



MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Ministry of Agriculture of the CR

RDP Rural Support Department

Re: 29315/2008 – 14150

NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK ACTION PLAN



European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:
Europe invests into rural areas



NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK

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1. Introduction

In accordance with Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006 of 15 December 2006 laying down detailed rules for the application of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), the Czech Republic is just like the other EU Member States obliged to establish the National rural network (hereinafter referred to as the Network) by 31 December 2008 at the latest. This Network will group the organisations and administrations involved in agricultural and rural development. The Network will subsequently report to the European Network for Rural Development as defined in Article 67 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 on support for rural development by the EAFRD. The Network is considered to be established by its constituting meeting.

The Network is established by the Ministry of Agriculture of the CR (hereinafter referred to as the MoA). The Network will serve as a communication platform for the Rural Development Programme and will promote not only the activities of the MoA, but also those actively involved in the rural area and agriculture, both domestically and abroad. The task of the Network is to collect data on best practice, to process such data in order to identify, disseminate and consolidate the most efficient tools of rural and agricultural development, to collect information on the development in rural areas, to organise meetings of actors and seminars for those actively involved in agricultural and rural development.

2. Objectives of the Network

The objectives of the Network correspond with the objectives laid down in the National Rural Network Fiche issued by the European Commission, Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 and Commission Regulation (EC) No 1974/2006. The objectives shall be fulfilled throughout the period of Network operation. Essential is the coherence and synergy of objectives which will enhance the effectiveness of functioning of the Rural Development Programme (RDP). The aims of the Network shall be to:

1. **Group the organisations and state administrations involved in rural and agricultural development.** Thus to contribute to stabilisation of rural areas and to the lessening of population exodus into towns. Sharing experience in submitting applications for support and enhancing awareness of rural development policies will encourage more dynamic response to needs of the actors involved in the rural area and improve cooperation between the state administration and those actively involved in rural areas.
2. **Create suitable conditions for public-private partnership** for the purposes of technical assistance for projects of national and transnational cooperation. In order to achieve this aim it is necessary to coordinate the information flows at the local, regional and national level by setting up the info-channels which will also facilitate the attainment of all aims of the Network. Sharing of knowledge, best practices and experience with projects will have a positive impact on the support of partnership at both the national and transnational level. Regional as well as inter-regional interests will be reflected with respect to individual RDP axes which will have an effect on building the systematic integrated approach to the development of rural areas resulting in a synergy effect combining the interests of public and private sector. Attainment of this aim will lead to more intensive growth of quality of life in rural areas and diversification of rural economy. Effective implementation of this aim will also enhance the prestige of Czech rural areas in Europe.
3. **Support the implementation and evaluation of rural and agricultural development policy by grouping the experts.** The experts will be grouped in the Thematic Working Groups. The experts will coordinate the exchange of expert materials and information and share information with the members of their respective Thematic Working Groups. Receiving feedback on the impacts of agricultural and rural development policy in the CR will have a direct impact on its management and coordination.
4. **Collect information and data on the best practice,** know-how and good practices. Through the attainment of this aim the effectiveness of agricultural and rural development policy shall be increased thanks to applying experience with both the best and bad practice. The use and evaluation of experience has a substantial effect on all the aims and activities of the Network, and thus will support the learning process of those active in rural areas as well as the development of the Network per se.

