



Strengthening rural businesses for a more competitive Europe: creating value through business support, territorial assets and social economy

17 September 2026

Agenda

Timing (CEST)	Agenda items
09.00 – 09.10	Welcome and introduction to the day > Outline of the event objectives and agenda Patricia Martínez, Rural Pact Support Office
09.10 – 10.20	Setting the scene: EU initiatives supporting rural competitiveness Presentations of key EU policy frameworks and funding opportunities supporting rural competitiveness > Enterprise Europe Network: supporting SME competitiveness and growth Christos Skouras, DG GROW, European Commission > Connecting regional innovation ecosystems to strengthen rural competitiveness Magdalena Cymerys, DG RTD, European Commission > Cohesion Policy for economic transformation and competitiveness in rural areas Matthew Lowell, DG REGIO, European Commission > Bioeconomy, circular value chains and local value creation in rural areas Carl-Johan Linden, DG AGRI, European Commission > The Social Economy Action Plan: opportunities for rural business ecosystems and entrepreneurship Julien De Beys, DG EMPL, European Commission Questions & Answers
10.20 – 10.30	Virtual coffee break
10.30 – 12.00	Parallel thematic exchanges: learning from practice and exploring solutions • Group 1: access to finance and businesses support for rural areas > Mobilising citizen investment to strengthen regional value chains Lars Kundt, Regionalwert AG, Germany



- > **Supporting rural entrepreneurs through integrated business incubation and innovation**
Olga Knez, Katapult, Slovenia

- > **Expanding access to finance and business support for rural enterprises**
Gillian Buckley, Western Development Commission, Ireland

- **Group 2: creating value from territorial assets and rural identity**

- > **Creating value from regional wood resources through innovation and local value chains**
Alexander Pinter, Wood Cluster Styria, Austria

- > **Turning local biomass residues into rural business and energy value chains: One Village – 1 MW**
Boglárka Vajda, Green Energy Innovative Biomass Cluster, Romania

- > **Creating value from natural assets through sustainable rural tourism: Ninemia Stay & Play**
Demy Grypari, Ninemia Stay & Play, Greece

- **Group 3: social economy models for rural competitiveness**

- > **Strengthening rural competitiveness through cooperative entrepreneurship**
Gordon Hahn, Coompanion, Sweden

- > **Improving access to finance for rural social economy initiatives through tailored strategies**
Mauricio O'Brien, NANOMA, Spain

- > **Participatory grocery shops: a social economy model for rural services and local value**
François Michel, Bouge ton CoQ, France

12.00 – 12.10

Virtual coffee break

12.10 – 12.50 Report back and stakeholder panel discussion: what is needed to strengthen rural competitiveness and diversification?

- > Spyros Kellidis, Enterprise Europe Network
- > Marie Vial, European Microfinance Network
- > John Brosnan, Working Group on Primary Producers, Circular Bio-based Europe Joint Undertaking
- > Gianluca Pastorelli, Diesis Network

12.50 – 13.00 Closing remarks

- > Rural Pact Support Office
- > European Commission



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