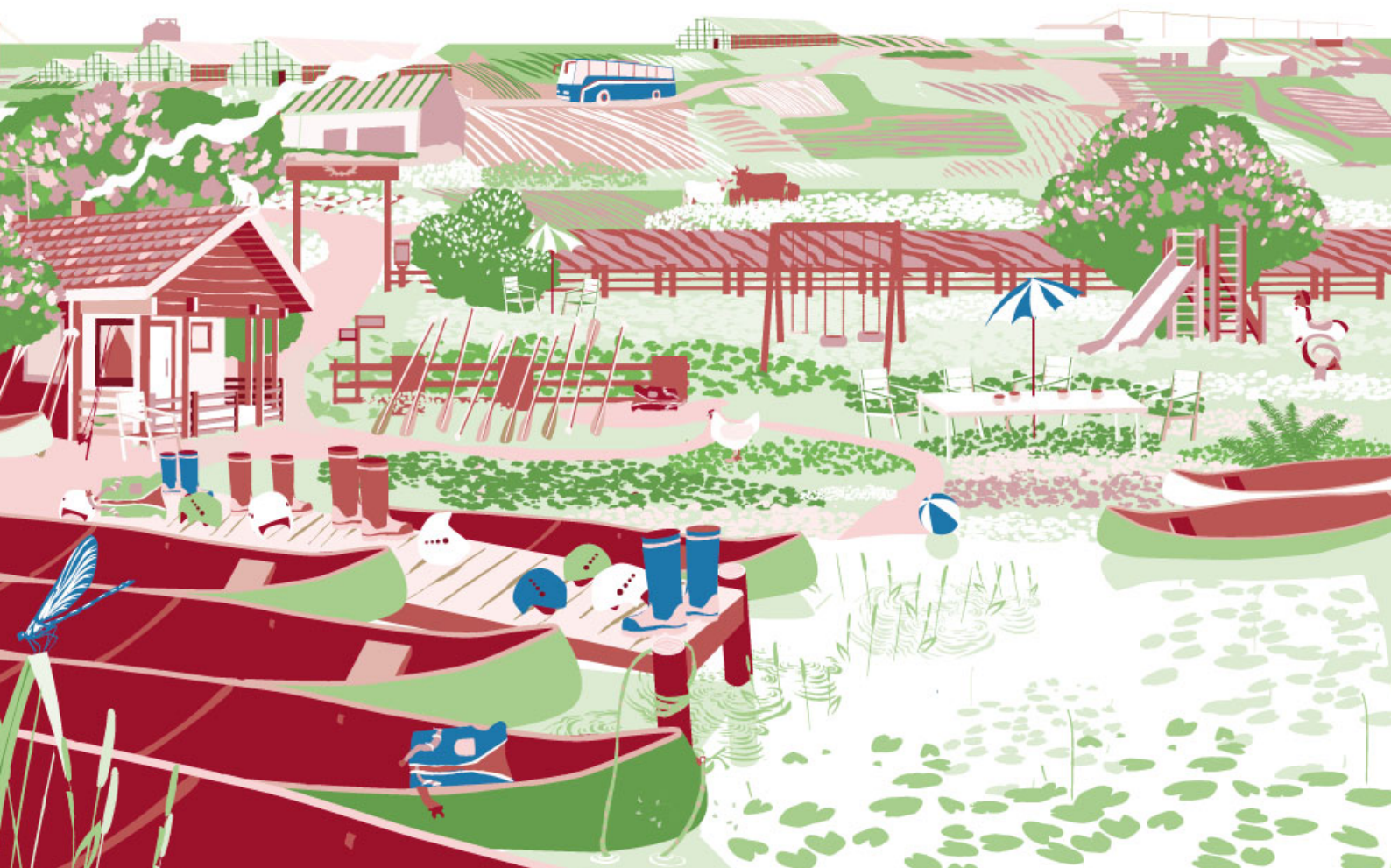




FINNISH RURAL POLICY

Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry



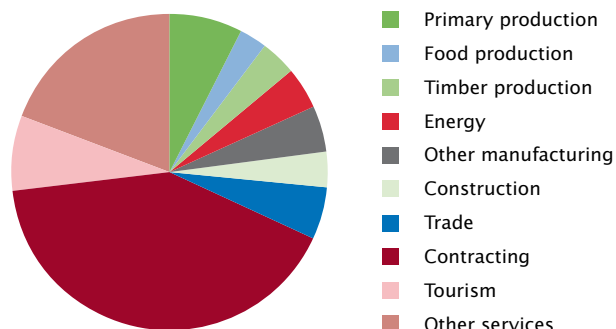
ALMOST HALF OF FINNS LIVE IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

Finland is the northernmost country of Europe, as well as a very rural country: almost half of the population lives in the countryside. Finland is also a very sparsely populated country, with an average population density of only 17 inhabitants per square kilometre.

The traditions and structure of industries reflect the northern climate, long distances and remote location. Finnish countryside and livelihoods are undergoing a strong transition. Today more than a third of the farms derive part of their livelihood from activities other than farming.



