

La Cañada



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Bob Gibbons

EFNCP steps up a gear thanks to DG Environment funding

2010 has seen a more proactive approach to project funding by the Forum. The results have been very positive, with many partnerships being strengthened through joint projects. Funding from a range of national and local partners has been matched by a grant from DG Environment, allowing us to roll out an ambitious work programme.

Thanks to this funding, we have been able to employ a range of staff to undertake management, policy and finance work. Even more excitingly, we now have new colleagues working on regional/country projects in France, Ireland and south-east Europe, where we are stepping up our networking activity.

HNV farming projects

A major focus of the work programme is ensuring that EU and national commitments to maintaining HNV farming, as a key contribution to halting biodiversity decline, are understood and implemented

effectively. Developing and reporting our proposals for making the CAP post-2013 work for HNV farming is an important task, and we are closely involved in CAP advisory groups and in the debate launched by the agriculture Commissioner.

Policy events this year include two workshops on the German island of Vilm and a major conference in Sibiu, Romania, where our policy proposals for HNV farming and CAP reform will be launched and discussed. We also supported the recent international hay meadows event organised by the Pogány-havas Association, Barbara Knowles, Sheila Anderson and László Demeter in Romania (see page 9).

Local projects to test and illustrate the HNV farming approach and how it can be put into practice are running in Navarra, the UK and France, with Ireland and Romania soon to follow. These will feed valuable lessons and examples into our work with regional and national governments on the implementation of RDP

Extensive grasslands in Transylvania. The location for this year's EFNCP conference.

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indicators and measures for HNV farming.

A specific long-standing area of interest for EFNCP is the improvement of EU policy measures for olive farming and the environment, and we are revitalising our work in this area this year with a networking initiative across the olive-producing regions, including EU candidate countries.

The theme of common grazing land, in all its various guises, returns in a big

way this year. Having successfully raised awareness at a policy level of the importance of common land for biodiversity conservation in many countries, we are undertaking research projects in the UK and the Balkans, and a capacity-building exchange between the UK and Spain. Later in the year a study tour between Romania and Spain is planned, which will look at

how to achieve Natura 2000 objectives in sites dominated by common grazings.

Grassland biodiversity

Finally, we are stepping up our involvement in specific policy areas of particular importance for grassland biodiversity. For example, we have contributed to discussions with the Commission over how

best to interpret the proposed protection of 'highly biodiverse grasslands' in the Renewable Energy Directive. We intend to broaden this question and look in more detail at the effectiveness and coherence of other EU measures for protecting grazed semi-natural habitats, such as the EIA Directive and CAP cross-compliance.

Gwyn Jones

Environmental services post-2013: EFNCP conference



Bob Gibbons

EFNCP's flagship event this year will be a conference on the environmental services of HNV farming and how these can be secured post-2013. To be held in Sibiu, Romania, on 7-9 September, the conference will be policy-orientated, setting out clearly the Forum's vision for 2014.

The conference is an opportunity to discuss the role of HNV farming in providing a wide range of ecosystem services: not only biodiversity conservation, but other services vital to our long-term future, such as carbon sequestration, quality and security of water and food, and resistance to climate change, fires and flooding.

The village of Viscri in Transylvania, one of the locations for field trips.

HNV farmed landscapes are dominated by semi-natural grasslands, and often small-scale traditional management. Their ecosystem services make them of global importance. Both the grasslands and the farming systems that use them are under threat. Are they sufficiently valued and supported by the CAP at present? Will a reform focused on 'public money for public goods' make a significant difference, and how should it work on the ground?

This conference will propose improved

EU strategies for maintaining HNV farming and grasslands. The Natura 2000 network provides site protection, and LIFE supports pilot projects within this network. But there is an urgent need for better economic support and more effective action to maintain HNV farming across large areas. The CAP reform debate of 2010-13 is a major opportunity for re-targeting CAP resources, so that they help to secure the future of HNV farming and grasslands, and of the ecosystem services they deliver across Europe.

Central to the conference, as always, is the field trip, this time to the Târnava Mare area, one of the most biodiverse farmed lowland landscapes remaining in Europe, rich in wild flowers, birds, butterflies and large mammals, including bears and wolves. There, local partner Adept is working to maintain HNV farming and encourage appropriate rural development as keys to conserving the values of this extensive Natura 2000 site.

Partly drawing on this local example, the conference will consider practical issues that can hinder effective policy implementation on the ground, if they are not taken into account by policy-makers. For example, CAP rules, depending on their interpretation, can lead to the exclusion of HNV grazing lands from receiving support payments.

The event would not be possible without the generous financial assistance of DG Environment and our local partner, Fundația Adept Transylvania, and with the invaluable support of Lucian Blaga University, Sibiu. Attendance is free, with participants responsible for their own accommodation. More details on the Forum website.

Nat Page & Gwyn Jones

Why biodiversity should top the CAP reform agenda

The present debates on the post-2013 CAP reform are harsh. As usual in the period preceding changes, opposing visions are being strongly held. But the

present debate takes place in a particular context. On the one hand, while the 2010 biodiversity goal ('no net loss') has been missed, there is a clear recognition that

the objective itself should not be abandoned. On the other, the recent 2008 food crisis and the unprecedented crisis of farm incomes bring the issue of the 'real economy' back onto the agenda. While, in the background, the decoupled CAP payments try to give the impression that producing is no longer an issue.

Sometimes it sounds as if it is a choice between biodiversity conservation – and

the associated low-input farming – and income support consistent with the views of production and market organisations. Biodiversity is regarded as a non-economic option: farmers are, in this vision, considered as mere gardeners, playing no role in the real agricultural economy, even if they receive payment for doing so. The need to feed nine billion or more people in the coming decades leads to the inescapable conclusion that the new CAP should be shifted towards supporting the rural economy and farm incomes.

Thus, considering the CAP reform from a biodiversity-conservation perspective, as the EFNCP does, will frequently be considered as dangerous and limited. Such a position will be even less credible, if those who take the ‘economy’ path defend environmental protection within a concept of ‘sustainable farming’, including a share for biodiversity needs in some delineated zones. To put it another way, when it comes to policy, ‘sustainable economists’ appear to be superior to biodiversity conservationists, since the former are able to capture at the same time both economy and biodiversity, while the latter are focused on biodiversity alone.

This article proposes that biodiversity conservation – understood in a wide meaning, as advocated by the Forum – can be thought of and defended as a sound economic strategy, which also includes the perspective of European farmers’ income and the global food crisis.

Biodiversity conservation is an economy issue, and vice versa

The recent history of agriculture and environment highlights the close links between biodiversity losses and the main problems currently faced by farmers. From an economic standpoint, the present income gap is fundamentally caused by prices not covering the costs of production. We can analyse the two sides of the equation, which are interrelated.

