



**Female-Led Innovation in
Agriculture and Rural Areas**



FLIARA Final Conference

WOMEN LEADING RURAL INNOVATION: FROM VISION TO ACTION



Speakers

Jacques Delors Building, Brussels

9:00 · October 17th, 2025



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WHAT TO EXPECT?

The final conference for the FLIARA project is a forum for researchers, policymakers, and other stakeholders to highlight the important role women play in shaping the future of rural areas and sustainable farming. Taking place during Rural Women's Week, the conference aims to showcase the impact of female-led innovation, promote knowledge exchange, and inspire action for a more inclusive and sustainable rural Europe. The event is designed to inform future policy directions and contribute to advancing gender-responsive rural policy at local, national, and EU levels.

OUR SPEAKERS

Aisling Murtagh – University of Galway



Aisling Murtagh is a postdoctoral researcher on the FLIARA project. She has worked on a number of rural development related national and European research projects in areas such as rural youth, cultural and creative industries, short food supply chains and food cooperatives. Before joining the FLIARA project she worked as Postdoctoral Researcher for four years on the Horizon 2020 project, RURALIZATION, with a specific focus on rural regeneration and generational renewal. Prior to this she worked as a Research and Development Officer with the National Rural Network where her work particularly focused on the LEADER programme.

Alexia Rouby – European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development



Alexia Rouby is an agro-economist with over 20 years of extensive experience, now playing a pivotal role in the European Commission's Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development (DG AGRI). She currently coordinates the team responsible for implementing the European Commission's long-term vision for the EU's rural areas, adopted in June 2021. This crucial work includes overseeing the EU's Rural Action Plan and the Rural Pact, initiatives central to the future of rural Europe.

Prior to this, Alexia dedicated her expertise to programming research and innovation on rural and social dynamics, social innovation, and participatory and territorial approaches within DG AGRI's Research and Innovation unit. Her career journey also includes significant experience in national network coordination on animal health and European network coordination in rural policy analysis and project management, giving her a comprehensive perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing rural communities.



Anastasia Oprea - ECOLISE



Anastasia is a dynamic Project Manager for the FLIARA project at the European Network for Community-Led Initiatives (ECOLISE), a key partner in the initiative. Her expertise extends to the Fundraising Circle at ECOLISE, where she actively contributes to Horizon project proposal writing. Drawing on her background as a PhD student and researcher in international politics – with a focus on everyday practices in ecovillages, European citizenship, and food justice – Anastasia is poised to revitalise the Learn circle. Her unique perspective, shaped by Eastern European and feminist lenses, drives her commitment to integrating environmental and social justice into her work through insightful situational analyses.

Annie Roos – Linnaeus University



Annie Roos is a senior lecturer in business administration, specialising in entrepreneurship, at the Department of Management within the School of Business and Economics at Linnaeus University in Sweden. She is the proud Swedish project for FLIARA. In FLIARA, Annie's work focuses on elevating innovative women in rural areas and fostering a deeper understanding of innovations that contribute to a more sustainable future.

With a PhD from the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences (SLU), where she specialised in gender, context, and entrepreneurship, Annie's research critically examines entrepreneurship, exploring how male stereotypes influence entrepreneurial roles and how entrepreneurship can promote empowerment and emancipation. She has also extensively studied women's entrepreneurial networks and their crucial role in advancing gender equality and inclusion. Beyond her research, Annie is the program director for the School of Business and Economics' master's program in Entrepreneurship, Sustainability, and Social Change, and she actively engages in teaching entrepreneurship, sharing her knowledge and experience with students. She is also involved in other impactful projects, including "Cultural Supply through Entrepreneurship Across Sector Boundaries," and is a proud member of the IUFRO Task Force on Gender Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in Forest-related Sectors (ForGEDI).

David Lamb – EU CAP Network



David Lamb is the Team Leader of the CAP Implementation Contact Point, part of the EU CAP Network. With over two decades of experience, David is a seasoned expert in agricultural and rural development, dedicated to fostering collaboration and effective policy implementation across the European Union.

