

La Cañada



Newsletter of the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism

No 26 Summer 2011
ISSN 1027-2070

The karstic Besaparski Hills in Bulgaria are interpreted from remote sensing as rocks and eroded areas and are considered ineligible for direct payment claims, despite being the largest pastures in the area.



G Popgeorgiev

La Cañada 26

Contents

- 1 HNV farming and permanent pasture – the gap between EU rules and reality
- 4 Court of Auditors SPS report – some useful points made, but also plenty to worry about!
- 5 New EU Biodiversity Strategy – an assessment
- 6 BSPB experience in supporting HNV grasslands management
- 8 Common grazing in Bulgaria
- 10 Common grazings in Scotland – forgotten treasures?
- 11 Serbia's low-intensity and potentially HNV farming systems
- 12 HNV farming network in South Eastern Europe (SEE)
- 14 Basic support for mixed farming systems – a first draft of a possible approach
- 16 Noticeboard

HNV farming and permanent pasture – the gap between EU rules and reality

At the core of the High Nature Value (HNV) farming concept, at the heart of almost all of the ecosystem services provided by agriculture, is farmed semi-natural vegetation – principally permanent pastures and meadows that have not been agriculturally improved.

A CAP which takes its multi-functional aspirations seriously has to focus particularly hard on what happens on and to this key part of the EU's farmland: how it protects and maintains it; how it funds and rewards public goods delivered on it; and how it ensures that those who farm it have a sustainable future.

As the article from our Estonian colleagues in *La Cañada* 25 suggested, there seem to be weaknesses in current policy. And so, funded by the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and DG

Environment, and with the support of the Grasslands Trust in the UK, we recently held a seminar in Brussels to look critically at some of the key issues. See www.efncp.org/events/seminars-others/permanent-pastures-brussels/.

What this event established beyond doubt is that the difficulties experienced in the context of Estonian wooded pastures and meadows is just one symptom of a wider malaise affecting the way the European Commission looks at a whole range of semi-natural forage resources which are central to HNV farming systems. This is a problem which can be traced back to the apparently simple definitions and assumptions at the very heart of policy.

Back to basics

We can start positively: the European

Commission recognises that permanent pasture (which includes meadows in this context) has a value as part of our 'Green Infrastructure', delivering a range of ecosystem services. It has put in place a basic control designed to prevent its conversion to arable land. It has introduced Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition rules to ensure a minimum level of maintenance and to avoid deterioration of the habitat, including through the encroachment of unwanted vegetation. All permanent pasture on a holding is, of course, to be declared in the farmer's application so that it can be subject to these safeguards.

Important pastures excluded

So what, then, is this 'permanent pasture'? According to the standard CAP definition, it consists of 'land used to grow grasses or other herbaceous forage, whether sown or self-seeded, which has not been included in the crop rotation of the holding for five years or longer.'

The problem starts with this definition. Within it there is already a mismatch with the real world. Consider all the non-herbaceous forage – the heathlands of

northern Europe, the scrublands of the Mediterranean, or the pannage resources which go into the finest Iberian hams, for example.

These farmed lands, many of them Habitats Directive Annex 1 habitats which the EU is committed to maintaining, are, according to the definition, excluded from agricultural land (the only other categories of farmed land are arable and permanent crops).

In the old headage-payment days, that did not matter, since where animals grazed affected biosecurity and food traceability, but did not determine CAP payments. Now, when the CAP is becoming more explicitly concerned with public goods, it is ironic that the very land which best encapsulates the mythical European Model of Agriculture is the one which fits most poorly into the administrative framework that is meant to support it.

Sown forages included

Even more surprisingly, it turns out that the key words in the definition are ‘has not been included in the crop rotation’. Thus, reseeded of ‘permanent’ pastures is fine, so long as they remain in herbaceous fodder. Not necessarily in grass, notice – a field ploughed into sainfoin or lucerne *every year* counts as permanent pasture!

And so even the logic of the EU’s protection of permanent pastures seems to be based on a misapprehension – that the rules will prevent the release of stored carbon, the disruption of soil structures and biodiversity and the increased risk of erosion associated with ploughing and other destructive cultivation techniques. It is clear that the regulations do no such thing, since any amount of ploughing, fertilisation and sowing is permitted. But it is also clear that they should prevent this from happening.

Lessons from Estonia

So where, I hear you asking, does the Estonian problem spring from? Surely wooded meadows are essentially herbaceous, as is most of the forage on other ‘problem’ vegetation types (especially in the absence of browsing goats). True enough – the problem here is different, but in some respects is also very similar.

Consider this: wouldn’t you be a complete fool if, on the basis of seeing an overweight man, you proceeded to divide the world into ‘The Overweight’ on the one hand and ‘Women’ on the other? Yet, as emerged clearly in the seminar, DG Agriculture is making exactly that logical error in the way it conceives of the countryside. The rural landscape is, according to its thinking, divided into ‘agricultural land’ and ‘forest’ – the two are mutually exclusive. According to the view from the

Rue de la Loi, ‘farmed forest’ and ‘wooded farmland’ are contradictions in terms.

But, as is so often the case, the real world beyond the urban haze of Belgium is a very different place. And again, this disjuncture has serious impacts on those farmers who are delivering significant ecosystem services.

Land below the forest canopy is assumed to be non-agricultural. Commission auditors are penalising farmers in Member States for not excluding them properly. On the one hand, there seem to be exceptions for areas under trees where they make no difference to the forage yield, while on the other, the expectation is that a pro rata reduction in forage will be made solely on the basis of the canopy cover. (We should note, in passing, that the logic behind that test itself flies in the face of farming realities in much of Europe – deciduous trees can actually *increase* the forage resource and, of course, pigs, goats and other livestock will be eating fruit, leaves and twigs.)

Why does it matter?

So where does all this leave us? If we follow the Commission’s definition and implement their pro rata rule for all trees and bushes over 0.01ha, massive areas of Europe’s farmland are excluded from CAP rules and CAP support. Yet until recently there has been no question that Atlantic heaths, for example, would be excluded. Spain has plenty of IACS forage codes which explicitly include trees and bushes.

France’s *département*-based implementation of CAP rules seems to work well, and fully allows for non-herbaceous forage.

The first ones to have had a problem seem to have been the new Member States – Estonia is just one example. Box 1 sets out some of the problems in Bulgaria. Not only are large areas being declared ineligible in principle, but other areas are declared in breach of Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition because of the presence or spread of ‘unwanted’ vegetation.

But now the same problem seems to be spreading to the old Member States. Since the recent imposition of some large fines, their governments also now seem to live in fear of the auditors, in some cases going beyond what is needed in response. Even France is not immune (see Box 2).