Commodity prices are affected by numerous factors, including the relationship between the buyers and farmers – their suppliers. Despite the inherent complexity of the relationship, King’s Law (named after the 17th century economist, Gregory King) applies: in agriculture, a small increase in supply can result in a huge drop in price, and vice versa. Dairy quotas are a recent illustration. The farmer is constantly faced with what economists call the ‘micro-macro dilemma’: his interest as a farmer is to maintain high prices, which can be achieved by reducing output, but if he does so, his neighbour will take advantage and produce more; thus his interest now lies in producing more than his neighbour, even if this drives prices down in the medium term.

The other side of the coin concerns production costs. Producing more means greater investment in production, and the competition between farmers implies a continuous investment process. This becomes all the more difficult when the commodity price is going down: the two curves of prices and costs are going in opposite directions. If one considers the diminishing returns trend (i.e. that the first Euro invested in equipment, for instance, will yield two Euros in production, while the last one out of thousands will yield only 1.1, when not less than its marginal cost), it is clear that production costs are becoming progressively larger relative to income throughout the farming sector. In recent years, a huge increase in inputs such as fertilisers or animal feed, has caused a drastic deterioration in most farmers’ income.

Most farmers are quite aware of this diminishing cycle, but are unable to get out of it when they have to repay loans for their machinery or pay the feed merchant. Producing more at higher costs has been the fate of modern European farmers for decades, and it seems destined to remain so in the near future.

This short economic analysis explains why it is so difficult to get out of the present CAP. Intensive and so-called ‘productive’ farmers have such structural costs that removing CAP payments would cause economic failure. In France, for instance, average farm income in the main CAP-supported sectors (cereals, beef, sheep) has been *below* the level of CAP payments for years, which means that the commodity price does not cover the production costs.

These economic processes and issues can be linked easily to the main causes of biodiversity loss on farmland. To the often familiar intensification and land abandonment process, we can arguably add the decreasing number of farmers. Intensification clearly is the very nature of the economic process described above: more output and more input at the same time. Land abandonment can be understood as a side-effect of intensification, which can be seen at different scales, from the large regions (e.g. in some dry mountains areas) to the smaller landscape features left behind by farming. Thus permanent pastures close to the farm are intensified, while those that are more remote will gradually be abandoned.

The dramatic decrease in the number of farmers (which is called, in economics, ‘improved farm competitiveness’) can be analysed from a qualitative and quantitative perspective as regards biodiversity. Quantitatively, fewer farmers to cut hedges, maintain stonewalls etc, mean more mechanised cutting or the use of wire

fences to control the flock. Qualitatively, it means less knowledge on how to manage a flock in scrubland, and so on.

If we insist on two parallel fates for farm economies and biodiversity, we ignore the intermeshing nature of the processes at play. Biodiversity management, in particular, is not only an issue of lack of knowledge (with the assumption that when the farmer knows, he will automatically and appropriately conserve biodiversity on his farmland), it is also an economic issue. Put another way, the loss of biodiversity can be seen as a tangible aspect of the economic process, with the replacement of free natural processes by cash-paid inputs.

Biodiversity as the cornerstone of a new CAP

We can recall a truism: biodiversity in farmland results from the farming systems, which are themselves determined by socio-economic drivers. Or, biodiversity is an ‘end of the pipe’ indicator, downstream of many others. In the present context, it is probably one of the most difficult to achieve owing to the number of conditions necessary to reach a high level of habitat- and species-richness in rural landscapes.

We must therefore approach European agriculture from this downstream vision, stating the need for results in terms of biodiversity as the starting point of what should be achieved through the CAP.

In terms of landscape, this goal would mean a much higher share of semi-natural vegetation, of *saltus*, in the HNV agrarian systems. Such ideal landscapes can be interpreted from an economic point of view. On the one hand, it would mean accepting a smaller area of cropped land, and therefore a lower global output of cereals and other crops. A diversification in crop systems, especially of protein crops, would also be a key contribution to biodiversity.

On the other hand, it would mean more extensive grass and scrub, whose protein content in terms of animal feed is higher than the dominant cereal crops. This, as a whole, would result in less cereals being produced in Europe and less protein being imported (mainly in the form of soya). The main sector affected by this change would be industrial livestock production, while extensive HNV livestock would gain share in the European market.

From a farmer’s perspective, this broad picture limits the intensification process described above, with two main advantages for net income, namely sustained prices (the ‘biodiversity condition’ puts a brake on the ever-increasing production, and so acts as a market stabiliser), and lower production costs. In fact, it is quite the reverse of the present trend, described

above. And we should remember that biodiversity management is, in many cases, labour-intensive and thus consistent with having a higher number of farmers.

Climate change

From an environmental perspective, this objective looks consistent with other key European environmental challenges, notably water quality, soil protection and climate change. While the convergence between the two former objectives and biodiversity is widely accepted, the case for climate change needs to be explained.

The biodiversity conservation objective as described above means fewer cattle (the increase in the number of cows is mainly as a result of the industrialisation of the last decades), less fertiliser, and much more permanent grassland and other permanent vegetation, whose contribution to carbon storage is central and immediate.

In addition, in a wider vision which does not limit climate change only to a greenhouse gas emissions issue, the more robust landscapes resulting from biodiversity conservation are able to play a role in adaptation to climate change (e.g. the role of permanent vegetation and landscape features in providing resilience against flooding and drying winds). What is argued here is that biodiversity and HNV farming at a large scale captures several environmental issues, while the reciprocal is not always the case.

Moving forward

What are the instruments needed to achieve this ideal picture? It is necessary to deal with the central tensions arising at the European market level. Reducing outputs will lead to higher commodity prices, which is good news for the farmers. But, there are then several issues to face:

- how to prevent these higher prices leading to higher investment at the farm level, and certain forms of intensification (see the micro-macro dilemma above);
- how to manage economic risks at the farm level, since more 'natural' agriculture might have to deal with variability; and
- how to ensure reasonable prices for consumers.

Prices should be higher than today, but not too high, and they should not fluctuate excessively. But they should not be the only driver and goal for the CAP. This requires the combination of several policy instruments (see page 8 for the joint submission on CAP for 2013 from BirdLife International, European Environment Bureau, EFNCP, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements and WWF). Strict environmental regulation is needed at the farm level to prevent further

intensification. Such a coercive approach is neither satisfactory nor sufficient in the medium term. Incentives are necessary to value biodiversity at macro and micro levels. Payments should be attached to strict environmental conditions, of course, but should also be accompanied by technical advice and education. There should, for example, be changes in the 'production pattern' taught in agricultural colleges. Such payments are able to act as a stabiliser in the farm economy, and to make it easier for suppliers and buyers to meet at lower prices. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the share of the 'farm gate' price, as a proportion of what the consumer eventually pays for food, is frequently negligible. There is huge room for manoeuvre in this perspective. To summarise, HNV farming on a large scale does not necessarily mean unaffordable food but it is probably inconsistent with large-scale food systems.

