



European Leader Association  
for Rural Development  
Brussels, [www.elard.eu](http://www.elard.eu)

FRENCH  
PRESIDENCY  
2023-2024



## PRESS RELEASE

6<sup>th</sup> September 2024, Brussels

### *Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture: A Groundbreaking Consensus and Pathway for rural development*

**Launched by the Commission President von der Leyen in January 2024, the final report of the Strategic Dialogue on the Future of EU Agriculture was presented by its Chair, Professor Strohschneider to von der Leyen on last Wednesday.**

After almost eight months of intensive work, discussions with sometimes conflicting interests, and compromises, the 29 members agreed on a shared conceptual consensus and made recommendations for guiding the work of the European Commission when shaping its Vision for Agriculture and Food, to be delivered in the first 100 days of President von der Leyen's second mandate. This achievement reflects the shared commitment to fostering a balanced and inclusive approach to agricultural, rural and food development.

These guidance and recommendations detailed in a report of more than one hundred pages long, and into five pillars (*namely i) Working together for a sustainable, resilient and competitive future ; ii) Advancing towards sustainable agri-food systems ; iii) Promoting transformative resilience ; iv) Building an attractive and diverse sector ; v) Better access to and use of knowledge and innovation*), shall set out a comprehensive new direction for the EU agri-food policy.

During these past months, ELARD actively advocated for the significant role rural areas and their communities play, and so for the inclusion of rural development while shaping the future of European agriculture and food systems. Rural development, often sidelined, has been integrated into several key points, ensuring its importance and communities are not left behind.

*« We warmly welcome this initiative, which represents a significant step forward. The unexpected consensus reached among diverse stakeholders is a testament to the dedication and collaborative spirit of everyone involved. We are particularly proud that, thanks to our persistent advocacy, rural development has been fully recognized in the final stages of the dialogue. Our efforts in the final debates ensured that the needs and priorities of rural communities are considered and reflected into the frameworks »*, said Thibaut Guignard, President of ELARD.

ELARD's contributions to the final report emphasize key recommendations to reduce the divide between urban and rural areas and to promote policies that support the attractiveness, growth and sustainability of rural areas. It was of utmost importance to keep the rural development as one of the key priorities of the future CAP. Indeed, the report outlines three central objectives for a revised CAP: providing targeted socio-economic support to farmers, promoting positive environmental and social outcomes, and creating enabling conditions for rural areas to thrive.

Other key points were to ensure that the Cohesion Policy will play its central role to preserve and empower rural communities in their diversity and avoid territorial desertification ; to have policies based on territorial approaches by securing the recognition of Local Action Groups (LAGs) and the importance of involving them in the decision-making process to strengthen rural areas ; to emphasize generational renewal and rural attractiveness for younger generations and rural sustainability.

### **Looking Ahead: Next Steps for the Commission**

With this report, the Commission has now the guidances to build a comprehensive and strategic new direction for EU agri-food policy, aimed at supporting farmers, promoting environmental and social outcomes, and revitalizing rural areas.

*« This report marks the beginning of a constructive process. The need for fundamental change to address the challenges faced by the EU's agricultural and rural sectors has never been clearer, and this consensus signals a decisive move toward that change. A long-term vision is essential. While the Commission's revision of the CAP reflects the urgency of rural development and supports the future of Europe's rural areas, ELARD recalls the importance of aligning with the European Commission's 'Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas' (2021), as well as the recent report, 'The long-term vision for the EU's rural areas: key achievements and ways forward' (2024) », added Mr. Guignard.*

The Commission has repeatedly acknowledged the importance of rural areas, the essential role played by LEADER-CLLD to empower rural communities and respond to the multiple rural needs, and the inadequate financial allocations. Being recognised and part of the future of the EU agriculture is a first step. Taking our recommendations into account is another one. It must be now followed by concrete actions.

With this in mind, the European LEADER networks welcome the Report and the next steps the European Commission is committed to take in its reflections on the future policies.

## The LEADER approach

*LEADER (Liaison Between Actions for the Development of the Rural Economy) is a European rural development programme. Created in 1991 as a complement to the first pillar of the CAP in order to support the transformation and diversification of rural areas, it now is a cross-cutting axis of its second pillar. The LEADER programme, with a minimum budget of 5% from the EAFRD, is the only European programme dedicated to supporting rural development projects. It supports projects that are part of a local strategy for the development of rural areas, developed and supported by a Local Action Group (LAG). These groups bring together public actors (ex. elected representatives of local authorities) and private actors (ex. companies, cooperatives, or associations). It allows local actors to define priorities and actions at their level (bottom-up approach), rather than having ready-made measures imposed on them.*

## ELARD

*ELARD is a European association that represents nearly 2,600 Local Action Groups (LAGs) from 29 countries, including countries in the European Union's neighbourhood, which have adopted and implement the LEADER methodology for local development by local actors.*

*We are actively working to make the LEADER approach better known among European decision-makers in order to guarantee its funding in European rural development policies. We support actor-led local development and represent the interests of LAGs to national governments and European institutions.*

*Since 1 January 2023, ELARD has been chaired by the French network, Leader France, which actively worked, during the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union in the first half of 2022, to promote the place of rural areas in European policies. The French Presidency of this European network is an opportunity for France, at the initiative of the programme in the 1990s, to promote LEADER and, more broadly, local development by local actors.*

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