Sweden, for example, has had to exclude alvars from Single Payment Scheme eligibility, despite it being universally acknowledged (for example, by the European Environment Agency) that this Habitats Directive Annex 1 habitat is maintained by agricultural management.

Drawing the line between non-agricultural land (forest), outside the reach of the CAP and its penalties, and agricultural land in breach of GAEC owing to the invasion of ‘unwanted vegetation’ is next to impossible and encourages Member States to exclude land which is already on the path to abandonment. Meanwhile, the 0.01ha rule above which ineligible areas are meant to be excluded is set so low as

Trees make wood meadows, such as this one in Nedrema, Estonia, more productive, not less, yet EU guidance is to exclude any areas under the canopy.



Box 1 Implementation of eligibility rules in Bulgaria



Ineligibility for CAP payments leads to abandonment and further loss of grasslands such as these in Kotel, Bulgaria.

Bulgaria provides an extreme example of eligibility problems. Of the 1.7 million ha of permanent meadows and pastures recorded in national statistics, only 0.43 million ha (25%) are eligible for the Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS).

This figure corresponds almost exactly to the area of productive permanent pastures. The remaining categories – less productive pastures, mountain pastures and grazed orchards – make up the bulk of Bulgaria's High Nature Value farmland, implying that very few low-intensity pastoral farmers are able to access CAP support.

It is clear that Bulgaria's less productive pastures are no different from those of Spain or Mediterranean France, but pinpointing the source of the problem is more difficult.

Bulgaria is implementing the EU guidance, for example, as regards tree canopy cover and maximum number of trees and bushes permissible per ha, as if this was the only way the rules could be applied. On the other hand, it is not clear how much flexibility the Commission would have allowed – not as much as for France or Spain, one suspects.

In some cases, Bulgaria is clearly going beyond the guidance, for example by excluding open high mountain pastures or by counting the presence of single examples of 'unwanted vegetation' as breaches of GAEC (see *La Cañada* 24). It is choosing to use eligibility as a catch-all tool, when a combination of GAEC inspections and a short opportunity for the farmer to comply with breaches could also have been used for cases in the 'grey area'.

Moreover, some decisions which have been made are difficult to understand and the rationale behind them was never explained to the farmer by the Paying Agency, creating a climate of fear and deterring other producers from putting in a claim, even for eligible land.

Box 2 Implementation of eligibility rules in France

The case of France contrasts markedly with that of Bulgaria. It has, if anything, a broader range of biogeographic conditions, yet the result is not a greater range of problems, but an implementation regime which has, at least until now, had the flexibility to match.

- First, the Single Application Form in France explicitly includes as eligible non-herbaceous vegetation – heaths and rangelands (*landes et parcours*) throughout the country and, on Corsica only, ligneous rangelands (*parcours ligneux*).
- Secondly, it distinguishes clearly between questions of *eligibility*, which are implicitly (sometimes explicitly) linked to whether the land is actually used for agriculture, and *meeting GAEC standards*, which are to do with the state of that land. The farmer thus has a chance to address issues such as scrub invasion on land which is clearly grazed, within a fixed time frame – a very different approach to that of Bulgaria.
- Thirdly, within the national framework, the detailed rules are set at the *département* level. This allows both the eligibility criteria and the way it interacts with GAEC to reflect the local agricultural land and livestock systems. For example, a level of scrub cover which would make land ineligible in northern France might not even be in breach of GAEC in Corsica, where browsing by goats is an important and long-standing practice.
- Many *départements* have issued photographic guides illustrating the three possible scenarios (ineligibility; eligibility but breach of GAEC; eligible and in GAEC). The result seems to be a good balance between the reality of local variability in systems and simplicity of control.

to be ecologically meaningless in many habitats, which are inherently structurally diverse or which commonly occur in mosaics.

It would be easy to blame the auditors, but when the wording of definitions and so-called 'guidance' from the Commission (often treated as holy writ) is so unambiguously out of kilter with reality, it is rather unfair to blame the messenger – the fault lies with DG Agriculture.

A simple solution

Fortunately, the fact that the problem is so basic means that it should be simple to resolve, given the will to do so.

We propose that all land under a minimum level of active farming use (to be defined by national authorities in accordance with local conditions) should, in principle, be eligible for CAP support, with no EU-level quantified rules on things such as tree density.

We do *not* believe in money for nothing – it is, for one thing, an insult to the active farmer. The definition of permanent pasture should both be agriculturally meaningful and able to clearly encapsulate those features which separate the ecosystem services provided by permanent pasture from those of arable and other land uses: '*Land used to grow grasses or other forage naturally (self-seeded) or through cultivation (sown) and that has not been ploughed or reseeded for five years or longer.*'

Pro-rata reductions of eligible area should be **ONLY** for those elements that are completely separate from the farming of the land, e.g. bare rocks and roads are

separate; the tree canopy in wood pastures is not.

On the other hand, under GAEC, rules on minimum maintenance and habitat quality **SHOULD** be obligatory, whether defined in terms of grazing pressure, mowing or habitat condition.

A question of equity

It remains to be seen whether France will emerge unscathed from the most recent encounters with the auditors, but it is depressing to find such a contrast between the situation there and in Bulgaria.

It is difficult not to come to the conclusion that the two Member States have very different concepts of their relationship with the EU services. France, as an old Member State, seems more willing to go into battle with the Commission. In order to avoid confrontation, Bulgaria prefers to over-interpret the Commission's guidelines and propose too strict an approach to permanent pasture in order to avoid *any* risk of a breach.

Certainly, France will have penalties if land not used as pasture is claimed, and quite right, too. But in Bulgaria, large areas of *utilised* land are being excluded – perhaps even the majority of its semi-natural pastures!

There are legitimate concerns about whether the new members have adequate administrative capacity and systems – the taxpayer needs to be safeguarded. But it seems inconceivable that Bulgaria will emerge from this torture with a system like that of France.

Gwyn Jones; gwyn@efnucp.org

Court of Auditors SPS report – some useful points made, but also plenty to worry about!

Just as this edition of *La Cañada* is being put to bed, the EU Court of Auditors (ECA) published a report on the Single Payment Scheme (<http://eca.europa.eu/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/8096819.PDF>). Coming at this key time, when the release of the Commission's budget proposals for 2014-2020 really brought the CAP reform debate to life, the Court's report is highly significant. The Court tells us a lot of things we already knew (or suspected), but the report also furnishes some interesting quantified examples from various Member States.