5. **Organise seminars, meetings, workshops for entities involved in the agricultural and rural development.** Dissemination of information on the RDP, available advisory services and rural and agricultural development related matters will promote the level of education and awareness of those active in rural areas. This aim which at the same time is a tool will help interlink most of the aims of the Network and directly achieve them. The Network will thus become a RDP communication tool. The interactive meetings of those involved in rural areas will also ensure the feedback necessary to run and develop the Network.
6. **Create a database of experts and advisers + system of certification of advisors in the area of agricultural and rural development for axis III and IV of the RDP.** By establishing a register of certified advisors for those involved in the rural areas under axis III and IV of the RDP and its networking with the existing database of advisors for axis I and II of the RDP, a comprehensive advisory system for the Rural Development Programme will be created and the efficiency of its implementation will thus be further increased. The database of experts will on the other hand support the cooperation during the evaluation of the Rural Development Programme and the evaluation of the National rural network.
7. **Serve as a communication and marketing tool of the Rural Development Programme** and promote the attractiveness of rural areas of the Czech Republic. The creation of an information system of the Network will give publicity to the MoA, its successes achieved in the implementation of the Rural Development Programme, but also successes and projects implemented by aid beneficiaries. The information system means a set of communication activities of the Network which will also include the web portal placed on the MoA web site. The communication activities will comprise publishing activities, publishing of the RDP promotional materials and information bulletin, and other publicity related activities. This aim will link and coordinate the already existing RDP publicity and communication activities in order to assist in their further development. The coordination of these activities will safeguard even more effective publicity of the Rural Development Programme and the Ministry of Agriculture under whose responsibility it is implemented.

3. Networking Tools

These tools will help implement all the objectives of the Network. Responsible for each tool is the Managing Authority of the Network. Individual partial activities will be implemented by the Secretariat of the Network. Funding of each tool will be evaluated in the annual implementation plan. Fulfilment of the objectives through the below referred to tools shall be commenced no later than on December 31, 2009. All the activities of the Network as laid down in the Action Plan shall be fully functional by the end of 2010 at the latest. The activities of the Network are expected to be continuously developed throughout the operation of the Network in order to achieve the most effective attainment of its objectives. The synergy between these tools will enhance effectiveness of functioning of the RDP as a whole and thus contribute to the renewal and development of rural areas and agriculture. The concurrent implementation tools will also support the increase of competitiveness of agriculture and rural areas through the ensurance of a knowledge base and innovation practices. It will also contribute to the modernisation of agricultural and non-agricultural holdings in rural areas.

3.1 Meetings of actors involved in agriculture and the rural area and their education and training

This tool aims to group the administration and entities focusing on agriculture or having an impact on the rural area and to facilitate the discussion between public, business and non-profit sectors on matters of the development of rural areas and agriculture. These entities shall together develop an integrated approach to the development of rural areas and agriculture and create favourable conditions for public-private cooperation. Through this tool several objectives of the Network will be interlinked such as the organisation of seminars, meetings, workshops, knowledge sharing, best practice and feedback with regard to impacts of the rural and agricultural development policy.

Brief description of individual activities:

The detailed description of individual activities and strategies and their purpose will be laid down in the annual implementation plans.

- Addressing the members of the Network and call for participation in the Thematic working groups, Local and Regional networks.
- It is expected that once the individual Thematic working groups, Local and Regional networks are established, they will meet on a regular basis 4 times per year.
- Acquiring, collecting and spreading information on measures promoting the development of rural areas and agriculture.
- Fostering and implementation of good practices of the development of rural areas and agriculture.
- Support for national and transnational cooperation initiatives.
- Organisation of a conference focused on the development of rural areas and agriculture once a year.
- Meetings of members of the Network twice a year.
- Organisation of thematic seminars and workshops for those (actors, applicants and general public) who are or may become actively involved in the development of rural areas and agriculture. These seminars will cover all the RDP axes, the axis III and IV in particular.
- Provision of training programmes for local action groups and actors involved in drafting the concept and approach to the development of rural areas and agriculture.

3.2 Information System

The information system shall enable a comprehensive collection of data on rural areas and agriculture through networking of the already existing databases. The information system will network both the contextual data (describing the situation in rural areas and agriculture and data necessary for evaluation of impacts of programmes focused on the support for rural areas and agriculture) and the project data (describing outputs and results

of individual tools to support rural areas and agriculture and the best practice). The setting up of data flow system and data hierarchy will be followed by the evaluation of effects of the rural and agricultural development policy tools impacts. The information system will be one of the RDP communication tools. It will give publicity to the MoA and its successes achieved in the implementation of the Rural Development Programme and to those actively involved in rural areas.

Brief description of individual activities:

Detailed description of individual activities, strategies and their purpose will be provided in the annual implementation plans.

