



GREENING MEASURES IN THE COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

WHICH MAY WORK FOR YOU AND NATURE?



THE BENEFITS OF NATURE FOR AGRICULTURE

It has been known for centuries that nature and agriculture nourish each other. Before intensive agricultural practices became widespread throughout the world during the second half of the 20th century, agricultural areas represented not only food sources for the human population, but also areas thriving with diversity of plant and animal species. Farmers were the custodians of nature since their livelihoods and the wellbeing of the natural surroundings were strongly connected and interdependent. Current small-scale farming and sustainable practices rely directly on that concept – farmers are able to maintain native plants and trees and create favourable conditions for indigenous animal species, ensuring their survival, and in return they obtain multiple benefits that ensure long-term agricultural practices, healthy and diversified nutrition and subsistence for their families. Agriculture in the European Union plays a key role in determining the health of

rural economies as well as the rural landscape. But today this region is suffering the consequences of decades of unsustainable and intensive farming, such as public health issues, insecure livelihoods of small-scale farmers and the reality of climate change-related problems that heavily affect agricultural practices (floods, intense precipitation, droughts).

It is becoming increasingly clear that a healthy and diverse natural environment composed of native plant and animal species is essential to food security, sustainable livelihoods, increased resistance to natural disasters and the ability to recover from its consequences, adequate nutritional requirements, and to obtain long-term benefits from agricultural practices.



DID
YOU
KNOW ?

- 37% of our planet's terrestrial surface is currently used for agriculture
- Agriculture is thought to cause around 70% of the projected loss of terrestrial biodiversity
- Bees, that help pollinate 35% of the world's food, are now facing extinction due to pesticides, habitat loss and disease
- Agriculture is responsible for around 10% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the EU
- The cost of industrialised farming on the environment worldwide is 3 trillion euros every year



THE GREENING MEASURES OF THE EU COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

Since its introduction in 1968, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been evolving to reflect the changing needs of both agriculture and the European society as a whole. In efforts to tackle the growing environmental and climate change challenges related to agriculture, its most recent update - implemented since 2015, contains a series of new rules for the implementation and approval of direct payments. Those include the so-called greening measures, which aim to make

agricultural practices more acceptable for the climate and the environment and thus more beneficial for people too. The 'greening' is now one of the mandatory key elements of CAP, according to which each farmer will receive an additional payment per hectare for using climate and environment- friendly farming practices. Member States are required to use 30% of their national funding allocations for the greening payments.



TYPES OF GREENING MEASURES:

- CROP DIVERSIFICATION – cultivating more than one crop, a requirement for farmers with over 10ha of arable land (up to 30ha, 2 crops; over 30ha, 3 crops)
- Maintaining existing PERMANENT GRASSLAND (land that has been used to grow grasses or other herbaceous plants for 5 years or more) + protection of environmentally sensitive pastures strictly in Natura 2000 sites
- Creating and/or maintaining an ECOLOGICAL FOCUS AREA of at least 5% of the arable land



WHY ARE GREENING MEASURES CURRENTLY FAILING TO BE BENEFICIAL FOR NATURE?

In theory, the initial proposal made by the European Commission was meant to make the CAP greener and ensure that public money dedicated to the "greening package" would effectively contribute to the preservation and protection of our natural resources.

Unfortunately, during the legislative procedure the proposal was modified and the final decision was to leave a lot of flexibility to Member States on how to meet the greening obligations. The result was a much less incisive "reform", which was not using public money to pay for public goods (clean water, rich biodiversity, healthy soils etc.): the flexibility left to Member States was indeed used to systematically choose the least-environmentally ambitious measures.

Investigating the choices made by 9 Member States, the IEEP affirms that "most countries

appear not to have used the flexibility permitted in the regulations to increase overall environmental ambition. Rather, they have maximised opportunities for farmers to meet their obligations without making significant changes". This led to a very poor result, and the policy now continues to have a devastating impact on the environment, public health, animal welfare and on the farmers too.

WHAT
CAN YOU
DO ?

As a farmer, you are in the position to make the greening work!

You have the power to make the Common Agricultural Policy more sustainable.

By choosing to implement the measures that are most beneficial for nature, you are:

- ensuring long-term existence of your business and subsistence for your family (and beyond – food security)
- contributing to improve the health and well-being of local communities
- keeping our countryside alive.



SO, WHICH GREENING MEASURES ARE MOST BENEFICIAL FOR NATURE?