Weaknesses in the Single Payment Scheme (SPS)

The ECA identifies a whole raft of issues. As we point out in the previous article, the difficulties start with definitions. 'Farmer' and 'agricultural activity' are not properly defined, leading to some people who are engaged in little or no farming being able to claim the payments. The Court implies that they are not farmers, but of course the CAP definition of agriculture includes keeping land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC), so non-farmers clearly can be compliant with the letter of the law as SPS beneficiaries. The preferred solution seems to be to 'detect' legitimate farmers by the significance of farming in their working life and/or of income from agriculture in their overall income.

The report illustrates how most of the aid goes to a few producers, in a way which is completely unrelated to the scale of the extra costs which GAEC may be imposing on them. They note that the historic system leads to 'speculation', whereby high entitlements generated by (at least formerly) intensive producers are bought up and claimed on extensive grazing land where the previous farmers (if any) would have received low value entitlements.

The alternative, regionalised payment, is less strongly connected to the former producer – cases of landowners claiming on tenanted land are given. For this and other reasons, it is likely to lead to inflated rents (land value). The mess was widely predicted back in 2003 when the Commission introduced its ill-conceived system of tradeable but decoupled entitlements.

Weaknesses in the ECA report

Beneath the confusing definitions lie confused objectives, with the Commission

wanting to achieve both decoupling and on-going use of the land. This Catch 22 situation is illustrated with embarrassing clarity in the Commission's replies to the report.

The Court implies, at the very least, that it approves of efforts, such as those of France, to limit the payment to those who can somehow show evidence of being 'real' farmers, but surely such rules are *contrary* to both the letter and spirit of the Regulations? It is clear that the Court looks favourably, as do we, on implementation mechanisms that insist on *actual* (real) agricultural activity on eligible land. France looks for signs of grazing to validate low-productivity rangelands, for example, and has a minimum stocking level for pastures. However, we hear rumours that the EU services put pressure on Member States to remove even these basic safeguards, as being contrary to the principle of decoupling. They are not – they do not insist on anything other than the minimal level of activity necessary to deliver 'Good Condition'.

We are not suggesting, and neither is the Court, that payments be related to production levels except at this very minimum level. This is the only logical and practical way of linking to activity – the Commission is tying itself in knots in trying to find another way to do it. **The EU must not only accept minimum activity rules, but insist on them**, and should state this explicitly. The Commission says that this breaches the WTO agriculture agreement, but seems bent on not looking for ways to square the circle. It might not be ideal, but it seems to us quite possible to insist on there being *on the ground* evidence of agriculture, without insisting on *any* specific production, with flock records etc. being used only as secondary evidence.

While we agree with the ECA (and many other recent commentators) that the money should support active farmers, we disagree with their suggestions as to how this could be done. Part-time farmers who spend less than half their time on the farm make up 67% of all producers in the EU (Eurostat data), over 80% in some Member States. Farmers whose income makes them 'part-time' (<8 Economic Size Units, Eurostat data) accounted for 73% of all producers in 2003 (i.e. excluding small-farm-dominated Romania and Bulgaria).

Are these lazy farmers? Do they choose to minimise their activities from

farming? No, they are largely the most socio-economically marginal, the ones who deliver disproportionately the public goods which the EU now says it wants to reward. Excluding them will not only have huge social and environmental consequences, but further concentrate payments on people who already get too much, according to the ECA.

'Farmer' should be defined solely with reference to visible evidence of activity on the land, without reference to farm income or limitation to full-time producers. And, in accordance with our permanent pasture campaign, **all actively farmed land should be eligible.**

We agree completely that 'speculation' happens and that the regional model can lead to land rent inflation. As we have said since decoupling was first broached, the only way to ensure that these problems are minimised – that there is no 'money for nothing' – is to ensure that the payment reflects the real costs of delivering the attendant obligations.

This means a transfer of payments from the intensive to the more extensive – the ECA's analysis makes that clear. But this must not be immediately translated into land values – recipients must be subject to the high costs suffered by active farmers in marginal areas. Claiming high payments in low-productivity areas is not wrong per se, as the Court seems to imply, but rather because they are claimed by those not active there and are not calculated on the basis of the costs of those activities.

The Commission rejects completely the accusation that SPS is poorly targeted. There is a slightly circular logic here, of course, in that anyone who claims SPS while maintaining GAEC is, according to the EU definition, a farmer, but we would agree that in general the vast majority of claimants are still farmers in the real sense. Nevertheless, it would be interesting to find out what proportion are only 'maintaining land in GAEC'.

However, to see targeting as an issue merely of who claims and who doesn't claim, when the value of standard entitlements vary from less than €10 to over €1,000, is a joke, and the Commission knows it.

It is almost a given amongst farmers, civil servants and NGOs that the auditors are part of the problem. Yet reading the ECA report and working over the last month or two on issues concerned with permanent pasture has reminded me that the real problem lies in *policy design*. The auditors are simply trying to make sense of the rules. The truth is that the current SPS is a nonsense. The Emperor is naked – and not in a good way.

Gwyn Jones; gwyn@efnecp.org

New EU Biodiversity Strategy – an assessment

In May, the European Commission released its proposed Biodiversity Strategy and targets for 2020 (<http://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/biodiversity/comm2006/2020.htm>). The strategy was approved by the Environment Ministers of the Member States on 21st June. The approval process was not straightforward, with dogged opposition from some countries. For example, France and Spain objected strongly to the fisheries targets. Others (Denmark, Italy) were unhappy with the targets in general. The UK was not keen on greening Pillar 1 of the CAP.

The new strategy is in line with commitments made by EU leaders in March 2010, notably the 2020 headline target: 'Halting the loss of biodiversity and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, and restoring them in so far as feasible, while stepping up the EU contribution to averting global biodiversity loss.' There is also a 2050 vision: 'By 2050, European Union biodiversity and the ecosystem services it provides – its natural capital – are protected, valued and appropriately restored for biodiversity's intrinsic value and for their essential contribution to human wellbeing and economic prosperity, and so that catastrophic changes caused by the loss of biodiversity are avoided.'

Given the very clear failure to meet the 2010 target to halt biodiversity decline, these new headline targets are indeed ambitious. The danger is that governments become fatalistic about failing to meet such ambitious targets. After all, how are they affected in practice? Does the electorate take notice of these failures, and punish governments for them in elections? Probably not.

Nevertheless, the approval of the new strategy is significant for several reasons. It confirms in the text itself that the biodiversity targets are an integral part of the wider Europe 2020 Strategy, which is to guide all EU policy (previously there had been some doubt about this). This had already been underlined by the Commissioners for Environment, Agriculture and Climate in a joint letter to the Member States, in which they also emphasised that the future CAP should be a tool to help them reach environmental and climate-change targets, notably in relation to biodiversity, water and soil.