Beginning his career in the food and drink manufacturing and marketing sector in 1997, David transitioned to leading the Food & Drink Team at Scotland's Rural



College (SRUC) in 2003, where he managed specialist advisory and consultancy activities. In 2012, he was instrumental in establishing and managing the Scottish Government's pioneering local food and drink development program, "Think Local." Since 2014, David has been based in Brussels, where he drives networking among Member States, cultivates relationships with EU-level stakeholders, and plays a crucial role in supporting the development and implementation of CAP Strategic Plans and peer-to-peer exchanges. David is also an accomplished facilitator, lecturer, and trainer, passionate about sharing his extensive knowledge and experience.

Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip – Delft University of Technology



Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip is an Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture, specialising in Landscape and Heritage, at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment at TU Delft. She is a key researcher in the FLIARA project, working alongside Professor Willem Korthals Altes. Trained as an architect in conservation strategies, Gerdy brings a wealth of practical and academic experience to her role, having worked on renovation projects and as a policy advisor for a municipality before returning to academia. Her expertise lies in the inseparable relationship between country houses, landed estates, and their surrounding landscapes, a subject on which she holds a PhD. Her specialisms include landscape architecture, heritage, narratives, landscape biography, identity, and participation.

As a research leader for the Centre for Global Heritage and Development, Gerdy is passionate about fostering interdisciplinary research and design through challenge-based education, leading student hubs focused on diverse heritage projects. Her extensive publications encompass books and articles on heritage issues, landscape architecture, and the intersection of practice and academia. She actively contributes to various master's programs at TU Delft and Leiden University, teaching courses on landscape biography, identity, and heritage, and lecturing on landscape archaeology. Gerdy is also the education manager for landscape architecture in the bachelor's program, ensuring the next generation of professionals is well-versed in the complexities of landscape and heritage.

Graeme Dean – SWIFT Project Manager, Spanish National Research Council



Graeme is a project manager for SWIFT— "Supporting Women-led Innovations in Farming and Rural Territories"— at the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC-UPV). The SWIFT project fosters transitions toward sustainable, balanced, and inclusive development of European rural areas by deploying women-led innovations and promoting gender equality.

An interdisciplinary scientist, Graeme embraces the complexity of human-nature interactions. He has participated in the IPCC cross-chapter box on Gender, Climate Justice, and Transformative Pathways, where he studied the role of gender in climate change adaptation within terrestrial and food systems. Graeme



also has extensive experience working with the Nature's Contributions to People (NCP) framework in extensive livestock systems in marginal and mountainous areas, with a special focus on the Mediterranean basin.

Hannu I. Heikkinen – University of Oulu



Hannu I. Heikkinen is a Professor of Cultural Anthropology at the University of Oulu and is part of the FLIARA team in Oulu. His research is centred on how human-environment relations are mediated through different forms of technology, particularly in Northern societies.

As a Docent in Environmental and Applied Anthropology, he is deeply interested in political ecology, participatory methodologies, and environmental justice. Professor Heikkinen has led and contributed to numerous interdisciplinary projects, with a recent focus on exploring how new technological solutions can enhance human well-being and foster more sustainable relationships between humans and their environment.

Lorena van de Kolk – Gender Alliance for Innovation in Agriculture



An entrepreneur and connector, and passionate advocate for sustainable and inclusive innovation in Europe. With a background in EU law and funding, Lorena has worked with the European Commission's DG MARE and now leads an international team at Schuttelaar & Partners as one of its Managing Partners. She is also the founder of GAIA and the Young Professional Network, supporting gender equality in agriculture and career development for young professionals. Known for connecting people, ideas, and resources, Lorena is dedicated to driving sustainable change with energy and purpose.

Louise Weir – University of Galway



Louise Weir is an Associate Researcher and the lead Project Manager of the FLIARA project. Louise is also part of the Galway research team working on the Horizon Europe Project, PREMIERE. She has a particular specialism in spatial planning and a research focus in rural planning, rural transport, social networks analysis and rural regeneration. Research on previous European projects, BuSk-Building Shared Knowledge Capital to support natural resource governance in the Northern Periphery and the Horizon 2020 project RURALIZATION provided the stepping stone to Project Manager and Associate Researcher on FLIARA.



