

Measure fiche

Knowledge transfer and information actions

Measure 1

Article 14 of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013

This fiche is based on the text of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013 [EAFRD] and, when relevant, on Regulation (EU) No 1303/2013 [CPR]. The Delegated and Implementing Acts supplementing these regulations have also been considered in this guidance fiche.

This guidance does not represent a binding legal interpretation of Regulation (EU) No 1305/2013. It is therefore essentially non-binding in nature and complements the related legal acts.

1. RATIONALE OF THE MEASURE

Under the measure "knowledge transfer and information actions", training and other types of activities should be carried out in order to enhance the human potential of persons engaged in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors, land managers and SMEs operating in rural areas.

Knowledge transfer and information actions could take several forms such as training courses, workshops, coaching, demonstration activities, information actions, short-term farm exchange and visit schemes. These actions should be implemented in order to address the needs identified in the programming area.

These activities are crucial to promote the economic growth and development of rural areas and to improve the sustainability, competitiveness, resource efficiency and environmental performance of the agricultural and forestry holdings. Besides, the measure contributes to increase the links between agriculture and research.

2. WHAT'S NEW IN COMPARISON TO THE PERIOD 2007-2013

During the 2007-2013 programming period training was supported but it was fragmented between various measures. The 2014-2020 regulation aims at unifying knowledge and skill acquisition under a measure and also at broadening its scope supporting other actions such as demonstration activities, information actions, short term farm management exchange and farm visits. In this way, other types of knowledge acquisition besides traditional courses will be promoted allowing participant in the activities to learn personally and practically from one another.

For simplification and in order to be compliant with WTO rules¹, the beneficiaries of the measure (in terms of reception of funds) are the service providers and not the users or recipient of the service.

3. CONTRIBUTION TO FOCUS AREAS AND CROSS-CUTTING OBJECTIVES

In the context of strategic programming, knowledge transfer and information actions is a horizontal measure relevant for all of the EU priorities for RD. Above all, the measure contributes to priority 1 "Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture, forestry and rural areas", specifically to focus area 1A "fostering innovation, cooperation, and the development of knowledge base in rural areas" and 1C "fostering lifelong learning and vocational training in the agricultural and forestry sectors". However, according to the need the training action intends to address it will be programmed under the relevant priority. Some illustrative examples on how actions under this measure should be programmed are as follow:

- A training course about restructuration of farms should be programmed under priority 2 "Enhancing competitiveness of all types of agriculture and enhancing far viability".
- A workshop of producers to discuss how to organize short supply circuits should be programmed under priority 3 "Promoting food chain organization and risk management in agriculture".
- A demonstration activity aiming to show a practice to preserve biodiversity (including the genetic diversity of farm animals, cultivated plants and forest) in a holding should be programmed under priority 4 "Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems dependent on agriculture and forestry".
- A farm visit organized to learn about a more efficient irrigation system should be programmed under priority 5 "Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors".
- A coaching activity to facilitate the creation of a small enterprise should be programmed under priority 6 "Promoting social inclusion poverty reduction and economic development in rural areas".

The contribution of the measures to the priority 1 has to be summarized in the RDP in order to have a complete picture of their overall contribution to this crosscutting priority.

4. SCOPE, TYPE AND LEVEL OF SUPPORT

4.1. Type of operation

Operations eligible under this measure are:

¹ Agreement on Agriculture, annex 2.

1.1. Vocational training and skills acquisition actions

- **Training courses, workshops and coaching:** specific sessions to reach concrete training objectives for target groups. It should be noted that courses of instruction or training which form part of normal education programmes or systems at secondary or higher levels are excluded of the measure. Workshops could consist on a thematic meeting or forums to deal with a specific issue. Coaching would be a more personalized service to give answers to specific needs. E-learning training courses could also be eligible for support. The RDP should identify the type of courses, workshops and coaching activities to be developed as well as the target audience of each one.

1.2. Demonstration projects/information actions

- **Demonstration projects/activities:** practical session to illustrate a technology, the use of new or significantly improved machinery, a new crop protection method or a specific production technique. The activity can take place in a farm or in other places such as research centres, exhibition buildings, etc.
- **Information actions:** activities to disseminate information concerning agriculture, forestry and SME business in order to make target group aware of knowledge relevant for their job. These actions can take the form of exhibitions, meetings, presentations or can be information in printed and electronic media. It should be noted that the supported materials and actions may not contain references to named products or producers or promote specific products.