- Establishment of an information portal of the Network on the MoA website.
- Database of members of the Network.
- Database of best practice projects and database of international projects of both the best and bad practice.
- Database of experts.
- Database of advisors.
- Database of LAGs.
- Search tool for identification of partners for international cooperation.
- Database and a summary of demographic, natural and socio-economic characteristics of the rural area.

3.3 Provision of Information

One of the priority objectives of the Network is to disseminate information on procedures in the administration of projects in the framework of national rural development programmes, to collect information and data on best practice, knowledge and good practices. The application of experience with both the best and bad practice will increase the effectiveness of Rural Development Programme functioning. It is necessary to use the existing information databases, national as well as international, to ensure their interconnection and continuous updates. This tool will also constitute a basic communication and marketing tool of the Rural Development Programme and will further promote the MoA by combining the existing promotional and communication activities.

Brief description of individual activities:

Detailed description of individual activities and strategies and their purpose will be provided in the annual implementation plans.

- Dissemination of information on measures to support rural and agricultural development.
- Dissemination of good practices of rural an agricultural development.
- Provision of information on the development of rural areas and agriculture.
- Support for national and transnational cooperation initiatives.
- Provision of information on available advisory services and RDP support.
- Publishing activities.

- Information will be published on the information portal of the Network placed on the MoA website.
- Journal or information bulletin.
- Articles and brief news available on the information portal of the Network.

3.4 Databases of experts and advisors, certification of advisors for RDP Axis III and IV

Setting up and running a database of experts which will facilitate expertise sharing and support the implementation and evaluation of tools of the rural and agricultural development policy. The database will be compiled in relation to the establishment of the RDP Evaluation Committee established within the structure of the European Network for Rural Development. The database of experts will help guarantee the quality of services provided in the framework of a broad portfolio of themes and expertise. Special attention should be paid to setting up a database of programme evaluators and their links to the European RDP Evaluation Committee. The evaluators shall first and foremost assess the activities of the Network and its impact on the achievement of the RDP global objectives but also the overall impact on the agriculture and rural policy.

Also a database of advisers will be established within the Network concentrated on quality advisory services. This activity will aim at facilitating the access to professional and specific advisory services in all the fields of rural and agricultural development. It shall primarily mean the access of applicants to quality advisory services and their provision through a database of advisors (the task ensues from the National Network Fiche issued by the European Commission). In this respect it is necessary to reckon with the introduction of the system called Certification of quality of advisory services similarly as is already the case in the RDP Axis I and II. This system of certification shall also be introduced for advisory services under Axis III and IV. It will also include the ongoing evaluation of quality of advisory system for the purpose of its continuous improvement.

Brief description of individual activities:

Detailed description of individual activities and strategies and their purpose will be provided in the annual implementation plans.

- Setting up a database of experts.
- Preparation of analytical and evaluation studies and materials focused on development of rural areas and agriculture.
- Setting up a database of advisors and its publishing on the information portal of the Network.
- Introduction of certification of quality of advisory services.
- Facilitating the access to advisory services in order to improve the quality of provided information.
- Cooperation of experts in the evaluation of the Rural Development Programme and in the evaluation of the National Rural Network by means of expert meetings coordinated by the Secretariat of the Network.

4. Design of Mechanisms of the Network

Activity of the Network will be planned for the entire period (2008-2013) based on the Action Plan while the annual implementation plans will describe in detail the individual activities of the Network for the respective calendar year.

4.1 Action Plan

- Action Plan is drawn up by the RDP Rural Support Department of the Ministry of Agriculture.
- Action Plan is the foundation for the implementation of Measure V.2 Establishment and running of a National rural network and is in compliance with the RDP.
- Action Plan represents the framework for functioning of the Network and its programming document.
- Action Plan defines the objectives of the Network, tools for their implementation, mechanisms within the Network, organisation of the Network, membership in the Network and funding of the Network.
- Action Plan is forwarded to the EAFRD Monitoring Committee for information.
- Action Plan is approved by the Minister of Agriculture.