The global context

Before coming to a conclusion on the political feasibility of the thesis outlined above, we must deal with another dimension, the global one. The glowing picture we have just painted is frequently attacked from a global food perspective. It is understood as a selfish, wealthy European vision, with citizens able to pay for nice 'gardened' landscapes and quality food, forgetting the poor, both inside and outside Europe. If we will have 9 billion people on Earth in the coming decades, whether we like it or not, can we afford such a policy? Should not Europe play an increasing role in the global food supply?

This vision can be discussed from many perspectives. First, the idea of Europe feeding the world, held largely by farmers' organisations, is far from the reality today. European agriculture can be summarised as producing cereals and then feeding its animals with a combination of these cereals and imported soya. Exported products – cereals and meat – are mainly exported to creditworthy countries, in a rather inefficient process (from the perspective of global food) in which meat is directly exported and the cereals are used for animal feed outside Europe. Meanwhile, imported soyabean for animal production puts pressures on land outside Europe which could be used to feed the local populations. This viewpoint could be extended to other sectors, such as that of palm oil destroying rainforest.

But we must also consider that significant share of production which is in fact exported, with subsidy, to developing countries. The competition between a tonne of cereal produced in Europe under heavily mechanised, subsidised agriculture, and that on a small farm in Africa, using manpower only, is too unequal

to allow the latter to survive. It is now increasingly recognised that the real need is to allow the developing countries to foster their own agriculture, with their own means of production, in order to face future climate change and population growth challenges, as stated, for example, by the International Assessment of Agricultural Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD). A condition for this is that a certain level of protection be extended to their farmers, reducing the pressure from imported produce. In this long-term view, the duty of Europe, alongside other major exporters, in global food issues is to reduce its import/export impact on developing countries. This does not mean a complete siege economy; fair trade between equally developed countries should continue, as well as specific interventions in the case of localised food crises (themselves largely caused by the failure of local agriculture to develop).

Biodiversity for European agriculture: a policy project

The vision defended here should be understood in the longer term, as it implies a new balance in Europe's economy and society. Many issues remain to be faced: for example, what is the level of production necessary to deal with biodiversity conservation, large-scale HNV systems and realistic food markets in Europe? What are the shifts in production and consumption patterns which need to happen? To what extent should some policy objectives be zoned, at least in the first instance? What is the level of budget necessary? The combination of reinforced regulation and the removal of subsidies to non-sustainable farming systems (which forms the main share of the present CAP budget) does not necessarily mean a larger budget, but does require a more targeted one. Such a project, by changing the perspective of European agriculture, requires many sectors to reposition themselves and would move the policy lines completely.

Such difficulties exist, and call for a learning process. But notwithstanding this, our project should be defended in the coming debates. Firstly, because the fate of European biodiversity is in the balance. It is on the verge of collapse in many regions and a clear new direction is needed. Second, because we believe it has its own internal logic on many levels, which go substantially beyond strict conservation issues. In our view, biodiversity, embodied in HNV farming systems, is not only an option, it is a basis which gives a meaning to the whole policy and to agricultural development.

Xavier Poux

Progress on HNV farmland indicators across the EU

Over the past year or two, there has been considerable progress on the interpretation and implementation of the CMEF (Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework) HNV farmland indicators, with a consensus emerging. Sceptics can no longer claim that the concept is too woolly and cannot be implemented. Several countries and regions have established working groups and are taking ownership of the concept and are developing projects which identify and monitor HNV farmland and forests.

As experience and dialogue develops, so the available guidance at the EU level is also improving. This positive feedback process has been illustrated by the European Evaluation Network for Rural Development (EENRD) Help Desk which, during 2009, organised a Thematic Working Group to explore practical ways of applying the full range of CMEF indicators, drawing on a mix of expertise and national experience.

In March 2010, the EENRD Help Desk published the detailed outputs of this working group, including a chapter on the HNV farming and forestry indicators, written by the author and Maria Luisa Paracchini. This goes considerably further than the previous HNV Indicators Guidance Document, and includes examples being developed in some countries.

Main points of EU Thematic Working Group paper

The paper stresses the practical purpose of the HNV farmland/forestry indicators for evaluating and improving Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). The aim is to be able to monitor changes in HNV farming and forestry compared with a baseline situation, and to assess to what extent these changes (or an absence of change) have been influenced by the RDP.

This means that indicators and monitoring methods should be designed to provide useful and meaningful information about changes taking place on the ground. It is not so much a question of precise statistical and mapping exercises, but rather of gathering various types of information that can provide an *indication* of what is happening to HNV farming and forestry, and to key elements of the land-uses in question. Such information is essential for effective evaluation of the effectiveness of RDPs in maintaining HNV farming and forestry, one of three environmental priorities for the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development

(EAFRD).

The three HNV indicators can be summarised as follows:

The **Baseline Indicator** establishes the baseline situation of HNV farming/forestry in the programme area at the start of the RDP

The **Impact Indicator** gives an indication of changes taking place in HNV farming/forestry during the programme period, measured against the baseline situation.

The **Result Indicator** is a measurement of actual results on the ground of specific RDP measures relating to HNV farming/forestry.

Explaining the indicators

The **Baseline Indicator** was intended originally to be simply a figure in hectares, representing the total extent of HNV farmland in the Member State at the start of the RDP, calculated using data that would allow regular updating. However, it is increasingly recognised that neither the HNV concept nor the currently available data lend themselves to a precise calculation in hectares. The reality is that the baseline HNV extent will be an indicative figure.

Land-cover and land-use data are the most appropriate sources for this purpose. These data can capture the key characteristics of HNV farmland/forest, especially semi-natural types of land-cover and mosaics of low-intensity land-uses.

Species data should be used with great caution, owing to patchy coverage, low resolution and infrequent updating of data for all but a few species in a few countries. Species data are most appropriate for identifying areas of Type 3 HNV farmland, which does not exhibit the semi-natural and low-intensity characteristics of other HNV farmland.

Maps of HNV farmland based wholly or partly on the location of designated areas are not helpful for monitoring purposes. The boundaries of protected areas and of areas such as Important Bird Areas (IBAs) are unlikely to be altered during the lifetime of an RDP. Changes would need to be monitored *within* these areas.

Obviously, monitoring an 'indicative' baseline extent of HNV farmland/forest can provide only a very approximate measure of change. Quantitative changes in numbers of hectares will be extremely difficult to interpret, and the influence of RDP measures on such changes even more so. On the other hand, cartographic monitoring, through which the *location*

of specific changes can be identified and examined in more detail, may contribute useful insights.