**Economic activities
on farms**





DIVERSIFIED RURAL LIVELIHOODS

Finnish farms are characterised by the diversity of their economic activities. Many farms derive income from machine contracting, tourism, various kinds of services, or wood and food processing. A growing number of farms engage in energy entrepreneurship. Use of energy produced from wood has increased rapidly in recent years. The different forms of bioenergy offer new business opportunities in the countryside.

The welfare of the countryside is no longer founded on agriculture alone, but it is still a significant rural industry. What is also important is the role of farming

in the rural landscape. The countryside needs diverse sources of income and new residents to stay viable.

About 40 per cent of Finnish companies are located in the countryside, which offers a wide range of opportunities for business. Most of the rural enterprises are small and engage in diverse activities. In the future new jobs can be created through special expertise and innovation.

The EU funding made available through the rural development programmes is mainly used for supporting the setting-up of small rural enterprises and developing business operations.



LIVING COUNTRYSIDE

A viable countryside is an essential element in the Finnish way of life and culture. It is also an economic necessity as the producer of food and wood. Besides these, the rural areas offer a wide range of other goods and services to the whole society.

Rural development programmes aim to enhance the viability of the countryside. New jobs have been created and rural areas are again perceived as highly attractive places of residence. Recent studies show that the number of Finns who would like to live in the countryside has been growing, and many people also make this wish come true.

Projects targeted at the development of villages activate people to work for the benefit of their own home region. New ways of producing the basic services for the rural population have been developed. Village action and work of the local action groups based on the local self-initiative have proven highly successful.





NATURE IS CLOSE TO THE FINNS

Most of the Finnish countryside is water or forest. For the rural residents these mean employment and economic security, good environment for life and work, as well as untouched nature and national heritage landscapes.

The Finns have a close relationship with nature. We go to the countryside for recreation and like to spend our holidays in the wild. The pure northern nature offers excellent opportunities for both wildlife tourism and production of local foods.

In recent years the role of tourism as a rural livelihood has been growing more rapidly than ever before. The main attractions are the nature, waters, forests, specialities of the four seasons, and various kinds of sports and nature activities.



VIABLE COUNTRYSIDE ATTRACTS NEW RESIDENTS

Active residents are an important resource for the rural regions. Community spirit has always been strong in the countryside. We have long traditions in various kinds of cooperation, neighbourly help and shared responsibility. Now the rural villages are again getting stronger and more active.

Rural regions need new residents to stay viable, while attractive and functioning village communities are vital for the rural residents. People want to care for the local cultural heritage. Culture gives strength and inspiration to the people, reinforces their identity and offers opportunities for business activities founded on the local specialities.

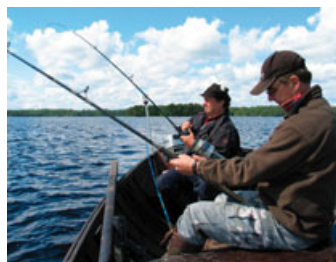
Especially families with children see the countryside

as an attractive place to live, provided that the job opportunities are in place and the basic services are ensured. For many parents the safe environment of small village schools has been the reason to moving to the countryside.

Information and innovation move rapidly in the rural regions as well. The improving communication networks link the rural regions to towns and cities. Teleworking offers new opportunities to live in the countryside.

Part-time residents contribute to the preservation of basic services in the rural regions. They are important customers for many rural enterprises. The number of holiday homes is about half a million. Each summer almost two million people spend their holidays in the Finnish countryside.





LONG TRADITIONS IN RURAL POLICY

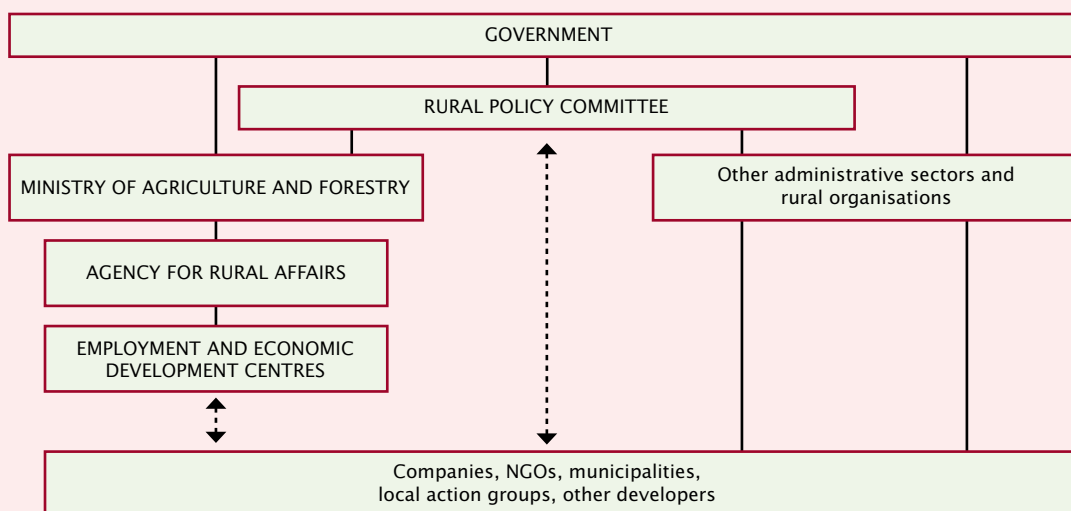
In Finland the need for active rural policy was perceived already in the 1980s. National rural policy is prepared and developed by the Rural Policy Committee, with representatives from seven ministries and several public and private organisations. Finnish rural policy is founded on broad cooperation and networking.