Sensibly, the wording of the Biodiversity Strategy places a lot of emphasis on the

practical importance of biodiversity. The packaging makes plenty of use of terms designed to appeal to the more utilitarian economic and policy actors who may be sceptical about the 'point' of conserving biodiversity for its intrinsic value. The strategy markets biodiversity as 'life insurance', as 'natural capital' and as a source of essential 'services' that underpin the economy. In other words, it draws on the thinking of TEEB (The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity). There is also a focus on biodiversity as a whole, both within and beyond the boundaries of protected areas, which is welcome.

So, the new Biodiversity Strategy has very ambitious headline targets, is integral to the Europe 2020 Strategy, and has been approved by the Council of Ministers. So far so good.

What of the details, and in particular the six 'Targets', which are what everyone is most interested in? It is worth noting here that the more interesting detail on the targets and the actions needed to meet them is to be found in the Annex to the strategy, rather than in the main text.

Target 1 – fully implement the Birds and Habitats Directives

The target is to halt the deterioration in the status of all species and habitats covered by EU nature legislation and to achieve a significant and measurable improvement in their status. By 2020, compared to the current situation, the target is: (i) that 100% more habitat assessments and 50% more species assessments under the Habitats Directive show an improved conservation status; and (ii) that 50% more species assessments under the Birds Directive show a secure or improved status.

The quantified targets have been criticised by the European Habitats Forum (of which EFNCP is a member), partly because the wording is unclear, but also because it seems to lack ambition. Although 100% is at first sight a big increase, the question must be '100% of what, exactly?', given that from the 2009 assessment only 17% of habitats (and species) were found to be in a favourable conservation status.

Establishing clear objectives for Natura 2000 sites, and putting in place effective instruments for pursuing these objectives, are key actions for achieving Target 1. Recognising this, the strategy Annex states that 'Member States will ensure that management plans or equivalent instruments which set out conservation and

restoration measures are developed and implemented in a timely manner for all Natura 2000 sites'. It is very disappointing that a definite timeline could not be specified for this action.

Target 2 – maintain and restore ecosystems and their services

By 2020, ecosystems and their services are maintained and enhanced by establishing green infrastructure and restoring at least 15% of degraded ecosystems. The preamble explaining this target is a mixed bag of issues. It emphasises the need to respond to the highly fragmented nature of some of the EU territory, by incorporating green infrastructure into spatial planning.

It also addresses the related issue of connectivity, especially between Natura 2000 and the wider countryside. But it is not clear why the maintenance and restoration of ecosystems should be bundled in with these specific connectivity issues, or how it will be determined which ecosystems are currently degraded, and at what point they can be considered restored. Target 2 is full of good intentions, but these are weakened because it is rather a muddle, and because the quantitative element is not at all robust.

Nevertheless, some quite concrete and significant actions are laid out in the Annex. For example, 'Member States, with the assistance of the Commission, will map and assess the state of ecosystems and their services in their national territory by 2014, assess the economic value of such services, and promote the integration of these values into accounting and reporting systems at EU and national level by 2020. By 2014, Member States, with the assistance of the Commission, will develop a strategic framework to set priorities for ecosystem restoration at sub-national, national and EU level.' If these actions are implemented, they have the potential to feed into the development of better policies for ecosystems in the medium to long term, by clarifying and quantifying their needs. Some interesting work along these lines has already taken place in some countries, for example in the UK (<http://uknea.unep-wcmc.org/>).

Target 3 – increase the contribution of agriculture and forestry to maintaining and enhancing biodiversity

This target is of particular interest to EFNCP. The specific targets for agriculture are, by 2020, to maximise areas under agriculture across grasslands, arable land and permanent crops that are covered by biodiversity-related measures under the CAP so as to ensure the conservation of biodiversity and to bring about a measurable improvement in the conservation status of

species and habitats that depend on or are affected by agriculture and in the provision of ecosystem services as compared with the EU2010 Baseline, thus contributing to enhance sustainable management.

The 'measurable improvements' are, in fact, simply a repetition of the same elements in Target 1 and Target 2, the only addition being that the CAP should be contributing towards their achievement. This means there are no specific quantified targets for agriculture. Only 7% of Annex 1 agricultural habitats (grasslands) were found to be in favourable conservation status in 2009, so a 100% increase in this figure would not be a great achievement. On the other hand, 2020 is only nine years away and the challenges are considerable.

Maximising the area of farmland under biodiversity-related CAP measures is something we would certainly agree with, but the aim is not quantified (although the background documents to the strategy – the 'impact assessment' – aspire to 60% of farmland). Besides, how are 'biodiversity-related measures' defined? Does it mean agri-environment measures, or would some simple greening Pillar 1 payments be considered 'biodiversity related'? DG Environment stated in a recent meeting that the measures in question should be clearly designed to achieve biodiversity objectives.

The actions listed in the Annex for the agriculture target are not very exciting for the farming types that EFNCP regards as most important for conserving biodiversity and delivering ecosystem services.

Examples are the greening of Pillar 1 along the lines already suggested by DG Agriculture and improving and simplifying cross-compliance, neither of which seems likely to benefit HNV farming.

Much more positive is the proposed action for the Commission and Member States to integrate quantified biodiversity targets into Rural Development strategies and programmes, tailoring action to regional and local needs. Potentially this is very significant, so long as the targets are based on a thorough and objective assessment of biodiversity challenges and priorities for each programme region.

We would have hoped to see some more joined-up thinking in relation to Targets 1-3. In particular, it is obvious that semi-natural grasslands are the one group of habitats and ecosystems that is absolutely central to achieving all three targets, and it would have been helpful for the strategy to have pointed this out, and to highlight some of the particular threats and challenges.

The other Targets (Fisheries, Invasive Alien Species and Global Biodiversity) are less relevant to EFNCP's work, and space does not permit further details in this article.

Indicators

Finally, there is the very important question of biodiversity data and monitoring. It is encouraging that the strategy includes an explicit commitment to develop an integrated framework for monitoring, assessing and reporting on progress in

implementing the strategy, by 2012. The EU 2010 biodiversity baseline and the updated EU biodiversity indicators will be key components of this framework.