The **Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs)** are good for nature if they are managed in an appropriate way: They create spaces that allow for different species of plants and animals to develop, breed, feed and nest. These areas can be used as corridors, in order to facilitate the movement of pollinators, insects, birds and little mammals.

EFAs that can be most beneficial for nature are the following:



EDGES OF FIELDS

WHAT ARE THEY: the boundaries of the fields, generally the least productive areas

BENEFITS that can be brought to the farm if the edges are not a simply dry line of land: if spontaneous plants are allowed to grow there, this area tends to be colonized by insects before the rest of the field. This increases biodiversity and decreases the risk of insect plague in the field. Living edges of fields also allow farmers to reduce herbicide use because field margins can prevent harmful weeds from entering the field; reduce soil erosion because plant roots stabilize the soil and absorb the excess rainfall; and increase the number of pollinators which are beneficial for crops.



HEDGES

WHAT ARE THEY: rows of shrubs or small trees planted close to each other

BENEFITS: provide shelter from wind, rain and sun; absorb the excess rainfall; prevent soil erosion; present potential source of firewood; present a source of supplementary diet for livestock; ensure privacy; reduce noise; filter pollutants that could reach water bodies; host beneficial insects and pollinators.



BUFFER STRIPS

WHAT ARE THEY: small areas of land in permanent vegetation and with no production, such as riparian buffers, filter strips, grassed waterways, shelterbelts, windbreaks, living snow fences, contour grass strips, cross-wind trap strips, shallow water areas for wildlife, herbaceous wind barriers and vegetative barriers. They should be next to or parallel with a watercourse.

BENEFITS: filter pollutants thus preventing their runoff to nearby water bodies; stabilize streambanks and shorelines; prevent soil erosion; improve soil quality; provide shade and cover; reduce noise; protect a specific kind of fauna which is strictly linked to a watery environment.



FALLOW LAND

WHAT IS IT: a cropland that is not seeded for one or more seasons; has no crop production or grazing on it.

BENEFITS that could be better ensured if left as arable land: conserves moisture; restores soil fertility through nitrate accumulation; prevents new weed growth and dispersal; creates calm areas where small mammals can live.



TREE LINES

BENEFITS: if trees and plants are grown for a long period (allowing birds and beneficial insects to complete their natural reproduction cycle and allowing trees to develop a strong system of roots), tree lines prevent soil erosion; protect from wind, rain and sun; reduce airborne dust from concentrated livestock areas; present source of firewood; filter pollutants from runoff and groundwater; present an aesthetically pleasing landscape; provide privacy; host birds, pollinators and beneficial insects.



AFFORESTED AREAS

WHAT ARE THEY: croplands or marginal lands converted into forests

BENEFITS: protection from wind, rain and sun; filter pollutants from runoff and groundwater; present an aesthetically pleasing landscape; provide privacy; prevent soil erosion; provide forest products such as firewood, edible fruits and plants or medicinal herbs; mitigates the impact and absorbs excess rainfall thus preventing floods.

Unfortunately, and in spite of the definition from the Direct Payment Regulation which clearly states that "Ecological Focus Areas should be established, in particular, in order to safeguard and improve biodiversity on farms", pesticide use is allowed on EFAs. As more than 70% of EFA surface is currently covered with crops, pesticide use on the EFAs is not only present but also intense. This does not reflect the idea of an "ecological focus area", as it does not allow pollinators, insects and birds to live in them. Therefore, it is important keep in mind that any of the listed EFA elements is only beneficial for nature IF NO PESTICIDES ARE BEING USED.

SOLUTIONS FOR THE FUTURE

Nowadays researchers are investigating in detail the CAP's impact on our nature - many useful tools are resulting from the implementation of innovative approaches, such as the use of GPS in order to have a reduced impact on soil and reduce inputs (precision farming) or the analysis of how much your yield can grow if the right species (of plants or insects) are support-

ed (functional biodiversity). Small farmers, as well as those who are practising subsistence agriculture, are a core part of the European food and farming system: innovation should also be brought to rural areas, in order to support these traditional techniques.



CONCLUSION

Biodiversity can still be protected and enhanced by our farmers, even if the rules are contradictory: as a farmer, you have the possibility to go beyond this list of priorities and means and make the right choice also from an environmental point of view. CAP should deliver on environmental objectives so that nature can deliver multiple benefits for your farming practice.

By making the right choices at farm level, supporting the integration of the right green elements and helping to create synergies between different sectors you can contribute to a healthier future, food security and a thriving countryside.



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This publication is financially supported by the European Union but does not necessarily reflect its position or opinion.