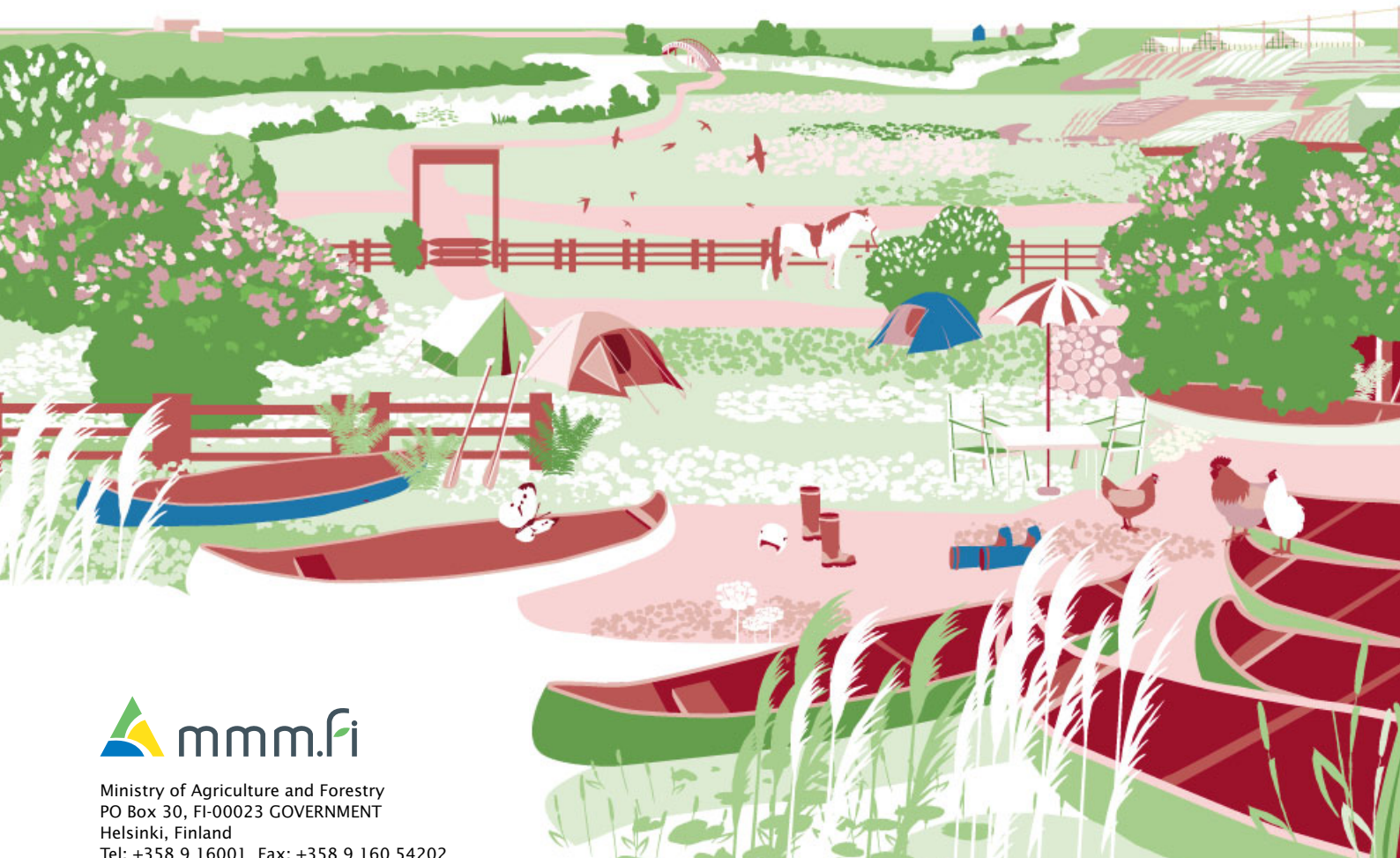
Cooperation between the actors is being constructed on the national, regional and local level as well as between these. A network of action groups and village communities is strongly rooted to almost all parts of

the country. In the programming period 2007–2013 there are 55 local action groups in Finland, which is one of the leading countries in Europe in this type of work. Active village residents have set up about 2,800 village associations.

The development of rural industries is supported under various kinds of regional development projects. The projects aim to promote the networking of companies and prepare for future challenges. Rural residents are encouraged to local cooperation.

Organisation of rural policy in Finland





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