4.2 Annual Implementation Plans

With the view to provide the most effective functioning of the whole Network and to implement its objectives the annual implementation plans have been identified as a tool of the Network by means of which the Action Plan is implemented. The annual implementation plans shall assist the organisation units within the Network in their activities and last but not least contribute to easier monitoring and evaluation of the Network. The Structure of the annual implementation plan is attached to it as an annex.

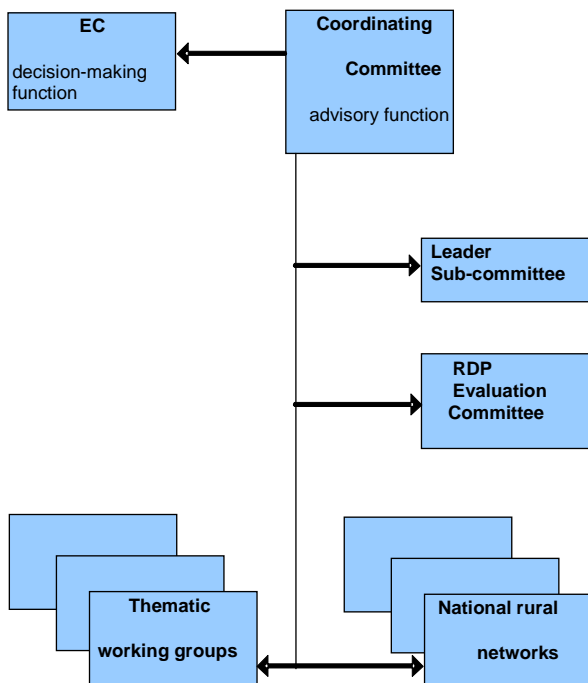
- Annual implementation plans are drawn up by the Secretariat of the Network in cooperation with the Managing Authority of the Network and are discussed by the Coordinating Committee of the Network.
- The annual implementation plans are approved by the first deputy minister and forwarded to the EAFRD Monitoring Committee for information.
- All the activities of the Network are implemented based on the approved annual implementation plan.
- Annual implementation plans give detailed information on the tools by means of which the objectives of the Network are implemented.
- Structure of the annual implementation plan comprises the characteristics of the tool used and the description of individual activities to be implemented in the respective programming period, a timetable of planned activities, description of organisational setup, communication strategy and financing plan, namely for each tool of the Network separately.
- The annual implementation plan is composed of detailed information on each tool in the above referred to structure.

- Annual implementation plans follow the Structure attached to this Action Plan as an annex.

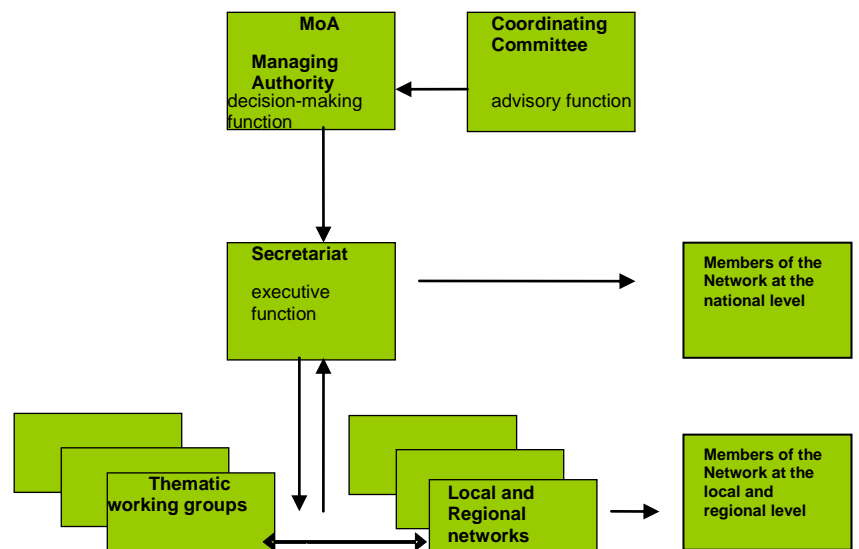
5. Organization of the Network

5.1 Institutional structure of the Network

European Network for Rural Development



National Rural Network



The institutional structure of the Network corresponds to the structure of the European Network for Rural Development proposed by Commission Decision and approved by the Rural Development Committee on 23 January 2008 with the only difference that the Thematic working groups and the Local and Regional networks will fall under the competence of the Secretariat of the Network.

