



RDOC/2018/0049

Scottish Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 Information and Publicity Strategy

Annual Strategic Communications Plan 2018/19



The European Agricultural Fund
for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas

Table of contents

Introduction.....	3
Key communication objectives for 2018/19	3
SRDP Priority 1 - Enhancing the rural economy	5
SRDP Priority 2 - Supporting agricultural and forestry businesses.....	6
SRDP Priority 3 - Protecting and improving the natural environment	7
SRDP Priority 4 - Addressing the impact of climate change.....	8
SRDP Priority 5 - Supporting rural communities	9
Annex A - Summary of communications activity in 2017/18	10
Annex B – SRDP scheme priorities matrix	14

Introduction

1. This Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) Annual Strategic Communications Plan for 2018/19 is part of the SRDP 2014-2020 Information and Publicity Strategy. The Strategy sets out the key messages, communications aims and methods, target audience, key actions, budget and evaluation. This document sets out the key strategic communication objectives from 1 April 2018 until 31 March 2019, and sets them in the context of the five SRDP priorities.
2. The Rural Development Regulation requires the Rural Development Operational Committee (RDOC) and the Joint Programme Monitoring Committee (JPMC) to be informed of:
 - progress in the implementation of the Strategy and any analysis of results – Annex A summarises communications activity over 2017/18 including quantitative data of some of the monitoring measurements from the Strategy
 - any substantive changes to the strategy. For 2018/19, the Environmental Co-operation Action Fund (ECAAF) has been withdrawn, and a new service, the Rural Innovation Support Service (RISS) operating within the Scottish Rural Network, has been launched.
 - planned information and publicity to be carried out in the following year

Key communication objectives for 2018/19

3. The key communication objectives are listed below and reflect the overarching aims of the SRDP Information and Communications Strategy.
 - monitor and communicate progress on Brexit, possible impacts on funding guarantees and Scotland's future relationship with the EU and the rest of the UK after exiting the European Union
 - inform applicants and stakeholders of scheme dates for applications, approvals and payments
 - manage expectations about the support available, including targeting and budget limitations
 - encourage high quality applications through discussions with potential applicants prior to submission as well as rejection feedback, guidance updates and promotion of good practice, and by producing communications materials which explain the application process and promote successful funded projects
 - raise awareness of the SRDP, the benefits it has delivered/aims to deliver in the future and the SRDP schemes/initiatives through promotional materials including case studies, video content, publications, events and media activity
 - demonstrate the value of SRDP schemes and initiatives to policy makers and the wider public as they visualise a post-Brexit landscape.
 - communicate any changes to the SRDP, including technical and budget changes expected through Programme modifications
 - engage with key stakeholders, including through the RDOC, JPMC and European Network for Rural Development

- Improve coordination of communication activities between the Scottish Government, SRDP delivery partners and Local Action Groups through the establishment of a new SRDP Communications Coordination group
- inform stakeholders and public about monitoring and evaluation key findings through engaging materials and content
- The Paying Agency is committed to ensuring farmers and crofters get their payments as quickly as possible while putting the payments system on a secure footing. At of 1 April 2018 most farmers have already received the majority of the money they are entitled to in Basic Payments, with only the remaining 10% still to be paid. A comprehensive communications plan covers all milestones, including the timetable for Pillar 1 & Pillar 2 payments, encouraging customers to make their applications for support online, supporting delivery of loans schemes such as the Less-Favoured Area Support Scheme, and other work to put the payments system on a secure footing, such as the introduction of a new system of land change management.

