

The Lien Declaration

REP: a European platform for practical research for sustainable rural development

This declaration is a legally non-binding statement of intent

Lien, Svartdal, July 4, 2004

1. Preamble

On July 4, 2004, representatives of research organisations, farmer organisations, environmental NGOs, government institutions and others from a variety of European came together in Lien, Svartdal, Norway and agreed on the following.

We, the signatories of this declaration, recognise that there are rapid changes in Europe's rural areas, which can be characterised by the following key observations:

- In many rural areas, there is a decrease of farming income and job opportunities;
- Ongoing intensification of agriculture is linked with abandonment elsewhere;
- In many rural areas, we see a continuous loss of biodiversity and additional environmental impacts;
- Loss of cultural identity & traditional knowledge;
- We see industrialisation of agriculture, which is no longer linked to land or food.

We recognise that these changes in the rural areas are driven by a variety of factors, some of which are autonomous, whereas others are driven by policy at different levels. Driving forces are different in different rural areas and the same driving forces may work out differently in different situations.

We believe that sustainable rural development is calling for an integrated approach

- which recognises the need for sustainable income in rural areas in combination with promoting biodiversity and minimising environmental impacts.

- which recognises the need for maintaining sustainable entrepreneurship in rural areas;
- which takes into account the need for specific solutions for specific problems in specific national, regional and local contexts;
- which is recognising the potential positive contribution of intensive agriculture to sustainable rural development;

2. REP

On July 4, the signatories have decided to establish the Rural European Platform, an independent European science-based think tank on rural development at the service of decision makers in farmer organisations, governments, NGOs and the private sector.

REP will offer an integrated approach of rural development issues, as indicated in Article 1. REP will provide a unique European network of research institutions that are in the position to provide up-to-date empirical and practical knowledge about regional and local situations, in order to provide adequate solutions for specific problems in specific rural areas, geared to the needs and interests of relevant stakeholders.

REP's work will be characterised by:

- an integrated sustainability (people, planet, profit) approach of rural issues;
- a science-based and multidisciplinary approach;
- a practical approach, based on real-world experience;
- its independence of particular interests or ideologies;
- developing region-specific solutions on the basis of empirical evidence;
- working on the basis of real needs of farmers and other customers.

REP and REP members will work on a variety of issues. We agreed on a preliminary list, which should be simplified and prioritised in the next draft of this text:

- function as a platform for scientific exchange of solutions for landscape use and management;
- develop instruments to increase awareness for issues of sustainable rural development;
- work out regional solutions of 'multifunctionality' in different European regions;
- help link knowledge from several regions into a single common policy;

- help increase awareness amongst farmers for the potential of multifunctional agriculture;
- play a role in identifying areas in which useful info is lacking (interface between disciplines and professions);
- coordinate pilot projects within the EU on sustainable agriculture;
- play a prominent role in monitoring projects;
- provide knowledge for adapting / building agricultural institutions;
- play a role in lobbying at the EU level for support of new management concepts for valuable landscapes
- help identify crucial gaps in knowledge/data about rural development;
- actively cooperate with relevant other networks and initiatives;
- bring together stakeholders in rural development with different backgrounds (nature conservation, agriculture, citizens, etc.).

3. Developing REP

We agree to develop REP over the months to come, including the following steps:

1. By September 2004, a second and improved draft of this declaration will be written on the basis of comments received;
2. An Organising Committee of 4-6 REP members will take on the responsibility to organise the next steps, see next points;
3. A secretariat for the initiative will be established;
4. The results of the Lien workshop will be documented and published, possibly on the internet (by September 2004);
5. Strategically important stakeholders, especially farmer organisation of different countries, will be invited to join the REP initiative;
6. A clear strategic programmatic vision of REP's work will be developed, identifying the most useful areas in which REP can provide unique contributions to different European stakeholders at different levels;
7. A minimally required formalisation of REP (some form of an association) and governance rules will be developed;
8. Funds for financing the REP initiatives will be raised;
9. A strategy for active acquisition of projects and funds will be developed;
10. The second REP meeting will be organised (summer 2005).

Lien, Svartdal, July 4, 2004

List of signatories