5.2 Managing Authority of the Network

- The activities of the Managing Authority of the Network are carried out by the RDP Rural Support Department 14150.
- While acting as the Managing Authority of the Network the RDP Rural Support Department 14150 cooperates with the RDP Managing Authority Department 14110.

- Managing Authority of the Network coordinates its activities with the Research, Education and Consultancy Department 15010 in the areas under its responsibility.
- Managing Authority of the Network coordinates its activities and cooperates with the Information Section 13100 in the areas under its responsibility.
- Managing Authority of the Network is the beneficiary of assistance under Measure V.2. In order to ensure the activities of the Network it will prepare a technical assistance project and the application in keeping with the annual implementation plan. Based on the approved annual implementation plan the Managing Authority of the Network and subsequently the Secretariat of the Network are allocated funds to perform their activities within the Network.
- It ensures the establishment of the Secretariat of the Network.
- It participates in the evaluation of the Network's activities – it cooperates with experts. In collaboration with the EAFRD Monitoring Committee it monitors the activities, consults the RDP annual reports and network activities.
- It periodically communicates with the Secretariat of the Network and the Coordinating Committee of the Network concerning the implementation of the Action Plan, annual implementation plans and potential amendments to the Action Plan.
- It communicates with the European Network for Rural Development (Contact Point).
- It takes part in meetings of the Coordinating Committee of the Network, meetings of the Network, meetings of the Thematic working groups, Local and Regional networks.
- It approves the statute and rules of procedure of the Coordinating Committee of the Network.
- Representatives of the Managing Authority of the Network are entitled to engage in any activity of the Network.
- Managing Authority of the Network is responsible for all the activities of the Network.
- Representatives of the Managing Authority of the Network take part in meetings of the Coordinating Committee and Leader Sub-committee of the European Network for Rural Development.

5.3 Coordinating Committee of the Network

- A working group for the Network has been established within the EAFRD Monitoring Committee. Members of this working group will compose the Coordinating Committee of the Network.
- Coordinating Committee of the Network has an advisory function. It cooperates with the Managing Authority of the Network and the Secretariat of the Network in the preparation and methodological guidance of the Network's activities.
- It consults and gives recommendations concerning the amendments to the Action Plan and annual implementation plans and helps select and coordinate thematic activities to be conducted by the Network.
- It is involved in the monitoring of the Network's activities.

- It is involved in the evaluation of the Network.
- In cooperation with the Managing Authority of the Network and the Secretariat of the Network it organises its regular meetings – approximately 4 times a year.
- It drafts its own statute and rules of procedure.
- The chairperson of the Coordinating Committee of the Network is a representative of the RDP Managing Authority Department of the MoA.

5.4 Secretariat of the Network

- The overall activity of the Network is conducted by the Secretariat of the Network.
- It makes sure that the Action Plan and annual implementation plans are fulfilled and that Network as such is functional.
- Secretariat of the Network is established by the MoA.
- Secretariat of the Network reports to the Managing Authority of the Network.
- Annual implementation plans are drawn up by the Secretariat of the Network together with the Managing Authority of the Network and discussed with the Coordinating Committee of the Network.
- It is obliged to regularly update the Managing Authority of the Network on fulfilling the Action Plan and annual implementation plans.
- It also carries out the activities of the secretariat of the Coordinating Committee of the Network and helps organise its meetings (4 times a year).
- It draws up annual implementation reports on the Action Plan and submits them to the Managing Authority of the Network and the Coordinating Committee of the Network.
- It coordinates the activities of the Thematic working groups, Local and Regional networks.
- It establishes Thematic working groups and Local and Regional networks by issuing a resolution.