Alongside the general promotion activities, particular actions to be taken to support individual schemes includes:

- promote the newly-launched RISS as a bottom-up approach to rural innovation, addressing the needs of land managers
 - keep stakeholders informed about the future of LFASS as details are announced by ministers
 - promotion of opening of Improving Public Access (IPA) fund window in April 2018 with mini social media campaign
 - communication on the future of the new entrant and young farmer start-up grants which have utilised available funding.
 - raise awareness of the Farm Advisory Service (FAS) by continued promotion of activity
 - continue operation of the LEADER Communications Working Group to drive and coordinate communications and link up Local Action Groups (LAGs) across the Programme
 - gather information on LEADER Programme outputs and progress through the Community-Led Local Development (CLLD) Working Group to demonstrate the value of the CLLD approach
 - Promoting woodland creation element of the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS)
4. The boxes below set out the key communications objectives for 2018/19 against each of the SRDP priorities, to demonstrate how communications activity will be used to support progress towards each of these priorities. The table in Annex B sets out how each SRDP support scheme or initiatives delivers against these priorities.

SRDP Priority 1 - Enhancing the rural economy

All SRDP support helps deliver the overarching objective of enhancing the rural economy to help deliver sustainable economic growth.

The Food Processing, Marketing and Co-operation (FPMC) provides direct investment into food and drink processing businesses; the FGS provides support for the forestry sector; LEADER supports rural businesses across a range of sectors; and Broadband provides digital connectivity.

Beyond this, a number of schemes directly support farm and forestry businesses through income support under the Less Favoured Area Support Scheme (LFASS) and business development for new entrants, crofters and small farms. The Knowledge Transfer and Innovation Fund (KTIF), the FAS and the RISS) will also help support farm businesses by embracing innovative techniques and best practice.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Ensuring all stakeholders and beneficiaries are fully aware that the SRDP is 'open for business'. This includes publicising scheme opening and closing dates through websites and social media, including via the SRN
- Promote through LEADER ideas for innovation and diversification in rural enterprise through published case studies, materials and events
- Encourage high quality applications by publicising success stories, discussing potential applications before submission including via an Expression of Interest (Eoi) for LEADER and pre-application forms for FPMC, and providing individual feedback to unsuccessful applicants
- Managing expectations as it is expected that there will continue be strong interest in FPMC along with business support under LEADER. This is done through discussing potential applications before submission which includes the Eoi and pre-application forms for LEADER and FPMC
- Communications about the future of new entrant and young farmer start-up grants
- Communications about the FAS including how it works, who can apply and the benefits, with 100 specialist site visits, 300 integrated land management plans and 2,500 crofter subscriptions planned

SRDP Priority 2 - Supporting agricultural and forestry businesses

The key direct support that addresses this priority is delivered through the New Entrants and Young Farmer Start-Up Grants (NESUG and YFSUG); the New Entrants Capital Grant Scheme (NECGS); the Crofting Agricultural Grant Scheme (CAGS); Small Farm Grant Scheme (SFGS); the FGS; and LFASS. KTIF and the FAS also provide innovative techniques, key training and education support to agriculture businesses.

The RISS, has been created to support farmers, foresters and crofters to problem solve and innovate through connecting them with facilitators from other sectors to form operational group.

The FPMC will support agricultural businesses through providing an outlet for primary produce and improving supply chain efficiency.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Publicising scheme opening and closing dates through websites and social media, including via the SRN
- Encouraging high quality applications by promoting agriculture as an exciting and rewarding career, ensuring guidance is regularly reviewed, discussing potential applications before submission where possible and providing feedback to unsuccessful applicants where possible
- Communications about the support available for new entrants
- Communications about the FAS including how it works, who can apply and the benefits – with 60 new entrants to receive mentoring support, 100 specialist advice visits and over 2,500 crofter subscriptions
- Ensuring stakeholders are aware of progress and options for LFASS in 2019

SRDP Priority 3 - Protecting and improving the natural environment

The key direct support that addresses this priority is support for the environment through Agri-environment Climate Scheme (AECS); Improving Public Access (IPA), and agroforestry under the FGS. The environment will also be one of the priorities for KTIF and the FAS.

