



Common Agricultural Policies

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Many of the habitats and species that are protected under the Habitats and Birds Directives are dependent on, or associated with, low input agricultural practices. For instance, the biodiversity of high-altitude grasslands or the meadow birds on fen meadows depend on locally tailored extensive farming systems and practices for their continued survival. Yet, in the last 50 years, through the combined effects of farm intensification and land abandonment, farmland biodiversity has undergone a dramatic decline. The importance of farmers for the Natura 2000 network is reflected in the fact that farmland makes up around 40% of the total area included in the Natura 2000 network. Because a high level of biodiversity usually coincides with low agricultural productivity, most of the farmland in Natura 2000 is located in the more marginal farming areas. Many Natura 2000 farming systems are under threat. Farmers who deliver the essential management of key habitats and species often farm under difficult circumstances using labour-intensive systems on marginal land. They are extremely vulnerable to economic pressures to abandon their traditional farming systems and in some cases to cease production altogether.

It is therefore important to build an integrated package of support for Natura 2000 farmers that first ensures the economic viability of the extensive farming system on which the beneficial management depends, and secondly addresses the specific management practices needed for the conservation of the key habitats and species.

Pillar 2 of the Common Agricultural Policy offers a wide range of measures to support farmers, other land managers and rural communities in adjusting their management of the area to the management requirements the Habitats and Birds Directives. The measures can be used to support Natura 2000 farmland, in terms of land management, conservation planning and knowledge transfer and advice. Potential support is laid down in the multiannual Rural Development Programmes (RDP) prepared by national or regional administrations. Rural Development Plans are financed from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). For the 2014-20 programming period, the Fund focuses on three main objectives:

- fostering the competitiveness of agriculture
- ensuring the sustainable management of natural resources, and climate action
- achieving a balanced territorial development of rural economies and communities including the creation and maintenance of employment.

Restoring and preserving biodiversity, including in Natura 2000 areas and high nature value farming, and the state of European landscapes is one of the focuses of the EAFRD.

Currently (2019) the CAP is under revision and confirming the broadened scope of the agri-environment measure by renaming it 'agri-environment-climate' is one of the elements in the new CAP. Also; recognition of the environmental and climatic benefits of collaborative action in particular but not only at the landscape scale, through the possibility of granting higher transaction costs in case of contracts involving more than one land manager; flexible rules on the duration of contracts after the initial period of applying the commitments; and extending the scope of the Natura 2000 compensation measure to cover farmland and/or forest land in other nature protection areas with environmental restrictions which contribute to improve habitat connectivity (Article 10 of the Habitats Directive).



A Eurosites Management Planning Expert Group document

The management of Natura 2000 farmland addressing the particular needs of key habitats and species can be carried out using a range of support from Pillar 2 that includes:

- Preparing and updating Natura 2000 management plans
- Agri-environment-climate payments
- Non-productive investments linked to agri-environment and Natura 2000
- Natura 2000 compensation payments
- Animal welfare payments
- Prevention of damage to forests from forest fires and restoring agricultural
- Production potential

(Info drawn from [“Farming for Natura 2000”, European Commission 2014](#))

References and further reading

Background information about the Common Agricultural Policy can be found at:

https://ec.europa.eu/info/food-farming-fisheries/key-policies/common-agricultural-policy/cap-glance_en

Valuable information can also be found in the Europarc publication [“European Protected Areas and Sustainable Agriculture”](#).