1.3. Short-term farm and forest management exchanges and farm and forest visits

- **Short-term farm and forest management exchanges:** exchange schema to allow farmers and forest managers to stay in another farm in order to learn personally and practically from another farmer. The purpose is to enhance exchange of knowledge and good practices and discover other ways of doing things. The content and objectives of the exchange should be defined in the RDP and should focus, in particular, on sustainable farming and forestry methods and/or technologies, farm diversification, farms participating in short supply chain, the development of new business opportunities and new technologies, and on the improvement of forest resilience. The duration as well as the content of the exchanges will be defined by Member States, as laid down in Art. 3 of Delegated Act.
- **Farm and forest visits:** visit to a farm or a forest holding in order to learn about a specific issue or a way of doing things (e.g. learn how to use a specific machine, conversion to organic farming, etc.). The content of the visits can be the same as the exchanges, the main differences would be that visits intends to be shorter and follow mainly an approach teaching-learning instead of a good practices exchange (one farmer knows a technique and the other one wants to learn it). The duration as well as the content of the visits will be defined by Member States (as laid down in Art. 3 of the DA).

4.2. Beneficiaries

The eligible beneficiaries (in the sense of recipients of funds) for support under this measure are the entities or bodies that will provide knowledge transfer and/or information actions to the profit of persons engaged in the agricultural, food and forestry sector, land managers, economic actors/SMEs operating in rural areas. The bodies organizing the farm and forest exchange and visits are also eligible beneficiaries under this measure.

For the selection of beneficiaries, the MA can choose between various procedures according to their national law, including tenders, grants and the in-house procedure. If the MS/region decides to conclude a contract it has to respect public procurement rules, in accordance with EU and national law². If the in-house procedure is applied, the following two cumulative conditions should be fulfilled:

- the contracting authority must exercise control over the "in-house" provider similar to that exercised over its own departments;
- the "in-house" entity must carry out the essential part of its activities with the contracting authority which controls it.

Furthermore, it should be noted that for "in-house" services the simplified costs' options can be used.

The recipients of knowledge transfer and information actions shall be persons engaged in the agricultural, food and forestry sectors, land managers and other economic actors which are SMEs operating in rural areas. Therefore, unemployed people or communities could not benefit from the measure.

Support under this measure cannot be paid directly to the recipients of knowledge transfer and information to be compliant with WTO rules. According to these rules costs incurred by the participants to take part in the activities have to be reimbursed by the service provider (the beneficiary). This also contributes to reduce administrative burdensome.

There is no limit on the size of the farm, food and forestry holding to take part in the activities promoted under this measure. However there is a limitation to SMEs operating in rural areas which have to comply with the SME criterion defined at EU level. It should be possible to check whether the SME participant is complying with the SME criterion through national registers.

4.3. Eligible costs and eligibility conditions

Eligible costs under this measure are:

1. **Cost of organizing** and delivery of the knowledge transfer or information action: cost incurred in implementing the operation (e.g. salaries of employees, travel cost, training material, cost linked to the premises where the action is done, etc.). Relevant **investment** costs only for demonstration project are also eligible. The demonstration project should aim to show results or

² More information could be found in the guidance on public procurement for RD.

techniques already tested and ready to be used. It should be of a temporary duration and should be removed once the demonstration project is finished. An example would be an investment to construct a milking room in order show how a new milking system operates. The investment has to be clearly linked to the demonstration activity and Article 45 EAFRD shall apply. Lease purchase of machinery and equipment are eligible but other costs connected with the leasing contract, such as lessor's margin, interest refinancing costs, overheads and insurance charges, shall not be eligible expenditure. Member States may, in duly substantiated cases, establish the conditions under which the purchase of second-hand equipment may be regarded as eligible expenditure. Due to the temporary duration of the investment, the durability of operations as laid down in Art. 71 CPR, should not apply.

2. Cost of participants including:

- a. Travel.
- b. Accommodation.
- c. *Per diem* expenses.
- d. Cost of replacement of farmer. It means any person suitable to replace the farmer (head of the holding) when participating in training. It does not have to be someone from a farm relief body.

All cost shall be paid to the beneficiary, including the cost incurred by the participants. The Commission will establish rules on payment modalities for farmers' cost, including the use of vouchers or other similar forms, in Art. 6 of the Implementing Act.

Member States are not obliged to include in their RDPs all possible forms of support as provided by the legal basis, they may restrict the eligible cost. For instance, it can be decided not to reimburse travel costs or the cost of replacement of the farmer.

Simplified cost options can be used unless the measure is implemented through public procurement, as laid down in Art. 67(4) of CPR. Where public procurement is applied, simplified cost options as referred to in Art. 67(1) of CPR, cannot be used (see Guidance on Simplified Costs Options, EGESIF_14-0017).