So, there is a clear need for additional indicators of the baseline situation of HNV farming and forestry. Additional indicators should aim to capture information on key characteristics of HNV farming/forestry, and how they are changing. These can be organised into three categories: changes in characteristic types of land-cover, changes in characteristic farming/forestry practices, and changes in the condition of characteristic habitats and species. In other words, the baseline situation will be indicated through a *set* of indicators, to capture changes in each of these categories.

In theory, once the Baseline indicators are established, the HNV **Impact Indicator** is easily applied, as it is effectively the set of Baseline Indicators repeated periodically to show changes in land-cover, farming/forestry practices, and nature value. In practice, the full set of Baseline and Impact Indicators is likely to be developed over time, as understanding of the HNV farming/forestry systems, selection of appropriate indicators, and data gathering are developed. We have always stressed that this is a process that will evolve over several years, not a one-off data-crunching exercise.

Whilst the Impact Indicators give an indication of the changes taking place, they do not in themselves indicate to what extent the RDP has influenced changes.

And so, finally, the **Result Indicator** is a measurement of actual results on the ground of specific RDP measures relating to HNV farming/forestry. It is intended to indicate the area of land that is under successful management contributing to biodiversity and high nature value. In order to know that this situation applies, the land in question must be under a specific policy measure that includes this objective, such as an agri-environment measure designed to support an HNV farming system or practices. Again, simply being within a Natura 2000 site does not give this guarantee.

Setting up an HNV monitoring system

The HNV indicators must be applied at the level of the RDP programming area. Depending on the Member State, this may be either at state or regional level. However, many countries and regions are likely to harbour several different types of HNV farming and forestry, functioning in different environments.

Broad indicators at the RDP level therefore will need to be complemented with indicators tailored to individual HNV farming/forestry systems or zones within the region. Monitoring changes in particu-

lar HNV systems or zones will be essential for assessing the effects of RDPs on HNV farming/forestry.

Regional/national data sources, combined with expert knowledge, should allow the identification of broad zones with a high concentration of HNV farming and/or forestry systems, and the characterisation of systems within each zone. Precise delineation of such zones, and measurement of their extent, is not recommended, as this is not likely to produce a reliable indication of the baseline extent of HNV farming/forestry for monitoring purposes.

An approximate zoning exercise provides a useful way of distinguishing broad HNV systems. These then provide the basis for choosing appropriate systems indicators. For example, in the case of an upland livestock system, an important characteristic might be the diversity of stock types (sheep, cattle, etc) using upland pastures, or the continued cutting of hay-meadows in steep valleys. For traditional olive and almond plantations, a key characteristic might be the maintenance of a semi-natural under-storey at certain times of the year. Trends in such key characteristics will give an indication of significant changes to the HNV system in question.

The Thematic Working Group paper recognises that current European, national and regional databases were not designed for monitoring tendencies in HNV farming, and would not be suitable for monitoring specific characteristics of the type described above. A sample-survey approach is therefore recommended to establish the baseline situation for a set of systems indicators and for undertaking repeat sampling in the final year of the

programme (as a minimum).

Sample surveys should be designed to ensure full representation of the range of HNV farming and forestry systems in the programme area. The surveys should aim to monitor a range of HNV characteristics, including:

- trends in the extent and condition of key types of semi-natural land cover;
- trends in key HNV farming/forestry practices; and
- trends in a range of species populations.

Monitoring the socio-economic situation of HNV farming/forestry holdings is also extremely useful, although this aspect is not a specific sub-indicator for HNV in terms of CMEF requirements.

Techniques may include interpretation of aerial photos for a selection of 1km squares, for example, as well as sample field surveys and farm interviews. Overall, sample surveys will be essential for assessing the effects of RDPs on HNV farming/forestry.

Further development of existing databases is an important consideration for the future of HNV farmland and forestry monitoring. It would be desirable to incorporate HNV variables in existing databases, especially in Farm Structure Surveys (FSS) and Land Parcel Information Systems and Integrated Administration and Control Systems (LPIS-IACS), including:

- parcels consisting of semi-natural farmland, including traditional orchards and hay meadows, and smaller features such as hedges and ponds;
- common grazing land used by the farm (area used in ha or livestock-unit grazing days);
- all forage land used by the farm (including scrubby and woody forage); and

- all grazing livestock present on the farm.

Conclusions

A gradual convergence of approaches to identifying and monitoring HNV farmland and forests seems to be possible, using a combination of land-cover data to capture their broad distribution and extent, and sample surveys to monitor trends in key characteristics.

For this to work efficiently in combination with other CAP and environmental policy mechanisms, there is a need for some investment in improved and better integrated data systems, especially LPIS, FSS and Farm Accounting Data Network (FADN). New sample surveys need to be established, but it is worth noting that sample surveys are already used for FSS, so this would not be a radical departure.

The development of LPIS is also needed for the effective implementation of other policy instruments, such as CAP cross-compliance, the Environmental Impact Assessments Directive and the Renewable Energy (biofuels) Directive in relation to biodiverse grasslands.

Ultimately, investment in improved and better integrated data sets should lead to a more efficient use of public funds under the CAP and RDPs, and is therefore money well spent.

Guy Beaufoy, EFNCP

Reference

Lukesch, R, & Schuh, B 2010 *Working paper on approaches for assessing the impacts of the Rural Development Programmes in the context of multiple intervening factors*. Findings of a Thematic Working Group established and coordinated by The European Evaluation Network for Rural Development http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rurdev/eval/network/impacts_en.pdf

Progress on HNV farmland indicators at country and regional levels

The following are a few examples of positive developments from a selection of countries (no doubt there are many others doing things we do not know about) that illustrate some of the progress being made.

National working groups

A very positive development is the setting up of national working groups on HNV farming, reflecting the need for interdisciplinary dialogue and interpretation in order to apply the concept.

For example, in **Estonia** a national HNV

working group was formed in 2009 by the Agricultural Research Centre (ARC). This working group includes representatives from the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment, agencies administrated by these ministries, and experts from the Estonian University of Life Sciences. The HNV working group sees its work in three stages:

- 1) Identifying and working out HNV baseline criteria;
- 2) Evaluation of the application possibilities;
- 3) Proposals for HNV in the RDP context (e.g. support measures and combination of

measures).

The HNV approach of the working group is not limited to the needs of the current RDP, but aims to create working tools for the next RDP period.

National working groups dealing with HNV farming have also been established in Spain (in the context of the Rural Development network) and in Scotland.

Studies to develop HNV farmland/forest indicators

When the current round of RDPs was introduced in 2007, very few Member States had a reliable basis for estimating their HNV baseline indicator. Some turned to the JRC-EEA CORINE-based maps and figures, which are not intended for use as CMEF indicators, or used the extent of Natura 2000 sites as a proxy, or simply provided no baseline indicator owing to lack of data.