However, we are far from convinced that these indicators are sufficient in their current form. Species monitoring across the EU is limited to birds, but even this is patchy and uneven. Butterfly monitoring is being developed, but is still very limited in many Member States. How many Member States are carrying out proper assessments and monitoring of the status of habitats and ecosystems in their territories? In the case of semi-natural grasslands, many Member States do not have reliable data on their extent, let alone their condition and tendencies. We believe that the commitment in the strategy to improving National, EU and global monitoring and reporting needs to be taken very seriously if the strategy and its targets are themselves to be given due consideration.

So what can we say in conclusion? There are certainly positive aspects to the strategy. Our position is that of a critical friend and it is in this context that we point out the lack of clarity and ambition in many of the strategy's quantified targets. But we must also recognise that a more demanding Biodiversity Strategy might have been rejected by the Council of Ministers. DG Environment has a difficult path to tread in search of the right balance between ambition and *realpolitik*. Our overriding concern is that the strategy should make a difference in the real world.

Guy Beaufoy; guy@efnecp.org

BSPB experience in supporting HNV grasslands management



G Popgeorgiev

The Bulgarian Society for the Protection of Birds (BSPB) is currently engaged in a High Nature Value (HNV) farming project (<http://bspb-grasslands.org>), motivated by the close link between extensive grassland management and the presence and

Hay cocks in the Ponor Mountains. Hay-making is one of the activities supported by the project.

quality of the feeding and breeding habitats of many important bird species.

The goal of the project is to ensure the long-term conservation of the HNV grasslands of Bulgaria in the face of threats from unsustainable grazing, abandonment, and the conversion of land to other uses.

The project focuses on two areas – the Ponor Mountains and Besaparski Hills – both of which are Important Bird Areas (IBAs) and Natura 2000 sites containing ten and four Natura 2000 grassland habitats respectively.

The Ponor Mountains are situated some 55km north-west of Sofia, in the Western Stara Planina. This limestone landscape, which ranges in height from 400m to 1,480m, is dotted with pot-holes – the eponymous 'ponors'. Most of the area is a mosaic of wide mountain pastures, meadows, limestone rocks and scattered small farms. This mosaic landscape, combined with its strategic location of the region along the 'Via Aristotelis' migration route and the traditional land management, has produced a rich bird fauna of 185 bird species, of which 116 (62%) are breeding.

The Besaparski Hills are situated on the northern slopes of the Western Rhodopes.

They are characterised by eroded karst slopes, an open non-forested landscape and an almost complete lack of water. The Besaparski Hills are very important for the conservation of vascular plants and are proposed for inclusion in the network of Important Plant Areas (IPA).

Responding to threats to grasslands habitats

Some of the main threats in the project areas are the ploughing and conversion of grasslands to arable; overgrazing near settlements; the burning of scrub, stubbles and pastures; a decrease in the numbers of grazing livestock; and abandonment of traditional agricultural practices relating to boundary strips, woodland and scrub.

The project tries to combat these threats through the preparation of biodiversity and agri-environment management plans for the project sites, assisting farmers in accessing agri-environment payments from the National Rural Development Plan (NRDP), facilitating the marketing of products from the sustainable farming systems, raising awareness at both local and national levels and providing grant support to the farmers.

Two mobile teams of consultants provide advice and support to the interested farmers on both the project grant scheme and NRDP support. They work through the whole process with the farmers, from the identification of their support needs, through the development and submission of the application, all the way to implementation and final reporting. This includes the identification of the land in the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS), recognising that land eligibility is a serious issue in at least one of the project sites. The teams also support farmers in their dealings with municipal authorities over the renting of municipal pastures.

Grant scheme

The project grant scheme took two years to prepare, during which time the project team was able to meet and establish regular contacts with most of the farmers in the two regions. As a result, the proposed measures were tailored to the particular needs of small farmers.

The pilot grant scheme was launched in 2010 and will run for two years. It aims to encourage farmers to adopt more biodiversity-friendly land management practices in the HNV farming areas. The overall budget of the scheme is €240,000.

The measures supported are taken from the EAFRD menu (see Box). However, they do not overlap with those measures currently available in the NRDP.

The scheme supports farms with a minimum area of 0.2ha and a maximum of 5ha. The minimum grants are €75 for

Activities supported under the grant scheme

Natura 2000 payments	Grazing of grasslands habitats (Natura 2000 codes 6210, 6220, 62A0). The basic direct payment requires a stocking density of between 0.3 and 0.6 LU/ha based on a rotational grazing plan. There is an additional payment of up to 10% for pasturing mixed flocks, including goats.
	Mowing (manually or by slow grass-cutting machines) of grasslands habitats (Natura 2000 codes 6510 and 6520). Mowing must be carried out twice a year at minimum grass height of 8cm and from the centre of the grassland outwards. This is to be done on 60% of the area while the rest is to be used for rotational grazing. Less than 1-1.5 tonnes per ha of manure may be applied per year.
	Grazing of grasslands habitats (Natura 2000 codes 6510 and 6520). The stocking density is not to exceed 0.8 LU/ha, based on a rotational grazing plan. There is an additional payment of up to 10% for pasturing mixed flocks, including goats.
Agri-environmental payments	Conversion of arable land into extensive grasslands. Change of the official land use when the land is owned by the applicant. Clearing of bushes and other vegetation when justified; tight mowing; seed collection from the barn and sowing (minimum 350kg/ha of seed); manure spread on the seeds (170kg/ha in compliance with Good Agricultural Practice); leave the land to rest for three months; first mowing is allowed in August. After the conversion, the land should be managed according to the scheme's Natura 2000 measures.
	Reinstatement of grasslands in Besaparski Hills by reseeding using hay. This is done each spring for the contracted period.
Non-productive investments	Investments related to purchase of slow grass-cutting machines and electric fences for pastures. Construction of housing and handling facilities for the herds and herders in the mountains, to stimulate grazing in remote areas. Construction of watering-places, as well as maintenance of small natural ponds in the grasslands; construction of small permanent ponds (up to 500m ²) from natural materials. Construction of dippers for livestock disinfection and treatment (the chemicals used for disinfection should be permissible in organic agriculture). Placement of information boards and bird houses, platforms and perching posts; designation of pedestrian and cycling routes. Planting of trees of local species (singly or in groups) and their maintenance for two years. Purchase of shepherd dogs.
Investment activities	Investments related to the modernisation and improvement of dairying and grassland management. Diversification of agricultural activities and conservation of local products. Public awareness and promotion activities relating to local products or other things which fit with the overall objectives of the project and can be justified by farmers.

the area-based measures and €250 for the investment component. The maximum grants are €2,000 and €3,250 respectively.

The grant scheme has generated very strong interest among farmers from the project sites. There was a total of 47 applications in just the first year. One was rejected and two others withdrew for personal reasons. All the others were supported. Many of the beneficiaries applied under more than one measure; 70% of the available funds were disbursed under the first call for proposals.