5.5 Thematic working groups

The Network is made up of Thematic working groups (WG) set up temporarily and for a specific purpose, according to the actual needs. The Secretariat of the Network provides them with methodological guidance and defines their purpose and objectives to be achieved. These working groups address predominantly topical issues related to the development of rural areas and agriculture.

Thematic WGs include member organisations and entities whose activities relate to the matters concerned, and also organisations and entities that want to get involved in addressing them.

For the purposes of systemic evaluation of impacts they process the acquired data needed for the evaluation of rural and agricultural development by topics, axes, etc.

- Thematic WGs will provide forum for professional discussion of partners oriented on a limited number of themes associated with the development of rural areas and agriculture.
- Thematic WGs have stronger professional focus and group prominent organisations and experts in the given field with an impact on the development of rural areas and agriculture.

5.6 Local and Regional Networks

The Network is made up of Local and Regional networks which will group agricultural agencies (hereinafter referred to as the AA) and entities operating in the rural area at district and regional level. The Local and Regional networks will secure intersectoral links and integrated approach to the development of rural areas and agriculture. The AA will ensure mutual transfer of information between the MoA and actors at the local and regional level. This design of the structure will facilitate effective bidirectional transfer of information and the nationwide reach of the network. At the same time all the regions become involved in the development of rural areas and agriculture and are offered the possibility to take part in the activities implemented through the Network.

5.6.1 Local Level (63 local coordination centres of the MoA - AA)

Local networks established at the level of districts will provide an open platform for a broad interdisciplinary discussion among AAs and individual actors willing to participate in outlining the approaches to the development of rural areas and agriculture. It will ensure the access to new approaches in the field of rural and agricultural development, to scientific and technical information, or even to the relevant education and training.

Role of the AA at the local level:

- AA makes effective use of all the networking tools and applies mainly the principle of individual client-oriented approach at the local level.
- AA takes an active part in the monitoring and advisory services during the RDP implementation.
- AA supplies the clients with information on the MoA programmes.
- AA ensures collection of information on the progress of implemented projects in the region and on projects completed (supporting materials for the evaluation of case studies of the best practice) with the view to present them and set up a database of best practice projects.
- AA is responsible for collection of information on rural projects implemented by other sectors and entities in the region, and their evaluation.
- AA draws up a local activity plan and a draft budget for its implementation.
- Complaints are to be addressed to the AA at the local level and it refers them to the next level.

5.6.2 Regional level (13 regional coordinating centres of the MoA – regional AA)

At the regional level the information received from the local level are coordinated and processed for the purposes of their evaluation.

Role of the AA at the regional level:

- Regional AAs perform methodological guidance of the Network at the regional level.
- Regional AAs also provide for the transfer of information from the centre to regions and back.
- Regional AAs secure communication and coordination of activities at the regional level – communication with regional authorities.
- Regional AAs elaborate a regional activity plan of the Network and a draft budget for its implementation.

5.6.3 Central level (Information Section 13100 – MoA)

At the central level the coordination of Network at the level of regions is conducted. The central level bears the responsibility for appropriate implementation of the Network. The central level of the Network reports to and cooperates with the Managing Authority of the Network – RDP Rural Support Department (14150) – MoA.

- It defines objectives of the Network for rural areas and agriculture.
- It coordinates the fulfilment of the Action Plan of the Network.
- It coordinates and provides methodological guidance to the regional structure of the Network.
- It develops central methodologies and coordinates the information flow between the centre and the individual structures of the Network.
- It evaluates regional activity plans of the Network and provides for their funding.
- It evaluates and processes information obtained from individual structures of the Network.
- It ensures transfer of information from central to regional level.
- It is an umbrella of the National Rural Network at the central level.

6. Membership in the Network

Membership in the network is governed by the statute and determined by clear conditions, rules and duties which do not predefine membership in the Network and therefore enable a broad spectrum of rural actors to get involved, at the local level in particular. The membership will be open to those who are active and willing to cooperate and get involved in the field of rural and agricultural development.

