



Supporting rural innovation through the EU Rural action plan

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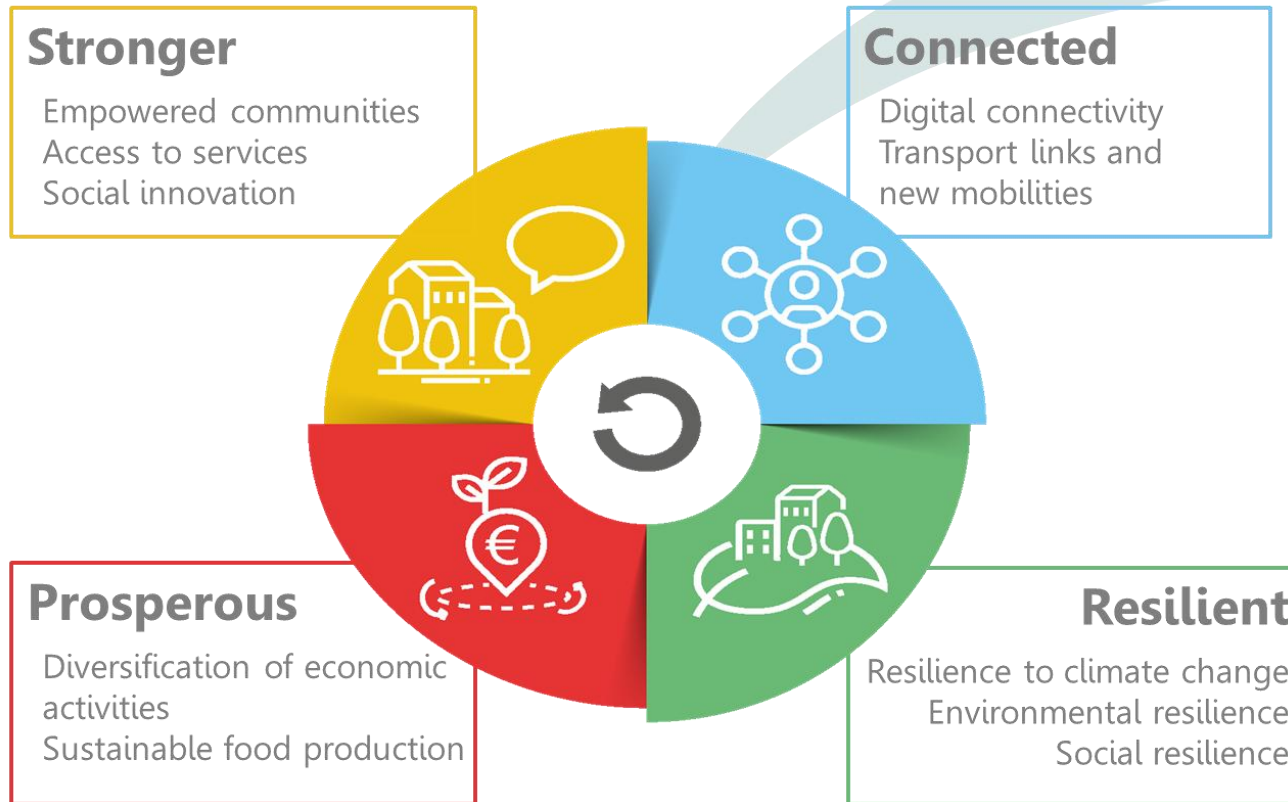
Good Practice Webinar on rural innovation

22 May 2025



The rural vision by 2040

The long-term vision for the EU's rural areas (2021)



Shared goals for 2040

**Rural action plan (EC)
&
Rural Pact (everyone)**

EU policies

Feb 2025: Vision for agriculture & food
> Update rural action plan
> Strengthen the rural Pact

The rural action plan: 24 thematic actions

Projects, networking and technical assistance to municipalities



► **Rural revitalisation platform launched**

► **Research and innovation for rural communities**

- **60 multi-actor research projects** under Horizon EU
- European **Startup village forum** launched

► **Networking for LEADER** (EU CAP Network) **and Smart villages** (SmartRural 21 & 27)

► **Study on land-use** for sustainable agriculture working on recommendations for **local planning and zoning**.