Above **Map showing HNV farming and forestry indicators in the Navarra region of northern Spain.**

Right **Steep hay meadows may be a good indicator for the health of HNV systems in Navarra.** Guy Beaufoy



Since then, a great deal of work has been developed across the EU by national agencies and research bodies. Much of the effort to date is focused on developing methods for the identification of HNV farmland using national data sets. Work has moved on from the basic mapping of land-cover types and protected areas, as first introduced by the European Environment Agency, to more complex combinations of criteria, including aspects such as field size and land-use diversity.

In **Spain**, a project started by the Ministry of Environment in 2008 to identify HNV farmland is now in its second phase under the new combined Ministry of Environment and Rural and Marine Affairs. Meanwhile, in the region of **Navarra**, a project with EFNCP involvement has been developing HNV farming and forestry indicators at the regional level, and also sets of indicators for monitoring changes in distinct HNV systems within the region, as recommended in the Thematic Working Group paper.

A study in **Finland** (Irina Herzon pers. comm.) is developing the national HNV farmland indicator, based on 5-8 farm-level variables with varying weighting factors. The amount of semi-natural grasslands, permanent grasslands, grazing animals and area in special agri-environment scheme contracts supporting biodiversity will have a relatively large weighting, while other farming statistics have lower weights in determining the HNV value of a farm. The total area of farms exceeding a threshold value will be considered as HNV farmland, the area of which will be monitored at intervals of a few years.

Research is also revealing critical data issues that hinder the effective imple-

mentation of support measures for HNV farming through the CAP. For example, in **Estonia** a large proportion of semi-natural farmland is not included within the official Utilisable Agricultural Area (UAA). Mostly, this is land traditionally used for extensive grazing, but with a proportion of bushes and trees that means it does not count as eligible farmland under current CAP rules (Pille Koorberg pers. comm.). Similar problem areas on the border between agricultural land-use data and forest land-use data are apparent in Spain.

Considerable work is also on-going in **Austria, Italy** and no doubt other countries. Later in the year, EFNCP intends to launch a new section on the website with information on developments in HNV farmland policy across a range of countries.

Sample surveys

Germany is, so far as we are aware, the only country to have a monitoring system up and running for HNV farmland. This takes a sampling approach, using a total of about 1,000 sites, each of 100ha. The sites were established originally for monitoring farmland bird species. Additional criteria, based on the HNV farming concept, have been incorporated. The system monitors the condition of relevant land cover elements, but does not monitor farming practices. In **Italy**, a system using data from sample surveys is also being developed, in this case for HNV forests.

Local projects for ground-truthing

EFNCP has always emphasised the need for ground-truthing of current methods to identify HNV farmland using top-down

data and GIS methods. Local projects are also an excellent way of developing thinking on where to draw the line between what is HNV farming, and what is not, and to improve our understanding of tendencies affecting HNV farming on the ground. This year, thanks to funding from DG Environment and from national and local sources we have been able to set up several projects with this focus.

These local HNV projects are running in **France** (Basse Normandie, Parc Naturel Régional du Vercors, Parc Naturel Régional du Haut Jura), in **Romania** (Târnava Mare, Transylvania), in **England** (Devon and Wye Valley) and in **Wales** (east Carmarthenshire).

Possible contacts for the countries referred to above can be obtained from the author.

Guy Beaufoy, EFNCP

Stop Press: Phd opportunity in Ireland

Sligo Institute of Technology is offering a PhD studentship on Halting biodiversity loss: the potential of high nature value (HNV) farmland in the north-west of Ireland.

This project aims to test existing methodologies for the identification and quantification of HNV farmland areas; determine the link between biodiversity and land-use management practices on selected farmland areas and develop farm level indicators for monitoring changes in the extent and quality of HNV farmland.

Contact James Moran at the Institute of Technology, Sligo, at moran.james@itsligo.ie for further details.

Enlarged advisory group on the CAP post-2013 – an EFNCP contribution

Earlier this year, Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Cioloş launched an open debate on the future of the CAP post-2013.

EFNCP joined a coalition of NGOs (BirdLife International, European Environment Bureau, International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements and WWF) in presenting a proposal for a new CAP based on the principle of public money being used only to support the provision of environmental public goods (see link at the end of the article).

In addition to the joint NGO proposal, EFNCP presented a number of specific concerns which are summarised in this article. These points are complementary to the joint NGO proposal:

- reforming the CAP to make an efficient use of public funds under the CAP in order to pursue a range of EU policy goals effectively (the current design of the CAP fails on both counts);
- targeting the public funds of the CAP money on promoting public goods, primarily environmental and wider territorial goals that are not delivered through the market (food security is a bogus argument for blanket income payments to EU farmers);
- recognition of the role of High Nature Value (HNV) farming, and semi-natural grasslands in particular, as central to the public goods delivered by European farming. CAP reform is an opportunity to correct fundamental weaknesses in their current protection under cross-compliance, and to introduce an EU-wide system of support payments to incentivise their maintenance across the Union.

Farm incomes and reasons for supporting them

Farming and rural circumstances vary hugely across the EU. In any given region or district, there are great variations in net farm incomes and in the need for income support. The threats of land abandonment and loss of rural vitality are not generalised across the EU, they are highly concentrated in certain more marginal areas.

As a general rule, the 'historic' Single Payment Scheme (SPS) directs the higher support payments to farms with more productive conditions that are better able to farm for the market, and have least

need for income support. Farms with least productive conditions but which tend to be inherently more valuable in terms of public goods, are generally in receipt of lower SPS payments. This situation represents a massively inefficient use of public funds: the system is not targeted efficiently, either as an income support measure or as a public goods support measure.

The Natural Handicap scheme (ex-LFA) is a potential means of 'correcting' the bias of SPS, but such an approach is not only inefficient, it is also very poorly executed in most regions, as the scheme fails to target the most marginal farms, or those that are most valuable for their public goods.

Food security is the latest argument presented by the farming sector for maintaining blanket farm income payments. Yet the bulk of food production in Europe is from larger, higher productivity farms with good physical conditions for agriculture. These farms are the best placed in the EU to earn their income from the market, through food production rather than subsidy.

This greater adaptation to the market was a fundamental rationale behind the 2003 reforms. There is no reason to reverse this principle. There is no world food shortage at present, nor is a shortage expected. Local access to food is the critical issue, and increased EU production will not solve this problem.

Farms in marginal production conditions (land with physical, geographical and/or structural limitations) have limited options to become competitive and earn their living mainly from the market. These farms have the most serious income problems. Many HNV farms are in this category – physical conditions have prevented intensification, hence their continued nature value.

The EC-funded MEACAP (Impact of Environmental Agreements on the CAP) study showed that farms with low-intensity characteristics fitting the broad criteria of HNV farming had lower net incomes than non-HNV farms. In many cases, HNV farms had a negative net income if CAP support is excluded, and in some cases, even with CAP support included. Such farms are sustained because family farm labour is costed below the legal minimum wage. The MEACAP study showed HNV-type farms receive lower levels of support from CAP Pillar 1 than non-HNV

farms. Effectively, the CAP is rewarding labour on HNV farming at a far lower rate than it rewards labour on inherently more competitive farms.