7. Funding of the Network

In accordance with Article 66 para 2 of Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005 at the initiative of the Member States up to 4 % of the total EAFRD amount for each rural development programme may be devoted to funding of the Technical Assistance. The funds are spent on preparation, management, monitoring, evaluation, information and control activities and technical assistance of the programme. This amount is broken down into:

- a) Technical Assistance Measure V.1 – Preparation, monitoring, evaluation, information and control activities within the programme
- b) Technical Assistance Measure V.2 – Establishment and running of a National rural network

The amount allocated to Technical Assistance Measure V.2 – Establishment and running of a National rural network is € 7.2 million, i.e. approximately CZK 173 million (calculated based on the exchange rate recommended by the Ministry of Finance for the quantification of state budget for 2009, namely 24 CZK/€ for 2007 – 2013 period.

- **Sub-measure V.2.1. for the establishment of structures needed to run the Network**
(up to 25% of the allocated amount, i.e. approximately CZK 43 million. This amount will not be inadequately increased in the future.)
- **Sub-measure V.2.2. for drawing up and implementation of the Action Plan**
(up to 75% of the allocated amount, i.e. approximately CZK 130 million)

The support is to be channelled to structures necessary for the management and running of the Network, development and administration of the information system, creation and administration of the web portal, organisation of meetings of partners, exchange of experience, preparation of training programmes and technical assistance for cooperation.

This Action Plan takes force and comes into effect on the day of its approval and signing by the Minister of Agriculture of the CR.

In Prague on August 19, 2008

Mgr. Petr Gandalovič, in his own hand
Minister of Agriculture of the CR

ANNEX 1:

STRUCTURE OF THE ANNUAL IMPLEMENTATION PLAN OF THE NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK

In order to ensure the most effective functioning of the whole Network and the attainment of its objectives the annual implementation plans have been introduced as a tool by means of which the Action Plan is implemented. The annual implementation plans shall facilitate the work of organisation units involved in the Network and contribute to easier monitoring of the Network.

The annual implementation plans are in line with the objectives set out in the Action Plan. The annual implementation plans offer detailed description of networking tools. Each tool is defined by the following structure. The annual implementation plan is composed of the following structured description of each tool.

1. Characteristics of the tool and description of individual activities for the respective programming period

- Name of the tool defined in the Action Plan.
- Description of objectives and purposes to be achieved.
- Description of strategies leading to the achievement of individual objectives, including the deadlines for their achievement.
- Description of activities, including the actors, their responsibility, deadlines and criteria for activity progress monitoring.
- Evaluation of inputs (status prior to the commencement of the activity), progress and outputs of the activity.
- Evaluation of impacts of the attained objectives.

2. Timetable of planned activities

- Schedule of individual activities in the respective programming period. The schedule will comprise the dates of activities and their organisation.

3. Description of organisation of individual activities

- Information on the implementing entity of individual activities.
- List of individual tasks, activities and way of their implementation.

4. Communication strategy

- Communication strategy presents activities of the respective tool so as to make its implementation more effective.
- Communication strategy is designed for members of the Network and entities involved in the development of rural areas and agriculture both in the Czech Republic and abroad.

- Promotional materials are published in the Czech and English languages.
- Communication strategy aims to promote not only the Rural Development Programme and its individual axes, but also the MoA as an organisation which takes an active part in supporting the development of rural areas and agriculture.
- Communication strategy defines the applied tools, communication mix and target groups.
- Communication strategy comprises the timetable of planned activities.

5. Financing plan

- Financing plan is always drafted for the respective tool which covers a portfolio of individual activities and a communication strategy for each tool.
- Financing plan comprises the breakdown of financial requirements of each tool by individual activity and communication strategy, a summary of annual financing from EAFRD and national sources.
- Financing plan entails an allocation of funds necessary for the functioning of structures of the Network and an allocation of funds for the implementation of the Action Plan.
- Each financing plan includes the balance of funds of the Network available for the next programming period.