

**Dear rural networkers, - this text was worked out by the meeting of rural networks in Brussels - please translate and send out this text on 14 June, you might also place it on your website.**

## **YES TO RURAL EUROPE**

### **Long-term investment in people and European integration**

Meeting together in Brussels on June 13 and 14<sup>th</sup>, civil society organisations, LEADER groups and national rural networks from 19 EU Member States offer a solution to the current stalemate on the future of Europe.

While Europe is divided between net-payers and beneficiaries, defenders and critics of the CAP and those who are for or against the Constitution, thousands of people working at local level in rural areas have come forward with comprehensive proposals for meeting all three Lisbon objectives of competitiveness, cohesion and sustainability.

Europe is, in fact, mostly rural: rural areas cover 90 percent of Europe's land surface and the majority of its population (57%). The formula proposed by the rural networks - who represent a large proportion of these people - is based on an integrated rural development approach, initiated and promoted by the Commission. This approach benefits all stakeholders and sectors: rural communities, farmers, entrepreneurs, environmental groups, and people who rely on and benefit from rural areas - whether they live in the countryside or the city.

Participative rural development methods, perfected or tested in LEADER, have shown that they mobilise the energy, creativity and resources of the private sector as well as local people, producing more jobs and a better environment for a lower cost than many traditional European Programmes.

The partnerships that have been created in all European countries including the new member states are open to all these stakeholders.

They have succeeded in all three axes of the Rural Development Regulation. Partnerships have brought policies for marketing, new technology and quality for the benefit of producers and the many SME's in rural areas. Local communities benefit from the environment as a resource rather than just a cost. They offer a way of making complex European programmes much more accessible to local people. This is one of the main avenues for European citizens to become involved in shaping the future of Europe.

Rural initiatives and movements from 19 countries have come together for the first time to speak with one voice. If Europe really wants to advance towards the Lisbon objectives then it should build on the commitment and experience of existing or emerging rural partnerships. Together with the national governments, it must invest more in integrated rural development.

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