Support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) 2007-2013

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This report is the second report from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the implementation of the National Strategy Plans (NSPs) and the Community strategic guidelines for rural development (2007-2013). This report provides a summary of the main current developments, trends and challenges relating to the implementation of the national strategy plans.

Each Member State has developed its own NSP for rural development, based upon the EU's Strategic Guidelines that take full account of the specific circumstances and needs in their country. NSPs are intended to provide a reference tool for preparing EAFRD programming. The strategies are implemented through Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) either for the country or, for some Member States, for specific administrative regions.

For many programmes, implementation only really started in 2008. Figures for the following years showed an acceleration and by the end of 2011, overall financial uptake was nearly on track, despite some unfavourable conditions such as the economic situation. Most RDPs will be able to fully spend their EAFRD budget.

For the individual programmes, most implementation issues are now solved. Many RDP modifications have been made to correct difficulties encountered in the first years of implementation, take on board recommendations from the mid-term evaluations and incorporate additional funds addressing new challenges (Health Check) and the economic crisis (European Economy Recovery Package). Some shifts between axes are still expected to maximise uptake, but in respect of the minimum spending rate for each axis. However, a few RDPs especially in EU-12 countries might have difficulties in fulfilling the minimum spending rate for Axis 4 (building local capacity for employment and diversification) due to the late implementation of Leader.

In terms of policy objectives, with four years of implementation left, targets set in the programmes are globally well on track for Axis 1 (improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sectors) and Axis 2 (improving the environment and the countryside) while implementation is still slightly lagging behind for Axis 3 (improving the quality of life in rural areas and encouraging diversification) and Axis 4 (building local capacity for employment and diversification) but the trends are globally positive.