Eligibility conditions: to be eligible under this measure the beneficiaries shall provide evidence of the appropriate capacity of their staff in the provision of the knowledge transfer and information actions. Therefore they have to have the appropriate qualification and be regularly trained to conduct this task.

The Member State or the Managing Authority should specify in the RDP as well as in the call for tender the definition of appropriate capacities of bodies providing knowledge transfer and information actions in order to be eligible under the measure.

4.4. Principles with regard to the setting of selection criteria and the selection of beneficiaries

In this section a reference should be made to the European Commission document "Guidelines on eligibility conditions and selection criteria".

4.5. Links to other legislation

Reference to public procurement rules should be done if the measure is implemented following this procedure.

4.6. Aid intensity/amount of support

Maximum aid intensity is 100%.

4.7. Co-financing rate(s)

The maximum EAFRD contribution rate are establish as follow (Art. 59.4):

- Max. 90% of the eligible public expenditure in the less developed regions, the outermost regions and the smaller Aegean.
- Max. 80% of the eligible public expenditure in the other regions.

The minimum EAFRD contribution rate shall be 20%.

The EAFRD contribution rate shall be 100% for amounts transferred from pillar I to pillar II.

4.8. Focus on specific issues

Demarcation with Article 15

The main difference between actions supported under Article 14 (knowledge transfer and information actions) and Article 15 (Advisory services, farm management and farm relief services) lays in the fact of the specificity and the scope of the action. In this way, Art. 14 aims at providing information and training as regard all the subjects that people working in the agricultural, food and forestry sector and in SMEs located in rural areas need to improve the performance of their holding/business. Regarding the scope, the objective is to reach a large number of people to make them aware of new information and improve their skills through training. It is a regular service oriented to keep target groups informed, up-to-date of the results of the research conducted in the areas of interest and trained in new tools that can be useful to develop their job.

By contrast, advice supported under Article 15 is oriented to more specific issues that are directly asked by the recipients of the advice. Even though it may be partly provided in group, the advice provided should really assess the specific situation of each individual, it should be clear that is not mere dissemination nor only presenting general information. It is a tailor-made service oriented to solve a specific request of a farmer (or forest or SME holder) regarding a particular issue. It is a punctual, accurate and quality assessment on a technical issue that should be delivered by well trained staff.

Demarcation with AECM (Agro-environmental and climate measures)

Training supported under this measure can be offered as a part of "packages" of measures or "combined measures" with AECMs. In this case, access to an AECM could even be conditional on accepting training.

Voucher system

MS may provide a system of vouchers (or another system of equivalent effect) to cover the expenses of the participants in the actions supported under this measure. If the MS decides to apply this system the following shall be considered (Art. 6 IA):

- The voucher has a period of validity that may not exceed one year.
- The voucher shall be linked to a specific training operation and the rules to obtain the voucher shall be provided by the relevant body.
- The specific conditions for the reimbursement of the vouchers shall be established.

Taking into account those requirements is up to the MA to set up the voucher systems. Just as information, the general functioning of voucher system could be based on the following steps:

- Request for the voucher: the farmer, forest holder or SME holder applies for a voucher to the body in charge.
- Allocation of the voucher: The request is assessed and in case of a favourable decision the voucher is provided.
- Use of the voucher: the farmer, forest holder or SME holder uses the voucher to attend a training provided by the beneficiaries selected for support under this measure.
- Redemption of the voucher: the service provider gets reimbursement based on the number of vouchers it has get from the participants on the trainings.

5. INDICATORS

Reference should be made to the Working Paper "Elements of strategic programming for the period 2014-2020", Annex IV.

6. VERIFIABILITY AND CONTROLLABILITY

Reference should be made to the "Guidelines on verifiability and prevention of errors".

7. TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS

N/A

8. BEST PRACTISES

Examples of projects developed under this measure are:

1. Training to farmers and foresters in order to build competency in basic IT skills as a farm management tool.
2. Creation of a training and advisory system to organise classes and online courses.
3. Setting up of online communities where professional advisors and trainers can exchange information and knowledge.
4. Development of a web platform and the designing of courses addressed to farmers, fishermen and other people involved in the food sector.
5. Creation of a mycology learning and exhibition centre.
6. Development of a professional 'training-of-trainers' course in the "economical driving" of agricultural machinery.
7. Development of an e-channel to enhance knowledge transfer and technical information among farmers.

More examples can be found in the ENRD website http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/policy-in-action/rdp_view/en/view_projects_en.cfm