Magdalena Mach – European Commission



Magdalena Mach is a Policy Officer in the Research & Innovation Unit of the European Commission's DG Agriculture and Rural Development. With a Master's degree in International Relations, Magdalena brings a wealth of experience to her role, particularly in the implementation of the LEADER approach.

Before joining the European Commission, she spent six years at the Agriculture and Fisheries Section of the Permanent Representation of the Republic of Poland to the European Union and the Polish Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, focusing on rural development programs. Currently, Magdalena is actively involved in the European Innovation Partnership for agricultural productivity and sustainability (EIP-AGRI), and she recently co-organized the successful EU CAP Network workshop on 'Women-led innovations in agriculture and rural areas'.

Maria Gafo Gómez-Zamalloa – European Commission



Maria Gafo Gómez-Zamalloa is the acting Head of the "Social Sustainability" Unit within the European Commission's Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development. In this pivotal role, she champions critical social issues impacting Europe's rural areas, including generational renewal, combating depopulation, promoting equality, fostering local development, and upholding human rights. Her unit also holds the significant responsibility for the LEADER program, a key initiative for local development.

Maria brings extensive experience to her current position, having dedicated many years to the European Commission. Her diverse career within the Commission has seen her contribute to the development of energy, environment, forestry, and agricultural policies. Notably, she played a coordinating role in shaping the long-term vision for rural areas, a crucial framework adopted in 2021.

Maria Walsh – Member of the European Parliament



Maria Walsh is an elected Member of the European Parliament for the Midlands-North-West constituency in Ireland, representing Fine Gael. She is a prominent voice in European policy-making, notably serving as a full member of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development (AGRI), where she advocates for Irish farmers and rural communities. Her key priorities in this committee include generational renewal in agriculture, supporting young farmers, and dismantling barriers for female farmers. As the lead negotiator for EU-UK issues on the AGRI Committee, Maria plays a critical role in shaping the future of agriculture and rural areas within the EU.

Beyond her focus on agriculture, Maria is deeply committed to social progress and equality. She is a member of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender



Equality (FEMM), prioritizing the implementation of legislation to combat gender-based violence, eliminating the gender pay gap, improving women's health, and protecting women online. Additionally, Maria serves on the Committee on Regional Development (REGI), working to ensure income equality through EU Cohesion Policy, and the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE), where she champions fundamental rights and addresses issues like cyber violence. As an Irish-American citizen, she also plays a vital role in the Delegation for relations with the United States and the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, fostering international cooperation and advocating for human rights and free media.

Marion Eckardt – European LEADER Association for Rural Development



Marion Eckardt is the manager of the Swedish Local Action Group (LAG) Lokalt Ledd Utveckling Halland, situated in the region of Halland. With extensive experience in local development, Marion previously directed two rural LAGs, LEADER Landsbygd Halland and LEADER Kustbygd Halland, as well as a fisheries LAG, Fiskeområde Halland.

A graduate in Geography from the Humboldt University of Berlin, Marion plays a significant role in advocating for Swedish LAGs at a European level. She represents them in the ENDR LEADER/CLLD Subgroup and in ELARD (European LEADER Association for Rural Development), where she currently heads the ELARD Knowledge Hub. Her leadership is instrumental in fostering knowledge exchange and collaboration within the European LEADER community.

Maura Farrell – University of Galway



Associate Professor Maura Farrell is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Geography, Archaeology and Irish Studies at the University of Galway and a recognised leader in European rural and agricultural research. Her work is deeply rooted in Rural and Agricultural Geography, with a core focus on rural gender studies, rural development, and the socio-economic resilience of rural communities. A key aspect of her research explores the vital role of women as innovators in agriculture and rural life, using a gender-inclusive lens to understand and address rural transformation.

As a leading figure in European research, Dr. Farrell currently serves as the Lead Coordinator for the FLIARA project. She also acts as Principal Investigator for the PREMIERE project, focusing on participatory governance in research design. Dr. Farrell's work is widely recognised for her impact on rural policy, having received the University of Galway Research Excellence Award and the President's Award for Community Engagement. She is a trusted expert who regularly presents her findings at international forums, including the EU Parliament, the OECD, and the



European Commission, and contributes to global initiatives aimed at shaping inclusive and sustainable rural futures.