HNV-type farms are concentrated in marginal areas where their abandonment is a concern for environmental and territorial reasons – biodiversity and landscape loss, collapse of rural vitality and culture, increased fire risk, etc.

Differentiating CAP income support payments

EFNCP supports making income payments to farms in order to prevent abandonment and consequent loss of land-management benefits produced by farming, but this can only be done efficiently by targeting the types of farm that are most in danger of abandonment and whose abandonment is problematic.

We believe that flat-rate payments for the bulk of farm-income support, while clearly an improvement on the unsustainable and discredited 'historic' basis, cannot be defended as a rational policy. As a system, it reflects neither the realities of farm income needs on the ground, nor the great differences in environmental public goods provision that are inherent in different farming types.

A targeted scheme for HNV farming is essential in order to support the economic viability of farming types that deliver most of the environmental public goods associated with European farming, but which currently are threatened with abandonment or intensification as a result of the low incomes they generate from the market.

How should payments be targeted at HNV farming? EFNCP believes that an approach based on the delineation of HNV farmland 'zones' alone, while superficially attractive in its simplicity, has many inherent weaknesses. Such zones are not easily defined. Zoning is not an efficient way, on its own, to target support.

Any geographically defined zone will include wide variations in farming types and practices. The LFA scheme has shown these problems over many years. It is therefore essential to apply eligibility criteria at the farm-level in order to target support to the holdings whose characteristics make them of greater nature value (and if appropriate, that are in greater need of economic support).

Farm-level criteria are a far more robust method than zoning. The French Prime Herbagère Agro-environnementale (PHAE) shows that such an approach can be applied at a national level. While the eligibility criteria and thresholds of PHAE are not exactly as EFNCP would propose for targeting HNV farming, the basic approach is highly appropriate.

This scheme uses farm-level criteria such as proportion of grassland, proportion of biodiversity elements (semi-natural farmland features), plus basic conditions on practices such as livestock densities and input use. EFNCP also favours capping payments per unit of labour as a method of combining a fairer payment distribution with a more efficient use of sparse public money.

The same approach can also be applied, with adaptations, to provide targeted support to HNV farms with an arable and/or permanent crop orientation. Thus the PHAE shows the way forward for a pan-EU support scheme for HNV farming. Criteria would be national and regional, in a common EU frame.

HNV zones may be used in addition to farm-level criteria, as way of budgetary and territorial prioritisation, but they do not remove the need for farm-level eligibility criteria to target payments.

We believe that such an economic incentive for maintaining semi-natural grassland within farms across the EU will be far more effective than legal protection. Currently, such grasslands can be destroyed or abandoned without authorities or farmers being aware of what has been lost. By providing an incentive across

the EU, farmers will be encouraged to register HNV grassland on LPIS (Land Parcel Identification System), because they know it will bring them a financial reward.

Such a payment system would create a reverse of the current situation, where cross-compliance effectively places an economic burden on farms that have kept a high proportion of HNV grassland.

Data systems are essential to a public-goods CAP – the importance of IACS and LPIS

The French PHAE scheme is totally dependent on a reliable LPIS system through which different land uses can be identified at farm and parcel level, and is also dependent on effective recording of livestock numbers on holdings.

To make differentiated payments on the basis of public goods, it is essential to have this sort of basic information about holdings. LPIS is also crucial for effective cross-compliance implementation and for application of CMEF indicators on HNV farmland. Yet the process of CAP decoupling threatens to dismantle the extremely valuable LPIS.

Maintaining and developing these data systems will allow a more efficient use of public funds and should not be seen

as a financial burden. It is an investment in greater efficiency and thus in future savings.

Rural Development Programmes targeted at HNV farming

Broad protection and incentives to individual farmers will not be enough to maintain HNV farming in many marginal farming situations, where the social fabric and economic viability of HNV farming is under severe threat. Such areas need a far more pro-active and integrated approach to Rural Development and to farming strategies to give any hope of a sustainable future.

HNV farmers in such situations need to be motivated, encouraged and informed by expert advice from local projects. Experience shows that such an approach can greatly increase the take-up and effectiveness of agri-environment schemes, stimulate marketing initiatives and diversification, draw in other funding, and create a critical mass of 'belief' in the future that is crucial to sustainability.

Guy Beaufoy: gbeaufoy@talktalk.net

The joint NGO position paper on CAP reform can be found at: www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/Proposal_for_a_new_common_agricultural_policy_FINAL_100302.pdf

Memories of a conference Mountain hay meadows – hotspots of biodiversity and traditional culture June 2010, Transylvania, Romania

The sun shone, the meadows bloomed, and the 96 delegates enjoyed the rustic setting of a restored barn and village houses for discussions on the culture, traditional management, science and conservation of mountain hay meadows, and opportunities for tourism, food and education.

Invited speakers presented results, opinions and recommendations in their

diverse fields of expertise. For other participants there was an opportunity to present research results as posters, as well as participating in the workshops and field trips. The conference included a VIP reception, two mornings of talks, six workshops and four field trips to the study areas of the project.

We received and published messages of support from His Royal Highness The

Prince of Wales, and from Sir John Lawton, distinguished ecologist and chair of the UK's Royal Commission on Environmental Pollution.

We were delighted to bring together delegates from such a varied but complementary range of backgrounds: farmers, biologists, sociologists, economists, policy-makers, mayors, teachers, guesthouse owners and NGOs. Lively discussions during breaks, meals and field trips created new friends and connections, and revealed a common purpose amongst these groups for the conservation, sustainable management and social value of mountain hay meadows.

The meadows of Transylvania are some of the most species-rich grasslands of Europe. Amongst them, the hay mead-





László Demeter

ows found in the hills and mountains of Eastern Transylvania are outstanding in terms of biodiversity, landscape beauty and the living rural communities that created and manage them. Our project aims to help and record the sustainable use of hay meadows and thus to maintain high biodiversity, important ecosystem services and healthy local communities in two adjacent but very distinct landscapes of the Eastern Carpathians.

The mayors, farmers and business owners from the region were surprised to find that their meadows attracted such interest and appreciation from the international delegates. One of the benefits of such an event is to raise local awareness and pride in the natural and cultural treasures that have been sustained by traditional extensive agriculture over many generations, and which are now under threat from the pressures of the modern world. It was therefore gratifying that the school teachers at the conference expressed a wish for more information that will help them to teach their pupils about the value of this heritage.

Newspaper, radio, TV and web coverage before and during the event raised awareness among a much wider audience, especially in Romania and Hungary. The conference was also listed as an official event of the International Year of

Scabious flowers amongst the hay meadow flora at Gyimes.

Biodiversity.