► **Youth:**

- Getting more rural young people in **ERASMUS**



► **Networking on mobility for rural communities under SMARTA-NET**

► Urban mobility plans being updated with **more focus on rural-urban linkages**

► **Rural Digital Futures**

- **€23.5 billion** invested in **connectivity in market failure areas**
- Pilot on digital education in remote areas "**Learning from the extremes**"

► **Broadband competency office network** acting for improved connectivity in market failure areas

- Capacity building/+advice



► **Rural energy communities advisory hub** (RECAH)

- **27 municipalities** received technical assistance
- **Guidance** for all

► **Certifying Carbon removals**

► **EU mission: A soil deal for Europe** (R&I calls)

- Funding for local/regional **living labs** and **lighthouses**

► **Social resilience and Women in rural areas**

- Raising awareness on the importance of care in rural areas (European **care strategy** 2022)



► **Entrepreneurship and social economy (SE)**

- **Providing good practices for social economy in rural areas** under "Transition pathway for proximity and social economy"
- Funding for **consortia in SE in rural areas**

► **Education for youth**

- Dedicated **content for rural schools** under school education platform & online teacher community

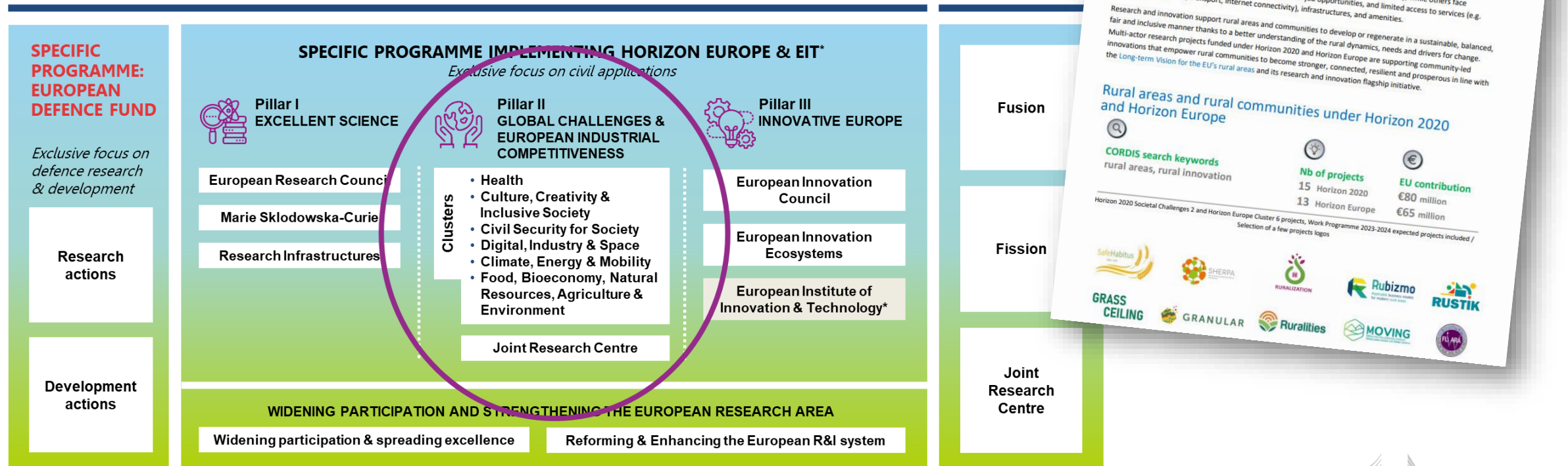
► **Toolkit for producer groups in Geographical Indications**