In 2011 the grant scheme continued with all four measures. The applications received could have spent the available budget four times over.

The key reasons for success seem to be:

- The scheme is designed specifically for the project areas. It responds to the real needs of those farmers in the project sites who are maintaining the HNV

grasslands in a realistic, practical way.

- The small investment component provides farmers with the opportunity to modernise their farms and to develop their business, while continuing to use nature-friendly agricultural practices.
- The mobile teams and especially the personal contact at farm and household level are very important in motivating farmers to participate. This also puts a very heavy responsibility onto the consultants' shoulders, since the farmers come to rely on their advice.

The contrast between the grant scheme and the NRDP is significant. The grant scheme delivers payment in a very short period after the application is submitted, whereas the interaction with the Paying Agency involves, at best, a long wait. *Miroslava Dikova, Edita Difova, Dimitar Plachiiski, Georgi Popgeorgiev; miroslavadikova@yahoo.com*

Common grazing in Bulgaria



Gwyn Jones

Common grazing in Bulgaria is a historical tradition. It gives the right to the people (farmers) of a settlement to graze their animals on common grazing land – the ‘*meri* and pastures’ – owned by the State or the municipality.

The term *mera* (plural *meri*) is specific to Bulgaria. The *meri* consist of permanent pastures near settlements that are used for grazing livestock or are mown for hay.

‘Common land use’ is legally defined as ‘the traditional practice of the inhabitants of the settlement with small livestock grazing farms on public *meri* and pastures, including by forming one or more collective (common) herds for grazing’.

Common grazing land size and ownership

In 2008, the total area of all *meri* and pastures in Bulgaria was 1,105,911ha. Almost 40% of these were owned by the State and municipalities.

Traditionally, each village or municipality owns common forests, mountain pastures and village *meri*, where live-

Meri and pastures in Bulgaria, 2008 (ha).

	State land		Municipal land		Total land
	Public use	Private use	Public use	Private use	
Meri & pastures	48,569	78,338	98,241	198,820	423,968
Scrub	1,721	1,233	2,489	10,039	15,482
Total	50,290	79,571	100,730	208,859	439,450

Source: National Statistical Institute, 2009 Traditional Common Land Use

World War, but subsequently penalties were introduced to control this practice.

Regulated common land use

The first official regulation of the common use of land was enacted in 1904. Some of those provisions are still preserved in contemporary legislation.

According to the Act, decisions on the use of the *meri* were to be made at a meeting of the local inhabitants, with at least two-thirds of the farmers attending. The decision was then sent to the regional governor by the mayor of the village, with the final decision being taken by the Minister of Agriculture.

The levies that farmers paid went to the municipality or to the State. Only after all of the inhabitants of the village had fulfilled their needs could the remaining areas be allocated to other farmers, for example from the adjacent villages.

Land was allocated according to the number of the animals, the soil quality, the area for hay-making (at least 0.4ha per farmer) and the area that could be used for other crops. This meant that in the past *meri* were regarded not only as pastures or meadows but also as areas that could be ploughed up and cultivated with fodder crops.

Another important regulation addressed high mountain and forest pastures extending to more than 30ha. These pastures were also used mainly by the local population, but based on grazing plans and the payment of certain levies per head.

Current official arrangements for SAPS support

Prior to Bulgaria’s accession to the EU, there were no area-based agricultural support payments. The common use of land was either regulated following the historical regulations or, in many cases, informally, but this had no implication for the payment of subsidies.

The introduction of the CAP support measures and direct payments in 2007 made it evident that the existing legislative framework needed amendment. The decision of the general assembly of the settlement, which had not been considered to have the force of law, was given this status so that it could serve as a legal base for the common-land users’ applications for Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS) support.

In March 2007, rules were issued on how the right to use the *meri* should be allocated to livestock keepers. It encouraged the establishment of associations of land users and prioritised them in the allocation of common lands. Only after the needs of the associations had been fulfilled were individual users to be given shares of

common land. These rules were obligatory for the State *meri*. The general assembly had to decide whether they should be applied to the municipal *meri* as well.

Another very important condition defined by these rules is the need for land to be in Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC). In practice, this results in common land falling into one of three categories:

1. Permanently ineligible for SAPS support – these are permanent pastures covered by trees or shrubs, buildings, facilities, rocks, stones, eroded or bare lands.
2. Otherwise eligible pastures made ineligible for support because shrubs, buildings, facilities, rocks, stones, eroded or bare lands situated on them, taken together, cover an area of more than 100m².
3. Permanent pastures eligible for support when used for livestock grazing or mowing.

For example, Maritsa municipality's rules for the use of *meri* and pastures lists only common lands eligible for support. We can only assume that other currently, or permanently, ineligible common lands are still being used in the traditional way, or perhaps even informally.

Each municipal council sets a levy for the use of its *meri*, to be used according to the legislation for the maintenance of the *meri*. This is a major conceptual contradiction in the current legislative set-up. On one hand, the associations of the livestock breeders receive the direct payments for 'maintaining the *meri* in GAEC', while on the other hand they pay a levy to the municipality to do so.

Since 2009, the municipal council has also had to prepare a request and a plan for the use of the State *meri*. These planning provisions are similar to the rules for the use of State forest pastures. Two types of plans have to be prepared: one for the long-term use of the *meri*, and an annual grazing plan.

The municipal councils are also given the right to designate a part of the *meri* for public use by the small farmers of the settlement. If they do this, the remaining (apparently surplus) area can be leased to private farmers for individual use in the following way:

- A call for tender for renting or leasing of *meri* for individual use is issued to livestock farmers registered in the settlement or the adjacent settlements.
- If there is still an area remaining, a call for tender for the lease of the *meri* for individual use for fodder production is to be launched. GAEC must be respected but there is no requirement that the lessors should have livestock.

The contracts for the use of the *meri*

can be for five years. Keeping the *meri* in GAEC is the responsibility of the municipality (in the case of public use) or the farmer (for individual use).

The use of forest pastures

Grazing in forests and in forest lands is allowed on the basis of annual grazing plans approved by the director of the Regional Forest Directorate. Official grazing is allowed only through grazing permissions, for which a fee is payable and which are available only to individuals. Overnight grazing and browsing by goats is forbidden.

The maximum livestock density in forest lands is defined according to the productivity and conditions of the pasture zones and grass cover, using standardised assumptions.

Actual situation and open issues

The legislative framework for the use of *meri* in compliance with SAPS requirements is a recent development, and a number of amendments and modifications in the regulations have been made as experience in its use increases. However, a number of issues remain unresolved.