Michelle Perello – Consulta Europa



Michelle Perello is the founder and director of Consulta Europa Projects and Innovation, a company she established in Gran Canaria, Spain, in 2009 with a mission to foster smart, sustainable, and inclusive development in the Canary Islands. Holding an MA in International and Diplomatic Sciences and a PhD from Politecnico di Torino, Michelle has been a freelance consultant in EU programs and funding, as well as innovation and territorial development politics, since 2004.

Michelle's extensive expertise spans regional and European innovation policies, social innovation, and business and innovation models. Her unique approach blends close-to-business experience with scientific knowledge, focusing on SMEs, social innovation, and the circular economy. She has specialised in participatory processes for policymaking, co-creation, and citizen science through her work on numerous H2020 projects. Having lived in Brussels for six years as a representative, Michelle brings a deep understanding of EU institutions and a commitment to supporting organisations in raising their profiles and developing European strategies, always integrating the unique perspective of an outermost and insular region like the Canary Islands.

Pascale Van Doren – Rural Pact Support Office



Pascale Van Doren is the Team Leader of the Rural Pact Support Office, a role she has held since December 2022. With over 35 years of international experience, Pascale is a highly accomplished agronomy engineer with a deep understanding of European and regional issues, particularly in the realm of rural development.

Pascale's extensive career spans university research, public policy consulting, lobbying European institutions, and managing transnational projects and networks. Her expertise is particularly strong in innovation, knowledge development, support for SMEs, regional development, social affairs, maritime affairs, interregional cooperation, and territorial governance. Since 2008, she has been a vital part of the Contact Point for the European Network for Rural Development, contributing to policy and knowledge development, communications, and coordinating networking with national rural networks. Pascale's remarkable ability to facilitate consensus, negotiate effectively, and lead multicultural working groups makes her an invaluable asset to the Rural Pact, an initiative crucial for shaping the future of Europe's rural areas.



Sally Shortall – Grass Ceiling Project Coordinator



Professor Sally Shortall is the Duke of Northumberland Chair of Rural Economy at Newcastle University and a distinguished Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences. A leading authority in rural sociology, and Professor at the South East Technological University in Ireland. Professor Shortall's research extensively explores social inclusion in rural areas and the vital role of women in agriculture. She has recently spearheaded influential research for the Scottish Government, Defra, and the European Court of Auditors on women's contributions to the agricultural sector and is currently the coordinator of the Horizon Europe-funded project, Grass Ceiling.

Professor Shortall is particularly renowned for her groundbreaking work on gender relations within farm families. Her research highlights the often-unquestioned dynamics of power that lead to women rarely inheriting land, facing limited industry recognition, and having restricted access to capital and training, despite broader advancements in gender equality. Her recent findings demonstrably show that women are key drivers of green agriculture and sustainable practices, often approaching farm enterprises with fresh perspectives that lead to greater profitability. Her expertise is highly sought after by international organizations, with commissions from the European Parliament and the European Commission, and invitations to deliver keynote addresses on women's roles in agriculture across Europe, Canada, Australia, Tanzania, and Nigeria.

Sally-Ann Barrett – Event Moderator



Sally-Ann is an award-winning multiplatform broadcaster and audio producer with over two decades of extensive experience in news and current affairs across local, regional, and national radio in Ireland.

As a seasoned communications professional, Sally-Ann has a proven track record in creating and leading innovative communications projects from inception to delivery. Her expertise spans various mediums, including podcasting, documentary production, live streaming, and serving as an MC for public information events. She is highly skilled in broadcasting on multiple platforms, media production, media relations, political analysis, training, team leadership, and journalism.



Serafin Pazos-Vidal – European Association for Innovation in Local Development



Serafin Pazos-Vidal is a Senior Expert in Rural and Territorial Development at AEIDL, where he is responsible for a wide range of Horizon projects. Holding a PhD in European Union studies, he is a seasoned policy practitioner and academic researcher with extensive experience in multilevel governance, EU Cohesion Policy, rural development, and comparative decentralisation processes.