► **Networking for forest-dominant municipalities**

R&I for rural communities

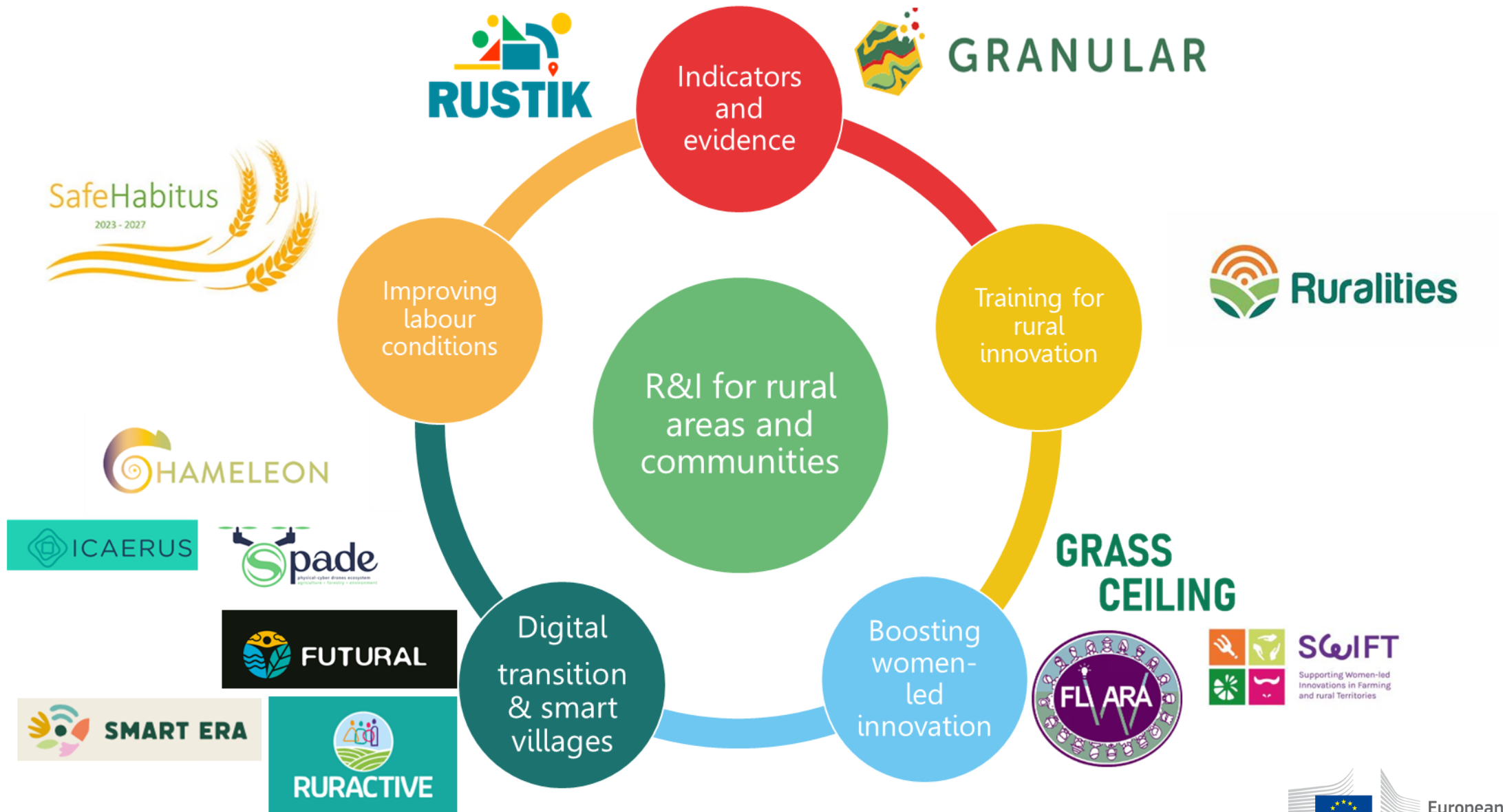
Horizon Europe

- ▶ Over **250 M€** invested in over **60 projects** with a direct interest for rural areas & communities under Horizon Europe
- ▶ Many of them « **multi-actor** », **benefitting local actors or communities**



* The European Institute of Innovation & Technology (EIT) is not part of the Specific Programme

Horizon Europe rural projects under cluster Food, Bioeconomy, Natural Resources, Agriculture & Environment



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Improving the understanding of rural innovation and entrepreneurship: the European Startup Village Forum initiative



Metrics & indicators



Eurobarometer surveying firms in rural (vs urban) areas **across the EU**



Rural innovation module, integrated into the upcoming **Swedish CIS**



In-depth survey targeting rural (vs urban) establishments in **Spain**



Downscaling and finer projections of aggregated indicators



Studies on patterns, drivers and obstacles



Regional specialisation and startup emergence in EU rural areas



The geography of **Venture Capital** in rural Europe



Crowdfunding in rural firms and its complementarity with other financial channels



Convergence paths and clubs in EU rural regions



Rural **entrepreneurial profiles** and socio-economic outcomes

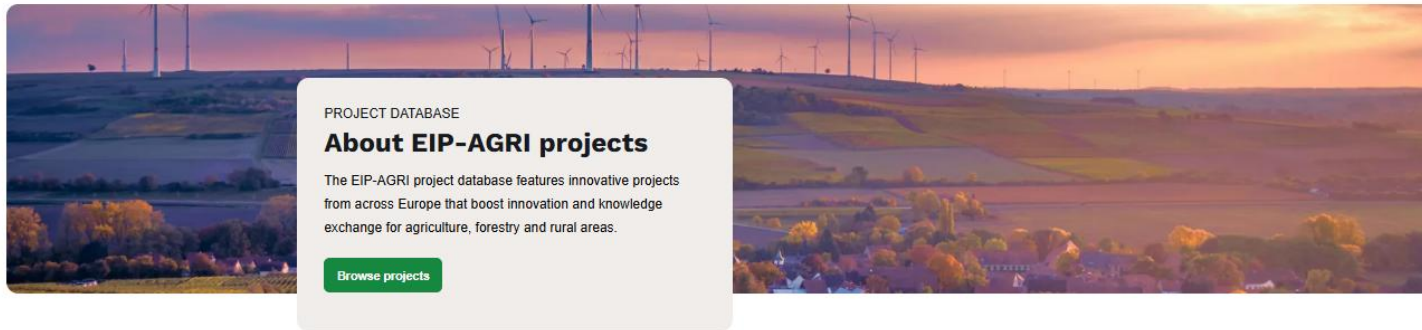


Engagement with EU rural territories



HIGH-LEVEL FORUM
Brussels,
November 2025 (TBC)

European Innovation Partnership for agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI)



The European Innovation Partnership for agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI) aims to stimulate innovation and improve the exchange of knowledge for agriculture, forestry, and rural areas.