Two local translators did a magnificent job of simultaneous translation in the face of much specialist vocabulary, so that we were able to offer Hungarian and English presentations to complement the bilingual conference booklet.

Fascinating field trips to two meadow sites, which are the subject of our current research, introduced delegates to the landscape, flora and fauna of this part of the Eastern Carpathians of Romania. László Demeter and Anna-Mária Csergő showed us a typical wet meadow area of the Csík (Ciuc) Basin. The site is important especially for amphibians and birds of prey. It hosts one of the largest Moor Frog populations in Romania. The site is special for its solitary Medieval church too, with a magnificent painted altar. Delegates enjoyed the sight of a Marsh Harrier pair nesting in a 300m² patch of reed, and some national rarities such as Bladderwort, Bogbean and Tufted Loosestrife, the latter two being on the southern edge of their global distribution. Zsolt Molnár introduced us to the species-rich hay meadows of Gyimes (Ghimes), making a live demonstration of the huge local knowledge about plants with the help of 65-year-old ‘uncle’

Károly. On the second day, Bela – whose grandfather returned to Gyimes because of his children, born to a local woman while he was stationed nearby on military service during the First World War – gave us more evidence of the local knowledge on biodiversity. He and Zsolt contrasted the academic and traditional knowledge of plant species, and their indicator or healing roles. He told us about local folklore, for example that Gyimes people say that cuckoos, at the end of June, when they stop singing in the forests, turn into a bird of prey and steal the chickens from gardens.

Some other notable moments from the conference were Patrick McGurn, in the hot sunshine, explaining a hay-drying technique used in the wet Irish climate, Owen Mountford exploring local flora, listing examples from Kazakhstan, Rainer Waldhardt warning us of quick unwanted change in land ownership, Jeremy Staniforth exhorting us for yet more data, and Razvan Popa’s force analysis.

Several of the workshops were memorable for their picturesque outdoor settings, which stimulated much imaginative thinking. The conference forms a central part of a project part-funded by the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme. The workshop reports will directly inform the development of meadow management plans required by this project, and recommendations for education, ecotourism, policies and rural development strategies for the region.

Local producers offered the delegates a chance to see and buy local produce, including textiles, painted wooden gifts, pottery, food, drinks and herbal products. Tasty meals of local produce, eaten outside at long tables, and an evening of traditional dance and music helped to cement the convivial atmosphere of the event. We parted reluctantly, glad to have made new friends and hoping to welcome them again to this beautiful region.

The conference was organised by the Pogány-havas Association, Barbara Knowles and László Demeter and sponsored by the Global Environment Facility Small Grants Programme, the Szülőföld Fund, Barbara Knowles Fund and EFNCP through its Life+ 2010 Work Programme.

The organisers wish to thank the professional partners: Sapientia Hungarian University of Transylvania, Fundatia ADEPT, Harghita Environmental Protection Agency.

Presentations, the conference booklet and further information about the conference and project can be found at www.mountainhaymeadows.eu.

Barbara Knowles

Outdoor workshops during the conference proved to be popular.



László Demeter

Book reviews: books illustrating the importance of HNV farming systems

Since *La Cañada* last appeared in press, three books have been published which further help to highlight the ecological, nature conservation and cultural importance of High Nature Value farming systems across Europe.

Cultural Landscapes of Europe: Fields of Demeter, haunts of Pan

Edited by Knut Krzywinski, Michael O'Connell & Hansjörg Küster
Published in English by Aschenbeck Media, 2009
(also available in German and Norwegian versions)
240 pages, softback



This book is the long-awaited outcome from the EU-funded European Thematic Network PAN: *cultural landscapes and their ecosystems* (<http://pan.cultland.org>), a project which was coordinated by the University of Bergen and to which EFNCP was one of the many European partners who contributed between 2003 and 2005. The book represents a first attempt at presenting an overview of cultural landscapes from a European perspective.

The early chapters draw on archaeological evidence to highlight the origins and development of many of these landscapes, and also consider the wide range of factors currently having an adverse impact on the farming systems responsible for the creation and maintenance of those landscapes. Given that the text was originally written in 2005, some of those early chapters (especially the sections dealing with the potential implications of the Common Agricultural Policy reform that was happening at that time) are a little out-dated. However, the really interesting and valuable aspect of the book is that it contains brief (2- to 4-page) descriptions of over 50 examples of cultural landscapes from across Europe. Although these are not as detailed as the EFNCP's HNV showcase site (<http://efnecp.org/hnv-showcases/>), and are not always linked to the underlying farming systems being practised, these descriptions still provide a wide

range of European cultural landscapes intimately associated with High Nature Value farming systems.

At around €40, this book is worthwhile buying for those aspects alone, and should appeal to the broader, non-specialist audience in particular. Copies can be ordered direct from the publisher at: www.aschenbeckmedia.de/index.php/cultural-landscapes-of-europe.html

Grasslands in Europe of high nature value

Edited by Peter Veen, Richard Jefferson, Jaques de Smidt & Jan van der Straaten
Published by KNNV Publishing, 2009
320 pages, hardback



This book aims to highlight the wide range of biodiversity-rich grasslands which occur across Europe and explores their links with traditional, low-intensity methods of grassland management for livestock forage and fodder production. The book has arisen largely out of the pioneering work conducted by Peter Veen and other botanists over the past 13 years to classify and map grasslands in central and eastern Europe, but also draws on studies from elsewhere in Europe.

The early chapters provide background information on topics such as grassland communities and classification, grassland fauna, the history of agriculture and the relationship between grasslands and climate. These are followed by a set of 24 case studies, written by an international team of experts, which serve to illustrate the diversity of grassland types and associated grassland management. The authors highlight that about half of Europe's endemic species depend on grasslands, and that many of these grasslands are intimately associated with traditional agricultural and cultural landscapes. Agricultural intensification and abandonment are threatening the future of such grasslands, with significant reductions in their area having been recorded over the last few decades. The book concludes by considering the risk that EU policy might lead to loss or degradation of grasslands of high nature value and suggests where there may be opportunities to support the farming systems essential for

their continued survival.