For 15 years, he served as the Head of the Brussels Office for the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities and has also represented the East of England and his native Galicia. Serafin has been a key expert for institutions like the Committee of the Regions and the European Parliament, advising on critical topics such as Community Led Local Development (CLLD), rural proofing, and depopulation. He also chaired the Cohesion Expert Group of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) for over a decade, demonstrating his leadership and deep engagement with rural and territorial policy.

Silvia Sivini – University of Calabria



Silvia Sivini is an Associate Professor in the Department of Political and Social Science at the University of Calabria, and a key figure leading the women-led innovations in farming and rural areas research for the FLIARA Project. With a background in Economic and Social Science and a PhD in Sociology, she brings extensive expertise to her role, having participated in numerous national and international research projects.

Silvia's research interests are centered on critical rural issues, including alternative agro-food networks, local governance, rural tourism, and broader rural development processes. As the coordinator of the Centre for Rural Development Studies (CeSSR), she plays a vital role in shaping academic discourse and fostering research in this field. She is also dedicated to nurturing future scholars, teaching in Bachelor, Master, and PhD programs, and supervising numerous PhD students focused on rural subjects.

Tara Farrell – Longford Women's Link



Tara Farrell is the Chief Executive Officer of Longford Women's Link (LWL) and a key partner in the FLIARA project. With over two decades of experience across the Community, Voluntary, and Education sectors, Tara is a seasoned professional with expertise in project management, adult education, women's human rights, and conflict resolution.

Tara is a prominent voice in rural advocacy, serving as the Chairperson of Irish Rural Link and a Director of Roscommon Women's Network. Her commitment to human rights and equality is further demonstrated through her lectures at St.



Angela's College (National University of Ireland Galway) in Sligo, complementing her LLM in International Human Rights Law. Tara's extensive background, which also includes lecturing in Political Science and Management Development, and her recent MBA, equip her with a comprehensive understanding of the multifaceted challenges and opportunities facing rural communities.

Tuomas Kuhmonen – University of Turku



Tuomas Kuhmonen is the Research Director at the Finland Futures Research Centre, University of Turku, where he leads the foresight and trend analysis for the FLIARA Project. With a distinguished background that includes serving as a Professor of Agricultural Policy at the University of Helsinki and a Professor of Entrepreneurship at the University of Jyväskylä, Tuomas brings a unique interdisciplinary perspective to his work.

Over his career, Tuomas has collaborated extensively with scientists and stakeholders, delving into complex agricultural, food, rural, and regional issues. His research interests are broad and impactful, focusing on socio-economic transformations, heuristics in complex systems, policy studies, futures images, and evolutionary epistemology. His work is crucial for understanding the dynamic forces shaping our rural landscapes and anticipating future developments.

Víctor Martínez – Consulta Europa



Víctor Martínez leads the Communications Team for the FLIARA Project at Consulta Europa. His extensive experience spans marketing, commercial and communication strategies, and public relations, which is central to his role. A versatile professional, his background spans media production for television and radio, journalism, advertising, and stakeholder engagement. Víctor's expertise also extends to developing digital products on sustainability, with a specific focus on self-consumption in the Canary Islands, Spain.

Willem Korthals Altes – Delft University of Technology



Professor Willem Korthals Altes is a leading authority in Land Development at the Delft University of Technology, heading the Policy Design and Assessment of the FLIARA Project. His expertise is particularly vital as the Dutch government aims to build approximately one million houses by 2030, a goal that demands a shrewd and effective land-development policy. Professor Korthals Altes's research delves into the intricate dynamics between government policy and market interests, especially given the increased role of market forces and land speculation in contemporary planning. He explores how an ambitious government can effectively engage the market to achieve its housing objectives in a landscape where it no longer holds all the cards.



Professor Korthals Altes's work also addresses the unique challenges of land development in non-urban areas. He has highlighted the significant implications of limited agricultural land trading for young farmers looking to enter the market, a "forgotten" issue that his chair will be researching in the coming years. His insights are crucial for understanding how municipalities can leverage their improved financial position from land value increases to stimulate house building, including strategies like developing housing plans, land purchasing, or compulsory acquisition. With a distinguished background that includes senior consulting at Ecorys-Kolpron and leadership in innovative land use initiatives, Professor Korthals Altes continues to shape the discourse on sustainable and equitable land development.



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