

## AGRICULTURE 4.0 AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

### Digital entrepreneurship in rural areas

#### KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Jackie Brierton, is CEO of GrowBiz – an enterprise support organisation in rural Perthshire, Scotland. She has Chaired the Rural Perth and Kinross LEADER programme since 2014, and has more than 30 years' experience in business, enterprise and policy development, including a period advising the UK Government's Small Business Service from 2002-2006. Jackie was recently appointed to the National Council of Rural Advisers by the Scottish Government. She is also Co-Founder and Vice-Chair of Women's Enterprise Scotland CIC. She holds a BSc (SocSc) in Business from University of Edinburgh.



#### CHALLENGES

Some of the key points included:

- There needs to be more focus on the broader rural economy (ie not just agriculture), particularly in relation to the needs of small and micro-businesses;
  - Increased access to broadband and mobile technologies in rural areas (while acknowledging the continuing infrastructure issues) highlights the need for specific training and upskilling to enable businesses and communities to maximise digital advantage;
  - More emphasis needed on long-term strategies for development of skills – technological innovations will require continuous access to training and development opportunities in rural areas;
  - The role of digital rural hubs, and co-working and networking opportunities, will increase in importance to counteract lack of social interaction as a result of digital connectivity;
  - A different model of business support is needed – less transactional and more relational, with a focus on peer learning, mentoring and networking. Also on new and emerging business sectors, attracted to rural areas because of increased digital connectivity and resource;
  - Business advisers will need more advanced digital knowledge and awareness;
- Growth models will be different in future – less emphasis on individual 'scale-up', more on collaboration and innovative partnerships;

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- There's a key role for community-led enterprise support using local knowledge and shared expertise.

## PRESENTATION

The session kicked off with a keynote presentation on digital entrepreneurship in rural areas featuring four themes:

- Infrastructure;
- Skills & knowledge;
- Business support in rural areas;
- Ambition.

Workshop participants then had the opportunity to hear short presentations from three of the featured poster projects. This was followed by group discussions around two questions – the first of which was: **What stands out as more innovative in the projects presented?**

- Promotion of multi-actor interaction: farmers/consumers/researchers/policy makers bringing added value to rural areas;
- Combination of social with technical innovation;
- Connection between rural socio-economic activities to consumers and citizen demands; inclusion of rural-urban settings; examples of a SMART evidence-based approach;
- The broadening of the definition of innovation from technical towards people reorganising to deliver societal change;
- Practical examples such as developing more pick-up points for produce instead of building more supermarkets;
- The use of new digital tools providing the opportunity to create new short supply chains for producers/consumers.

The second question was: **What opportunities for digitization can you identify in relation to the theme of the session?**

- A range of opportunities were discussed including: accessible platforms and portals; social media; online/e-commerce; e-learning; mapping; market research and big data; networking; app development; SRTI; fair-trade;
- Tools and technologies for digitisation to innovate rural entrepreneurship should also be about: development and utilisation of on-farm tools; combining digital technologies with face to face social + business meetings such as rural cyber conferences;

It was suggested that digitization is not a tool. We have to focus on long-term outcomes and filtered information;



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- Capabilities and capacities need to be developed to ensure inclusive targeting of markets for societal benefits;
- Digital innovation hubs should be part of the infrastructure, connecting local, regional and national initiatives and offering shared services such as distribution, marketing and entrepreneurial support.

## MAIN OUTCOMES FROM THE DISCUSSIONS

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Summarising all the discussions and content of this session was challenging, but three key themes and ideas which emerged are:

- Combining social interaction with technical innovation helps to negate the disadvantages of rural areas;
- Digital tools provide opportunities to create new connections between producers/consumers;
- Development of rural hubs (both physical and virtual), which combine different technologies and types of interaction – including business support - will strengthen the development of rural entrepreneurship.

And, finally, emerging new methodologies for enabling data sources and better broadband connections should be explored to assist small and micro-enterprises in rural areas.

## INNOVATION PROJECTS

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At this thematic session, each participant assisted to the presentation of 3 of the following posters:

- **ADELAIDE.FARM** - online market for small farmers to connect with the urban consumers;
- **ASNET** - Mobile Broadband
- **EPAM PROJECT** – Business development in the aromatic and medicinal plant sector in Portugal
- **GEO PARK AROUCA** - Implementation of a development strategy
- **PROVE** - Promote and sell agricultural products in short supply chain
- **ROBUST** - Unlocking Rural-Urban Synergies
- **SIMRA** - Social Innovation in Marginalized Rural Areas
- **SMARTFAMER** - e-commerce platform for fruit and vegetables that links directly farmers to the consumers

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