Secondary support comes through LFASS, NESUG, YFSUG, NECGS, CAGS, SFGS which help the viability of the businesses, enabling them to then carry out environmental actions and combine environmentally and commercially successful management in the running of their businesses.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Publicising scheme opening and closing dates through websites and social media, including via the SRN and delivery partners
- Encouraging high quality applications – for FGS through awareness raising events; publicising improvements to AECS and IPA guidance and targeting;
- Publicise the opening of the Improving Public Access fund window across social media and with a filmed case study
- Communications about the FAS including how it works, who can apply and the benefits – with 60 new entrants to receive mentoring support, 100 specialist advice visits and over 2,500 crofter subscriptions
- Promotion of positive impact of AECS after the application window ends in April and encouragement of collaborative applications until the closing date of 31 May

SRDP Priority 4 - Addressing the impact of climate change

This priority is addressed through support for woodland creation under the FGS and, more broadly for environmental management through AECS. In addition the Beef Efficiency Scheme (BES) aims to deliver economic and environmental improvements and improve efficiency. The environment is one of the priorities of KTIF and the FAS, including the provision of farm carbon audits.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Publicising scheme opening and closing dates through a comprehensive communications programme that includes the SRN and delivery partners
- In conjunction with stakeholders, provide on-going information about the requirements of the Beef Efficiency Scheme (BES) alongside clear guidance for staff, applicants and agents and case study promotion
- Under the FGS, woodland events will take place along with the development of marketing material
- Communications about the FAS including how it works, who can apply and the benefits, particularly of carbon audits

SRDP Priority 5 - Supporting rural communities

The key direct support that addresses this priority and the programme's contribution to the social fabric of rural Scotland is LEADER with further support from the Broadband Scheme and IPA.

Secondary support comes through LFASS, NESUG, YFSUG, NECGS, CAGS, SFGS, FGS farming, agriculture and business support schemes which help the viability of rural agricultural and forestry businesses, enabling them to then provide downstream benefits to rural communities.

The key communications actions to support delivery of this priority are:

- Continued promotion of the opportunities available under LEADER through individual LAGs including events, workshops, local awareness raising, including via the SRN and newsletters/social media
- Ensuring good communication with the LAGs through the LEADER Communications Working Group, focusing in 2018/19 on cooperation and information gathering/engagement on the achievements of the CLLD approach.
- Encouraging high quality applications through the EoI process for LEADER and working with rural communities to develop applications for the Broadband Scheme or other signposting other opportunities e.g. R100
- Managing expectations by LEADER LAGs and Community Broadband Scotland discussing potential applications and ensuring communities are aware of the support available
- Promotion of Improving Public Access, in particular the opening and closing dates of application rounds through launch of case study film.

Annex A - Summary of communications activity in 2017/18

1. The ARE comms team has supported colleagues, through communications advice and the delivery of high quality communications products, to deliver the Scottish Government's objective to grow the rural economy and support agriculture and rural communities.
2. Over 50 press releases or news articles relevant to the SRDP have been produced by the Scottish Government to ensure stakeholders, applicants and potential beneficiaries are aware of information relating to Brexit, the Single Application Form (SAF) and the roll out of Broadband to rural Scotland.
3. A Parliamentary debate on the importance of LEADER was held in March 2018.
4. The Scottish Rural Network (SRN) continued to operate at full capacity through 2017/18, expanding its website membership, newsletter subscribers and social media followers. Highlights included.
 - production of 20 short films featuring SRDP-funded projects released as part of the "SRDP on Film" series. Films included projects funded by the AECS, KTIF, LEADER, BES and projects funded under Rural Priorities (RP)
 - establishment of the LEADER Communications Working Group to coordinate communications activity across the LEADER Programme in Scotland. Outputs included the production of a new animation to explain the application process, an event at the Royal Highland Show to promote farm diversification and the production of a communications toolkit for Local Action Groups
 - production of eight case study flyers, distributed at the Royal Highland Show, other events and online, to promote SRDP-funded schemes and the application process
 - production of an in-house infographic animation promoting ten years of the SRDP
 - production of infographic summaries of the SRDP Annual Implementation Report, the Ex-Post Evaluation of the SRDP and in promotion of Community-Led Local Development
 - publication of 19 SRDP case studies on the SRN website
 - launch of LAG-only area of SRN website containing LEADER information and resources
 - launch of the SRN funding search tool to enable stakeholders and the general public to quickly identify the correct funding scheme for their enterprise or project
 - linked in with key stakeholder Scottish Rural Action, supporting and helping to facilitate the Scottish Rural Action Conference in September and producing a film on rural transport and connectivity from the event
 - Establishment of LEADER Staff Liaison and Management Group and three meetings through 2017/18
 - Organised and facilitated three cooperation workshops in Aviemore, Ayrshire and Renfrewshire leading to 23 proposed LEADER cooperation projects.

