



Empowering Rural Areas: The Role of Rural Investments in Accelerating Climate Resilience

On Tuesday 18 June 2024, United States and European Union stakeholders, joined by the European Commission's Directorate General for Agriculture (DG AGRI) and United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) officials met online in the framework of the Collaborative Platform on Agriculture (CPA) to exchange experiences and discuss issues of possible common interest around rural development policy tackling climate resilience.

The event was opened by DG AGRI's Deputy Director General (DDG) Mihail Dumitru, USDA's Senior Counsellor at the Office of the Under Secretary for Rural Development and Clare Sierawski. All highlighted the benefits of collaborative and cooperative efforts under the CPA for the exchange of knowledge and information and promote mutual understanding in the field of the global agricultural challenges.

The online event consisted of two sessions. The first one presented general outlines of rural policy on both sides of the Atlantic. DG AGRI's Silvia Nanni outlined the EU's Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas (LTVRA), which has been one of the priorities of Ursula von der Leyen's Commission. It has launched the Rural Action Plan to make rural areas stronger, better connected, resilient and prosperous. Apart from focusing on achieving these goals, the LTVRA foresees the implementation of the "rural proofing" concept that would require all legislation to consider rural needs. The vision is being operationalised via national and regional "rural pacts" with rural stakeholders.

USDA's Chief of Staff for Rural Development, Sarah Dietch, in turn presented the set-up of the US rural development policy. It consists of six pillars: building strong communities, funding renewable energy projects, connecting rural Americans to high-speed internet, investing in innovative businesses, providing stable and affordable housing and funding rural water and electrical systems. The implementation is done via dedicated rural development services.

The second session focused on Decarbonization and Climate Resilience at the Rural Level. The first presenter was USDA's Senior Counsellor at the Office of the Under Secretary for Rural

Development, Clare Sierawski. She went through major funding instruments available, also stemming from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), such as the Rural Energy for America Program (REAP), Powering Affordable Clean Energy (USDA PACE) and Empowering Rural America (New ERA). Among the most ambitious is the largest investment in rural electrification since 1936.

Finally, the DG AGRI colleagues, Deputy Head of Unit B.2 Gregorio Davila Diaz and Nicola di Virgilio presented an overview of the EU climate policy framework with an important contribution of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The framework consists of foundational regulations such as the Climate Law, Fit for 55 revision of relevant legislation impacting on climate in the sector, the Communication on the 2040 climate target as well as the union certification framework for carbon removals, carbon farming and carbon storage. The second part of the presentation focused on CAP-specific actions chosen by EU MS via their CAP Strategic Plans. All nine CAP objectives contain actions geared directly towards promoting economic, social and environmental sustainability. The presenters highlighted efforts around promoting sustainable energy, and circular bio-economy including planned carbon sequestration and emissions reduction projects planned by EU MS.

The online meeting ended by a joint discussion by all participants on the identification of possible issues of common interest for knowledge and best practices sharing, further joint work and coordination. Topics included the involvement of cooperative structures and rural communities in the implementation of relevant programmes, the role of young farmers or carbon removal practices and targets.

Speakers:

Mihail Dumitru – Deputy Director General at DG AGRI

Clare Sierawski – Senior Energy Counselor, Office of the Under Secretary for Rural Development, USDA

Sarah Dietch – Chief of Staff for Rural Development, USDA

Gregorio Davila Diaz – Deputy Head of Unit B.2 at DG AGRI

Nicola di Virgilio – Unit B.2 at DG AGRI

Silvia Nanni – Unit D.1 at DG AGRI

Moderator: Maciej Golubiewski, Unit G.2 at DG AGRI