EIP-AGRI projects are projects from across Europe that boost innovation and knowledge exchange. They are based on an 'interactive innovation' model, bringing together project partners to turn practical problems and creative ideas into innovative solutions. Co-creating solutions stimulates collaboration, knowledge exchange, and effective dissemination and take-up of knowledge and results.

The interactive innovation approach is used both in EIP-AGRI Operational Group projects, which are supported under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and in multi-actor projects (including thematic and advisory networks) funded under EU Research and Innovation Programmes (Horizon 2020 and Horizon Europe). While Operational Groups are implemented by EU countries, Horizon projects work on a transnational level.

The [EIP-AGRI project database](#) can be freely searched for Horizon projects and for Operational Groups from across Europe.

Check the [EIP-AGRI project database](#) for interesting projects on rural!

- ▶ Horizon Europe +
- ▶ The Common Agricultural Policy supports:
 - **Knowledge exchange** and **better advice** for innovators
 - Projects called **EIP « operational groups »**: co-creating innovation with multiple actors
 - [Networking](#) (**EU CAP Network**)
 - on all objectives of the CAP, **including for rural development!**

European Innovation Partnership for agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI)

- ▶ **EIP-AGRI Operational Groups** – CAP-funded projects with multiple partners that co-create innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural communities
- ▶ More than **4 000 OG projects** implemented under CAP
- ▶ Broader scope in CAP 2023-2027 – covering all CAP objectives including **rural development**
 - **13%** of the 370 OG projects reported so far contributes to the CAP specific objective '**vibrant rural areas**'

EU CAP Network



Explore the [EIP-AGRI project database](#) for more projects on rural!

Smart villages

- ▶ Smart villages can be supported under **Cooperation intervention, LEADER, Investments under the CAP.**
- ▶ In total, **17 MSs** (Austria, Belgium-Flanders, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Greece, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain/Extremadura/Galicia, Sweden, Slovenia) plan to support smart village initiatives. So far, based on the target of 13 MSs, **2624 smart village strategies or smart projects** are expected to be implemented.
 - 5 MSs have planned to **support smart village strategies** and projects under cooperation intervention
 - 16 MSs have planned to support **smart villages through LEADER**
 - 3 MSs have planned to **support infrastructure investments related to smart-village strategies**



LEADER – Community-led local development

LEADER Method

- LEADER: **5 billion EUR from the EU, 2600 Local Action Groups** in the EU
- **Innovation** at the local level is part and parcel of the **LEADER method**
- Technological, digital, social innovation
- Not all projects need to be innovative but it is an important **selection criterion** by Local Action Groups

Project Examples

- **234 examples of LEADER** innovation in the CAP Network database
- [Good Practice database | EU CAP Network](#)
- Examples: *diversified farming, cultural heritage, local produce, waste management, online tourism tools, youth mentoring, local crowd-funding, smart co-working, smart villages, design thinking method, delivery of services and...many many more.*

Local innovation

- **Cooperation projects between various LEADER** territories are conducive to innovation
- **Risk taking** (LAGs which have limited resources and basic needs are less inclined to take risks)
- Innovation to **enhance the local development strategy**, not a goal in itself
- Positive **failure-friendly** culture needed

A picture says more than 1000 words: examples of LEADER innovation at local level



Looking forward

- ▶ Updating the **EU Rural Action Plan in 2025/early 2026**
 - **We are interested to hear about *your ideas* on how to improve and enhance these actions!**
 - Discussion at the [Rural Pact conference](#) on 16-17 September:
 - Group discussion on “**Boosting innovative and competitive rural economies and businesses**”.
- ▶ We have **Calls for projects open for application**. Check here:
 - [Work programmes](#) (calls)
 - HORIZON-CL6-2025-02-COMMUNITIES-01: Adapting to and mitigating demographic trends in rural areas through evidence-based planning and innovative solutions
 - HORIZON-CL6-2025-02-COMMUNITIES-02: Exploring and improving access to housing in rural areas and developing the houses and villages of the future
 - [How to apply](#)
 - [Funding portal](#)
 - [Info days Cluster 6](#)





Thank you!

Join the Rural Pact Community and online platform

www.ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu/become-member_en



www.ruralpact.rural-vision.europa.eu

