

## **OLIVE FARMING AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN ANDALUCIA (SPAIN)**

**Concha Salguero, EFNCP**

### **Land-use data and trends**

The olive area in Spain is 2,572,793<sup>1</sup> ha, of which 1,860,458 ha are non irrigated and 712,335 ha are irrigated.

Andalucía is the main producing region with 1,549,663 ha, followed by Castilla-La Mancha 405,883 ha, Extremadura 264,934 ha, and others such as Cataluña and Valencia.

In 2005, 20.6 % of olive production in Andalucía was irrigated, which has since increased to 30%. The most extended system is localized or drip irrigation, used in 85% of the total irrigated area.

### **Environmental challenges and policy responses – soil erosion**

In Andalucía, intensive olive farming is a major cause of soil erosion, especially on slopes. Of a total olive area of over 1.5 million hectares, around 54% are on slopes of over 10% and therefore highly vulnerable to erosion according to the Spanish Oil Register (Registro Oleícola Español)<sup>2</sup>.

An agri-environment measure was introduced in the late 1990s to address this problem. But by 2003, only 7.3% of the area targeted by the measure was participating<sup>3</sup>.

The measure was targeted on preventing erosion in olive groves on slopes of 8% or above or located on terraces, planted before 1998 with a tree density between 30 and 210 trees and with a minimum area of 0.2 ha.

The farmers, on top of good agricultural practice, had to comply with the following requirements:

- keeping an agri-environmental register book and plan
- keeping a vegetation cover between trees and natural vegetation on the land borders
- preserving specific landmarks such as terraces, hedges, etc
- not using chemicals for preventing the growth of suckers on the tree trunks.

The distribution of up-take of the measure was very irregular, in some areas around 25% of olive groves benefited from the measure and in others the implementation did not reach 5%. In some very marginal areas the effect of the measure was very limited indeed, including some areas with serious erosion problems.

Clearly this agri-environment measure was not a success on any significant scale. Well over 90% of the area of olives considered highly vulnerable to erosion was not touched by the scheme.

---

<sup>1</sup> Source: FEAGA. SIGPAC 2010. Resumen nacional.

<sup>2</sup> Ariza Seguí, M et al; "La medida agroambiental de la lucha contra la erosión del olivar en pendiente en el programa horizontal de Desarrollo Rural". DG Desarrollo Rural . MAPA.

<sup>3</sup> Guzmán Álvarez, J.R., "Las medidas agroambientales y el olivar". Territorio y medio ambiente en el olivar andaluz; pg 115-134.



*Collapsing terraces and soil erosion, resulting from over-intensive cultivation. Córdoba (Spain)*

Possible reasons have been suggested, among them the insufficient financial and technical support, including deficient advisory services to farmers. Also, according to some econometric analysis, there are structural factors in farms and farmers that influence the decision of participating such as the soil conditions (the more soil degradation the less probability to apply for the measure because costs increase). Another factor is that farmers may be unsure with continuing to farm for the five years of the agri-environment commitment<sup>4</sup>.

More recently, CAP cross-compliance rules have been introduced in an attempt to tackle soil erosion, but research is needed to assess how successful this has been.

In the RDP 2007-2013 of Andalucía there is a specific measure for incentivising olives groves located in river basins for human water supply or in Natura 2000 areas to practise integrated production. It aims the improvement of water quality, soil and biodiversity.

There are currently 155,056 olive hectares in integrated production. The farmers should, among other practices, maintain soil cover following the measure specifications. The basic payment ranges between 203-286 €/ha.

---

<sup>4</sup> Franco Martínez, A., "The impact of agri-environmental European policy of fighting against soil erosion on olive groves in Anadalusia".

Meanwhile, issues such as biodiversity and landscape conservation in olive farming, and the need to provide increased basic support to traditional, low-intensity olive farming, are largely unaddressed.

Is this about to change? Recently the Andalucía regional government has presented a draft “Law of olive groves”, focusing on olives as an economic resource (the second most important farming sector in the region), and as an agro-system of high environmental, social and cultural value.

Sustainable management is one of the targets of the draft law, supporting traditional and marginal olive groves through specific payments. The draft also foresees an Olive Management Plan which will contain a characterisation of traditional olives groves and a environmental diagnosis of the sector.

For more information [www.juntadeandalucia.es/agriculturaypesca/portal/contenidos-destacados/anteproyecto-de-ley-del-olivar.html](http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/agriculturaypesca/portal/contenidos-destacados/anteproyecto-de-ley-del-olivar.html)