It is not unusual for village general meetings to be inoperative. In such cases, the municipal councils are empowered to allocate the common land. They should by law first define the area for public use, and only subsequently launch the tender process for the allocation of the remaining area

for individual use. In practice, it seems that the tenders for the individual use are often launched *first*; only then is the remaining area (usually with a very low productivity) distributed for public use.

The administrative provisions also raise issues. The question of how responsibility for maintenance in GAEC relates to the grazing fee has been outlined above. But the fact that in 2010 only land in GAEC was distributed officially for SAPS support means that large areas of ineligible land are outside the system.

The guidance on preparing grazing plans is not clear – many municipalities are preparing them *pro forma*, resulting in internal contradictions.

Degrassive LFA payments may act as a disincentive to co-operation, even encouraging the creation of more than one grazing association. The payment for the first 50ha is double the normal rate in the mountain LFAs, while there is no payment after 100ha.

The lack of a requirement to keep livestock in the case of a contract for individual use can result in a situation where, for example, the whole area of *meri* is allocated to an individual who receives all the payments, but in practice the livestock grazing the *meri* and maintaining the land in GAEC are those of the small farmers of the village.

Vyara Stefanova & Yanka Kazakova;
vyara@efncp.org, yanka@efncp.org

Few of Bulgaria's common semi-natural pastures, such as these Annex 1 mountain hay meadows with *Stipa pennata*, are considered eligible for CAP support.



Common grazings in Scotland – forgotten treasures?



Someone said recently that the Forum's mission statement could be 'We bring complication to your simple lives.' A double-edged compliment, if ever there was one, but one which nevertheless engenders a certain pride in this writer at least. For me, that really is what we are about – telling those in power about the complex web of factors which they need to consider if they are to safeguard the farming systems which are richest in biodiversity.

From a farmer's perspective, there are few things which bring more complications than using common land. To the old problems of needing to accommodate neighbours and work to the pace of the slowest, have now been added the difficulties of animal movement and identification regulations, and of claiming area-based support payments.

Of course, it is just these kind of impediments to agronomic progress that have often kept common land as the only remaining areas of unimproved semi-natural pasture lands in some of Europe's most intensively farmed areas – lowland England, for example.

In Scotland, a country which pioneered the agricultural revolution of the 18th century, inclosure and the subdivision of common land was almost universal in the south and east of the country. Only in north-western Scotland did common grazing survive to any significant degree.

But in these most marginal of areas, it is very important for a large number of farmers. The seven old 'Crofting Counties' of the north and west of Scotland account for 38% of all claimants of Single Farm Payment (SFP) in Scotland, but over 97% of all claimants declaring common grazing.

Indeed, 69% of all claimants declaring

Linicro common grazings, Skye. Over three-quarters of farmland in Kilmuir parish is common grazings and over a third of households use them.

common grazings are in the most marginal of Nuts IV areas – the 67 parishes declared by the state development agency for northern Scotland, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, as 'Fragile Areas'. It is clear that the importance of common grazing in the forage of those who actually have the right to use it is of the order of 80-90% in these most marginal areas and 70-80% overall.

Why does this matter? It matters in the broad sense because of the clear importance of common grazings for the agricultural activity of the small farmers (crofters) who use them, farmers whose communities are considered economically very fragile.

Why does it matter to the Forum? Well, because virtually all of this land is semi-natural pasture, managed at low intensities by High Nature Value farming.

The question we want to answer can be put as follows: we know that social and administrative constraints limited crofters' ability to make money in the days of production-driven policy and support, but is their delivery of environmental services or public goods being better rewarded as the CAP allegedly becomes more targeted?

Researching some answers

To begin to answer this question, the Forum (supported by a number of public bodies listed at the end of this article) has undertaken a substantial piece of research work (www.efncp.org/download/Trends-in-Common-Grazing3.pdf) involving data-gathering from a variety of sources,

interviews and discussion of the findings with crofters.

We investigated three main issues:

- What is the likely effect of moving to a non-historic basis for payment of the decoupled SFP?
- To what extent are common grazings handicapped in their ability to access agri-environment and similar rural development schemes?
- How could common grazings institutions be better adapted and what assistance might common graziers need to make such changes work?

A substantial report of the project's findings is available online, but a number of more generally applicable lessons emerged.

The first is that without analysis, it is difficult to propose adequate remedies, but analysis itself is impossible without data. In Scotland, there is neither, despite the socio-economic and public goods significance of common grazings.

Second, common grazings pose clear extra administrative and social impediments in the way of graziers engaging with policy, and vice versa. These difficulties mean that common grazings-specific considerations have to be included in the policy development process at an early stage and, where they impose extra cost – as they usually do – these must also be factored into the resulting regulations or support mechanisms.

One addition to the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development which might help in this regard is to allow some explicit support for the setting up and capacity-building costs of common grazings governance structures and institutions, and for the transaction costs of entering support measures (as well as of ongoing participation in them, where applicable).

Finally, common grazings illustrate the difficulties caused by the current ambiguities of the CAP. Inactivity can be rewarded through direct payments, since the 'farming' they reward includes maintaining land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition which, on common grazings, can be done for the inactive at no cost by the still-active.

Indeed, 'Does it work on common grazings?' would be a good test for the Commission's professed aim of rewarding 'active farming' in the next incarnation of the CAP.

Gwyn Jones; gwyn@efncp.org

The project was funded by the European Commission (DG ENV), Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Scottish Natural Heritage, Shetland Islands Council, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and the Highland Council.

Serbia's low-intensity and potentially HNV farming systems

Low-intensity farming systems are still widely distributed throughout Serbia and many of them have the potential to be of High Nature Value (HNV). Most farming systems still maintain the centuries-old traditions of extensive farming. There are also others that have been lost and are now being reintroduced for nature conservation or local development reasons.

The most comprehensive attempt so far to identify and describe the potentially HNV farming systems was undertaken by the 'Support for Agri-Environmental Policies and Programming in Serbia' project, which ran from 2008 to 2010 and was jointly implemented by Avalon, IUCN, IEEP and Natura Balkanika, with the financial support of the Dutch BBI Matra Programme.

Distribution of HNV farmland

An indicative map of the distribution of the HNV farmland in Serbia was developed in 2010. The map was developed on the basis of all relevant information from a wide variety of data sources of key potential HNV farmland types, including their distribution and biodiversity values. Following the methodology proposed by the European Commission for the identification of HNV farming systems, this information was interpreted and supplemented by the expertise and experience of the researchers at the Department of Agricultural Botany at the University of Belgrade.

