European Countryside Movement

Mouvement Européen de la Ruralité (MER)

International Association Rurality-Environment-Development - RED
European Agri-Cooperatives - COGECA
European Association of Elected Representatives from Mountain Regions - AEM
European Committee of Property Owners - CEDIP
European Council for Agricultural Law – CEDR
European Council of Young Farmers - CEJA
European Farmers - COPA
European Landowners' Organization - ELO
European Federation of Farm and Village Tourism - EUROGITES
Federation of Associations for Hunting and Conservation of the EU - FACE
International Federation for Housing and Planning – IFHP
European Rural University – URE

M.E.R.

Climate changes

Rural areas : facing challenges and providing solutions

Climate change and its increasing impacts calls for a strong global response.

Through the impacts on environment and on economic sectors climate change jeopardizes the viability of rural areas. Therefore, rural areas and their actors are essential partners in climate related discussions aiming to provide answers and to build up policies.

Rural actors are committed to improving the resilience of their activities with regards to climate change and to continue to supply society with high quality food, non-food and forest products. Rural actors are also committed to produce these goods to high environmental and safety standards, while preserving the landscape, traditions and attractiveness of the countryside.

There is a risk that measures put in place to reduce rural economic activities' greenhouse gas emissions will result in a shift in production with social, economic and demographic impacts. Measures that discriminate against rural populations or their economic activities would lead to the abandonment of many less favorable areas.

Emissions and removals

The impacts of climate change are not equally distributed and their excesses randomly strike territories, but the characteristics of rural areas are prime targets: Agriculture is particularly under pressure because of its close link with the environment and its sensitivity to the climate. Forests are threatened by an increased risk due to fire, storms or the resurgence of diseases linked to the onset of new climatic conditions unsuitable for the species in place. The economic vitality of these sectors could be seriously altered.

Some solutions facing climate change impacts can be delivered by agriculture and forestry to reduce atmospheric CO_2. Carbon sequestration in vegetation, wood and soils, can be improved. For example forestry sequesters carbon through sustainable forest management in wood and harvested wood products. In addition improvements in livestock management can deliver methane and nitrous oxide emissions reduction.

Research and the provision of advice and vocational training are key to fill the existing knowledge gaps of the mitigation potential of management practices, their acceptance and their cost. These would enhance the most cost-effective options to be chosen at the farm level and improve farmers' and forest producers' adaptive capacity. Especially, it would facilitate the access to tools that foster the mitigation potential of their activities.

Food security and safety

Climate change through its impact on agricultural productivity threatens food security and safety. Increasing world population's demands as well as changing eating habits in emerging markets will need to be met. Agricultural production in rural areas must therefore remain economically viable to be able to cope with climate change and assuring food security and safety.

Energy

Security of supply and reducing greenhouse gas emissions requires diversification of energy sources and a greater shift to renewable energies.

The production of bioenergy (biofuels, forest biomass, biogas) substitutes society's use of fossil fuel resources for electricity and heating, contributes to mitigation by reducing GHG emissions and offers broad possibilities of public-private partnership. Moreover, these alternatives may contribute to self sufficiency in rural areas.

The increased use of wind, solar, hydropower and geothermal energy, mostly developed in rural areas, also reduce the dependency on non-renewable energies.

Biodiversity

Climate change causes stress on biodiversity and ecosystems derived from habitats degradation and the arrival and rapid spreading of invasive alien species. Therefore, economic activities in rural areas which strongly depend on and interact with the nature, work for enhancing ecosystem resilience while early adaptation is crucial.

Mitigation options providing multiple environmental benefits protecting biodiversity should be favored. Adaptation measures in cropland and livestock management, sustainable hunting and forest management practices, might determine mitigation effects and also contribute towards connected ecosystems throughout the wider landscape.

Employment

Rural areas are essential components to global economic wealth. For the EU-27, rural areas provide 53 % of employment and represent 54 % of EU population.

The impact of climate change extends to all economic activities in rural areas and their labor force. Sectors such as agriculture, agri-food industry, forestry, tourism, hunting are threatened by the changing context in which these activities are developed and on which they rely. Conversely, the changing climate may open up opportunities for some regions, for example, new jobs in renewable energies or in new productions.

Farmers, agri-cooperatives and land managers actively participate in the economy of the rural areas and thereby contribute to maintaining and creating employment and providing strong links between rural activities and urban requirements. Activities in rural areas must assure employment and thus avoid land abandonment. In more remote and less favored areas, without the mainstream of agricultural productivity, vast tracts of land would become desolate and unoccupied with a detrimental effect on infrastructure, tourism and landscape. Therefore, maintaining agricultural production and SMEs in rural areas is of great importance.

Proposals of the European Countryside Movement

- The European Countryside Movement acknowledges the need for **policies for mitigation** to limit warming to 2ºC above pre-industrial level **and** the need to agree a new **commitment** period in the way to achieve by 2020 the cuts in emissions required for stabilisation and early accession of the larger developing economies to compromises, **as mitigation is a shared EU and worldwide responsibility**.
- The consequences of climate change are already being felt worldwide, contributing to the disparities between urban and rural areas, calling for policies to keep the balance. More specifically, rural actors face significant **threats** from climate change in food production, soil and water resources, forestry, biodiversity and related social strains. To limit these impacts and to **adapt** rural economic activities to climate change we ask for **investment measures and supportive policies** to ensure the economic viability of these rural areas.
- Policies for encouraging a **low carbon economy** and the boost for local resources are essential. However there is a risk that measures put in place to reduce rural economic activities' and transport's GHG emissions will result in a shift in EU production, leading to abandonment of less competitive and accessible areas.
- Adaptation and mitigation of climate change requires an integrated **approach** and the provision of tools to different rural actors to combat decreased production, to increase water storage and water use efficiency, to stabilise crops and forests against extreme weather events, to preserve green infrastructure including agricultural land and to protect biodiversity.
- Feasible EU rural adaptation and mitigation solutions need further **research**, innovation, **investment** and the provision of **technical assistance** and **training** in order to enable committed rural sectors to **deliver substantial and long-term** contributions.