The book is well written and illustrated throughout with many beautiful photographs, and should appeal to both grassland specialists and a broader audience. It costs around €70 and can be ordered direct from the publishers at: www.knnvuitgeverij.nl/EN/webwinkel/nature%20conservation/0/5962

Large-scale Livestock Grazing: a management tool for nature conservation

Edited by Harald Plachter & Ulrich Hampicke
Published by Springer, 2010 (as an English translation from the original German text)
465 pages, hardback



This book provides an overview of detailed investigations into the effects of large-scale livestock grazing conducted in Germany, in south-eastern Sweden, in western Ukraine and in central Georgia, between the mid-1990s and early 2000s. The book contains detailed and well-referenced chapters covering topics associated with these grazing systems, such as changes in vegetation type and structure on pastures; livestock grazing behaviour and preferences; spatial patterns of grazing and impacts on butterflies and grasshoppers in the Ukraine; and landscape-scale impacts on habitat connectivity. The book also gives some consideration to farmer attitudes to such grazing systems within the German study areas, and the scale at which any future public support would need to be implemented. If you can afford the rather expensive price-tag (£117), and are a specialist looking for a detailed overview of some of the ecological processes operating at the field, farm and landscape scale, then this book is for you. Copies can be ordered from Amazon's UK and German websites: www.amazon.co.uk/Large-scale-Livestock-Grazing-Conservation-Sustainable/dp/3540686665

Although differing in style and content, all three books complement each other well in serving to illustrate the range of habitats, species and cultural landscapes that still exist with strong links to HNV farming systems. In this respect, all three are to be commended. Disappointingly, however, they

also show great similarity in terms of the conclusions they draw and the lists of actions they recommend to address declines in HNV farming systems. They all end by highlighting what members of EFNCP and readers of *La Cañada* have been aware of for years, namely that:

- agricultural production systems in the marginal areas are more strongly dependent on public support than in the more productive areas;
- current EU agricultural and environmental support packages are largely focused on supporting intensive, biodiversity- and culturally-poor farming systems;
- the amount and type of support strongly influences the type and intensity of management practices implemented at farm level;
- there is a recognition, in principle, that those farming systems which contribute to nature conservation and cultural landscape protection should be rewarded for doing so;
- there are a number of ways in which greater support for such farming systems could potentially be achieved (e.g. targeting public support for the provision of nature conservation benefits, and increasing the production of premium goods from HNV systems);
- it should be possible, in principle, to ensure that HNV farming systems become financially viable through increasing public support, while maintaining the elements of the farming systems which produce the nature conservation and cultural landscapes benefits.

It is, however, all very well to come to such broad conclusions, but in reality these are no different to what EFNCP and others have been saying since the 1990s. What none of the final chapters of these three books tackle is the fundamental question 'How can we ever hope to achieve the marked change in public funding which is necessary to support HNV farming systems, given the current structure of CAP and agri-environment support payments and the lack of political will across Europe to reverse this?' It is easy to say that such systems are more deserving of support but, as EFNCP has found over the years, it is much more difficult to put this into practice. None of these books say that what really needs to be done is actually to stop tinkering within the constraints of current CAP and agri-environment support systems and to implement a major change in the focus of publicly-funded support. Without such a change, the habitats, species and cultural landscapes so well illustrated in these three books will simply continue to decline, and will eventually be lost.

Davy McCracken

Innovative scheme on the Burren

The much-discussed concept of supporting High Nature Value farming has become a reality in Ireland, with the recent launch of a new 'Burren farming for conservation programme' (BFCP), a targeted programme of farming for conservation for the Burren region, situated along Ireland's mid-western coast.

Venue of the Forum's 2000 conference, the Burren, an internationally renowned glaciated karst landscape, is well known for its rich biodiversity and remarkable cultural heritage. Concerns for the future of the Burren have grown recently as a result of an increasing imbalance in farming activity between the rocky upland areas – traditionally used for low-input winter grazing – and the more fertile lowland summer-grazed grasslands. As has been reported in previous editions of *La Cañada* (11 & 13), the heritage-rich uplands are suffering from undergrazing and neglect, while there has been an intensification of farming activity (more slurry, fertiliser use, etc) on the associated lowland improved grasslands.

These all too familiar pressures of intensification and abandonment have culminated in extensive scrub encroachment (15-20% of the region is now inundated, mainly with Hazel *Corylus avellana*) and there are growing concerns regarding water quality. Natura 2000 designations and national agri-environmental programmes were failing to address these threats effectively, so an alternative solution had to be found for the region, which is touted to become Ireland's next World Heritage Site nominee.

The solution came in the form of BurrenLIFE, a five-year applied research project which took place on 20 Burren farms (2,500ha) and was funded through the EU LIFE Nature Fund and sponsored by the National Parks and Wildlife Service, in partnership with Teagasc (the National Agriculture and Food Development



Brendan Dunford

Suckler cows are the dominant grazer on the Burren and are a major factor in ensuring the presence of high levels of local biodiversity.

Authority) and the Burren Irish Farmers Association. The project was a major success on the ground, resulting in a 25% increase in grazing, the restoration of 15km of stone walls and the removal of scrub (using a variety of methods) from 100ha of priority habitat, and the creation of 55km of paths. The development of a new Burren feed ration helped to reduce silage feeding (a major source of pollution and a strong contributory factor in undergrazing) by 60% or 650,000kg per annum.

Significant added value was given to the work of the project through a detailed monitoring programme. All project activities were monitored to prove to farmers that their 'conservation cattle' were not being affected negatively by the changes and to prove to the taxpayer that the project increased biodiversity and improved water quality. Socio-economic research showed that while farmers were operating at a loss, there was a public 'Willingness to Pay' for the range of goods (landscape, biodiversity) that Burren farmers were producing, amounting to an estimated €842/ha. Adding to this economic imperative was the fact that

the project, and its outcomes, had strong support from the local farming community (an 88% approval rating), the ultimate sustainability test!

The tested and costed 'blueprint' developed through BurrenLIFE formed the basis for the new BFCP. The scheme, run under Article 68.1(a)(i) of Regulation 73/2009, was adopted jointly by the Department of Agriculture and Food and the Department of Environment, Heritage and Local Government in 2009 as a model of best practice for landscape conservation in Ireland, ironically coinciding with the closure of the national agri-environment scheme (REPS). According to Agriculture Minister Brendan Smith, 'It has become clear that "grazing by livestock" is the primary component for the conservation of the biodiversity and landscape of the Burren.'

The annual budget for the three-year BFCP is €1m, a sum expected to accommodate 100 farmers for whom the maximum payment will be €15,000. Payments under the BFCP will be made under three basic measures:

- Protection of Natura 2000 land and other areas of Annex I habitat.
- Capital Enhancement Works, including works such as wall restoration, water and access provision and scrub removal.
- Production of species-rich limestone grassland, whereby farmers will be paid according to the ecological quality of their grassland as determined by trained advisors.

A measure of the interest in farming for conservation is the fact that over 350 farmers applied for inclusion in the programme within two weeks of its launch. Already, pressure is growing to increase funding to accommodate more farmers. According to farm leader, Michael Davoren, 'The future for Burren farming is in the production of species-rich grasslands...the BFCP gives us a chance to become architects of our own destiny.'

Further information can be found on www.burrenlife.com.

Brendan Dunford, BurrenLife

The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism brings together ecologists, nature conservationists, farmers and policy-makers. This non-profit-making network exists to increase understanding of the high nature-conservation and cultural value of certain farming systems and to inform work on their maintenance.
www.efncp.org



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