



## Leader+ Steering Committee reviews progress

**A first meeting of the Leader+ Steering Committee took place in November 2002 to discuss progress in the implementation of this initiative, designed to encourage the implementation of sustainable development strategies in the European Union (EU). Chaired by the Commission and comprised of representatives from the administrations and national networks, the committee reviewed the major achievements made since the start of the programming period in 2000. As many as 72 programmes out of 73 have now been approved throughout the EU, including nine national programmes <sup>(1)</sup>, 61 regional programmes <sup>(2)</sup> and three national network programmes <sup>(3)</sup>.**

Leader I marked the beginning of a new approach to rural development policy, which is territorially based, integrated and participative. Leader II saw the Leader I approach put to more widespread use, with an emphasis on the innovative aspects of projects. Leader+ continues its role as a laboratory which aims to encourage the emergence and testing of new approaches to integrated and sustainable development that will influence, complete and/or reinforce rural development policy in the community.

Leader+ is one of four initiatives <sup>(4)</sup> financed by EU Structural Funds and is designed to help rural actors consider the long-term potential of their local region. Encouraging the implementation of integrated, high-quality and original strategies for sustainable development, it has a strong focus on partnership and networks of exchange of experience. A total of EUR 5 046.5 million for the period 2000–06 will be spent, of which EUR 2 105.1 million is funded by the EAGGF <sup>(5)</sup> Guidance Section and the remainder by public and private contributions.

Leader+ is structured around three actions, in addition to technical assistance:

	million EUR	Share (%)
Action 1: Support for integrated territorial development strategies of a pilot nature based on a bottom-up approach	4 377.6	86.75
Action 2: Support for cooperation between rural territories	504.8	10.00
Action 3: Networking	68.7	1.36
Technical assistance	95.4	1.89

Implementation of Action 1 is through local action groups (LAGs) selected in an open procedure, based on the criteria laid down in the programmes. These include the rural nature of the territories, their homogeneity in physical, economic and social terms, and integrated and innovative development plans. Economic and social partners and associations must make up at least 50 % of the local partnership, and the relevance and effectiveness of this partnership is also taken into account. Although the process is ongoing in Belgium, Germany, Italy and Luxembourg, 692 of the expected 938 LAGs have already been selected by the Member States.

All priority themes laid down by the Commission <sup>(6)</sup> have been chosen by the LAGs that have already been accepted. These are:

- making the best use of natural and cultural resources, including enhancing the value of sites (33 % of the total number of LAGs);
- improving the quality of life in rural areas (24 %);
- adding value to local products, in particular by facilitating access to markets for small production units via collective actions (21 %);
- the use of new know-how and new technologies to make products and services in rural areas more competitive (10 %).

Eight out of 15 national networks have already been established for the implementation of Action 3. These organisations disseminate information from national level to the LAGs and act as a forum for information exchange on experience and know-how. They also deliver assistance for local and transnational cooperation. Implementation of Action 2 and technical assistance has not yet begun but is expected to start in 2003.

Member States must now present a mid-term evaluation of Leader+ programmes by the end of 2003.

<sup>(1)</sup> Denmark, Greece, France, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Portugal, Finland and Sweden.

<sup>(2)</sup> Submitted by Belgium, Germany, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

<sup>(3)</sup> Germany, Spain and Italy.

<sup>(4)</sup> Other schemes financed by the Structural Funds are Interreg III (cross-border, transnational and interregional cooperation), URBAN II (assistance to urban areas in crisis) and EQUAL (tackling inequalities and discrimination that exist on the labour market).

<sup>(5)</sup> European Agriculture Guarantee and Guidance Fund.

<sup>(6)</sup> Commission notice of 14 April 2000, OJ C 139, 18.5.2000.

# Fischler advocates enlargement opportunities in Prague

In the final build-up to the conclusion of the enlargement negotiations with 10 candidate countries from central and eastern Europe, Franz Fischler, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, participated in the second information conference organised by the Agriculture DG in the candidate countries in 2002. Concluding a two-day conference with parliamentarians, representatives from the media, government and various farmers' organisations in the potential Member States in Prague in November, Mr Fischler discussed issues central to the agriculture and enlargement negotiations, European solidarity, and the importance of information diffusion in the closing stages of the enlargement process.

Commenting on the 'truly remarkable progress' made by the candidate countries, he concluded that enlargement is 'one of the most important opportunities for the European Union at the beginning of the 21st century',

with December's Copenhagen Summit marking 'the beginning of a new era for the EU' <sup>(1)</sup>. He reiterated the importance of: phasing-in direct payments in the new Member States to ensure that the necessary restructuring of their rural sectors takes place; the use of transition periods to prevent foreigners taking advantage of cheap land prices; the 'fair and justified' criteria used to define the reference periods for quotas. He also pointed out that solidarity is one of the most important benefits of EU membership and clearly evident under EU rural development policy. A reinforced rural development package in the new Member States will help support and create new opportunities in remote areas.

The importance of information diffusion was emphasised as essential in winning public confidence in the lead up to enlargement. This was the second and final event of this type organised by the Agriculture DG during 2002. The first took place in Riga, Latvia <sup>(2)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> Speech 02/555 of 11 November 2002.

<sup>(2)</sup> See *Newsletter*, No 48 (October).

## News in brief

### □ New publications from the Agriculture DG

- *Report on milk quotas* provides a brief summary of the current situation in the EU milk market and the instruments that form part of the common market organisation for milk. It also discusses some of the difficulties that have arisen in the milk quota regime and the prospects for the EU milk sector. The report aims to provide a basis for the mid-term review of this area of the CAP <sup>(1)</sup>.
- *Study on the impact of future options for the milk quota system and the common organisation for milk and milk products* — Carried out at the request of the European Commission by the Institut national de la recherche agronomique (INRA), France, and the University of Wageningen, Netherlands, this study provides an *ex ante* quantitative assessment of alternative dairy policies for the EU over the period 2000–14, with the help of modelling tools. It analyses the impact of four different scenarios on the future of the EU milk quota regime on milk and dairy products markets, EU milk producers, consumers and the processing sector, and the EU budget <sup>(2)</sup>.
- *European agriculture entering the 21st century* presents the evolution of the agricultural situation in the EU and all Member States over the past 10 years. It provides statistics and graphs on the role of agriculture in the EU economy, the structure of agricultural holdings, income and trade in agriculture, budgetary aspects, and market balance sheets for certain products <sup>(3)</sup>.
- *Environmental integration and the CAP* was produced for the Commission by the Institute for European Environmental Policy. Its principal objectives are to identify the environmental concerns relating to agriculture and develop an informed understanding of the distinction between CAP-driven environmental issues and those relating to other factors. It also explores the means for further integrating the environment into the CAP, in particular the add-on-instrument approaches such as agri-environment and add-on-objective approaches such as cross-compliance <sup>(4)</sup>.

<sup>(1)</sup> See [http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/mtr/milkrep/text\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/mtr/milkrep/text_en.pdf)

<sup>(2)</sup> See [http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/publi/reports/milkquota/inrawag\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/publi/reports/milkquota/inrawag_en.pdf)

<sup>(3)</sup> See <http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/publi/reports/21century/text.pdf>

<sup>(4)</sup> See [http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/envir/report/iecp\\_en.pdf](http://europa.eu.int/comm/agriculture/envir/report/iecp_en.pdf)