- we have continued to work with the other UK NRNs and the Irish NRN to share knowledge and good practice and to identify opportunities for harmonisation across the RDPs. SRN helped organise and attended an NRN meeting in Belfast in November 2017, producing a film from the event on the future of rural development across the UK and Ireland.
- Europe – The SRN participated in several ENRD workshops through 2017-18

SRDP Communications 2017/18 – quantitative data

The table below gives a summary of the quantitative data where it is available, against the monitoring measurements laid out in the Information and Publicity Strategy. It is intended to carry out a mid-term review of communications through a stakeholder and staff survey to ensure communications are responsive and remain effective throughout the Programme period.

Method of measurement	Progress
Number of applications submitted (since 2015)	15371 across all schemes, excluding LFASS which is around 11,300 each year
Number of applications approved (since 2015)	10,434 across all schemes, excluding LFASS
Website page views (1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018)	Rural Payments and Services SRDP scheme pages – 176,000 page views with AECS and FGS being the most visited pages SG SRDP pages – 18,953
Monthly Rural Issues newsletter circulation	Circulated monthly to around 14,000 recipients and includes relevant information on the SRDP (amongst other issues)
Social media activity (1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018)	RPID – 1889 Twitter followers RPID - 5,841 Facebook followers SRN – 5,500 Twitter followers – 13.2K tweets since August 2009 SRN Facebook likes – 1,800 26 Videos produced by the SRN have been viewed 28,500 times on Facebook and Vimeo.
Monthly LEADER newsletter (1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018)	12 editions of the LEADER newsletter were issued in 2017/18
Weekly SRN newsletter (1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018)	52 newsletters were issued in 2017/18. Number of subscribers as at March 2018 was 1,289
SRDP project case studies (1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018)	28 new case studies were published in 2017/18
LEADER Expression of Interest (EoI) forms	3,734
SRN events	8 events plus one UK NRN event
Qualitative stakeholder consultation via RDOC, CAP Stakeholder Group, bilaterals (1 April 2017 - 31 March 2018)	Qualitative stakeholder consultation via RDOC, Agriculture and Rural Development Stakeholder Group, Highlands and Islands Territorial Committee (1 April 2016 - 31 March 2017). SRDP-wide updates have been provided at nine formal stakeholder meetings throughout the year, along with stakeholder bilaterals and informal meetings.
Farm Advisory Service 2017-2018	Events held – 204 Beneficiaries – 3580 Grant applications - 4071 Integrated land management plans

Annual Strategic Communications Plan 2018/19
Scottish Rural Development Programme

	underway – 125 Specialist advice instances – 200 Carbon audits – 150 Mentoring - 16
--	--

Annex B – SRDP scheme priorities matrix

The table below highlights the main priorities delivered by each scheme, although it is acknowledged that support provides secondary benefits to most of the priorities.

	Enhancing the rural economy	Supporting agricultural and forestry businesses	Protecting and improving the natural environment	Addressing the impact of climate change	Supporting rural communities
New Entrants	X	X	X	X	X
Small farms	X	X	X	X	X
Crofting	X	X	X	X	X
FPMC	X	X	X	X	X
LFASS	X	X	X		X
AECS		X	X	X	
Forestry	X	X	X	X	X
Broadband	X	X		X	X
LEADER	X	X	X	X	X
KTIF	X	X	X	X	X
BES		X		X	
SRN	X	X	X	X	X
Rural Innovation Support Service	X	X			X
Farm Advisory Service	X	X	X	X	X