The work identifies as much as 1.2 million ha, or 19% of the agricultural land of Serbia, as being potentially HNV.

It must be stressed that this approach favours the identification of Type 1 HNV farmland, with its high proportion of semi-natural vegetation. It is less appropriate for identifying Type 2 HNV farmland with mosaic land use, or Type 3 HNV farmland supporting rare species. It is thus quite probable that the total area of HNV farmland in Serbia is significantly higher than the preliminary figure of 1.2 million ha.

Low-intensity farming systems

The project identified and described ten broad types of farming system that are likely to be beneficial for wildlife.

1. Deciduous forests with high proportion of grassland cover

This is one of the oldest low-intensity agroforestry systems in lowland Serbia. Sheep and cattle graze semi-natural pastures in

the floodplain forests of the Sava, Danube, Tisa, Tamiš and other lowland rivers of the Vojvodina.

Recent efforts have been made to revitalise traditional 'salaš' farms through support for rural tourism and for the development and branding of local speciality products. This is also vital for the conservation of rare breeds of domestic animal.

2. Winter nomadic pastures on ruderal lands and stubble

These pastures are mainly located in the Srem region, in the Banat and in low-lying river valleys throughout Serbia, but this practice of transhumant 'popaša' has recently become extinct.

Without grazing or mowing, most of these lowland grasslands will disappear, as they lie in forest zones and were created and maintained by domestic livestock grazing.

3. Semi-natural meadows or meadows with sown mixtures used for hay production

This farming system is responsible for creating the landscapes of the Šumadija Mountains so familiar to tourists.

After the intensification of the period

1960s-1980s, the intensity of land management has recently decreased, with the return of more traditional practices such as communal mowing for hay.

4. Semi-intensive grazing of highland semi-natural grasslands in forest zones and natural grasslands above the forest zone

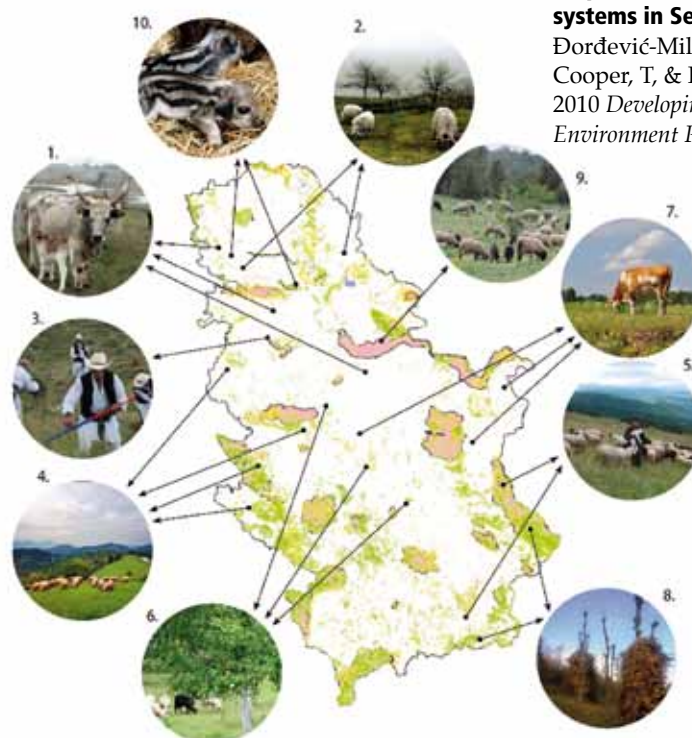
These semi-intensive livestock systems are typically found in the more humid zones of western Serbia. Here, the pastures were created and maintained through low-intensity grazing by cattle and sheep, mainly through sedentary summer grazing. They are most often found in the coniferous forest zone, and less frequently as openings in mixed forest or at higher altitudes.

This type of management has created some of the most attractive landscapes for tourism, such as in the Tara, Zlatibor, Zlata, Golija and Sjeničko-Pešterska plateaux, which are all punctuated with mountain dairy huts called *katuni*. Unfortunately, grazing animals are hardly seen in this region today, except for on the Sjeničko-Pešterska plateau.

5. Extensive nomadic grazing of highland grasslands

Over 100,000ha of pasture are under traditional, seasonal, extensive grazing in southern, south-eastern and eastern Serbia. The predominant livestock types are indigenous sheep breeds such as Pramenka (Zeckel).

These pastures are found in the area of natural mountain pastures above the



Map of low-intensity farming systems in Serbia

Dorđević-Milošević, S, in: Cooper, T, & Pezold, T (eds) 2010 *Developing a National Agri-Environment Programme for Serbia*.

forest zone and in clearings in the coniferous forest.

6. Extensive grazing of closed village pastures

Across central Serbia, free-range pigs, sheep and poultry graze on semi-natural vegetation in managed orchards (mainly plums) and in forest patches, in an extensive livestock system.

Free-range pigs, which destroy the grassland cover, leading to a loss of biodiversity, would not be considered a HNV practice, but it could become so with appropriate management.

The survival of this system is closely linked to the Serbian feasting tradition, during which family guests enjoy home-reared lamb. Because of the limited grazing resources in central Serbia, this semi-subsistence farming system is likely to survive, so long as the home killing of animals for family consumption remains legal.

7. Combined use of mountain grasslands

This transhumant system is based on winter-spring grazing in the lowlands, with daily spring and early summer migrations to meadows found in the deciduous woodland zone. On St George's Day, at the beginning of May, the flocks are moved to highland pastures, above the zone of mixed woods, where they are free to roam during the day and are kept within fenced pastures overnight (*trlo*, *bačilo*, *stan*).

The recent abandonment of highland pastures is jeopardising the survival of pastures in the lowlands due to overstocking. This in turn leads to soil degradation and erosion on slopes, while the abandoned grasslands are invaded by juniper, bramble and other shrubs.

8. Deciduous forests pruned for winter forage

This is an extensive mountain sheep

system, with winter forage collected from deciduous forests. Branches and leaves are collected (often by 'shredding', whereby the central stem is retained and the side branches cut off), dried and stored for animal feed in winter.

In certain mountain areas with limited resources for production of winter feed, this ancient practice evolved and resulted in the creation of valued cultural landscapes. As this practice has an impact on the commercial value of woodlands, it was forbidden in state-owned forests. However, it is still carried out in the lower Danube region and in Eastern Serbia.

9. Marginal grazing on land with light, salinised or hard soils

These are semi-intensive grazing systems with grazing by sheep, cattle and donkeys on sandy dunes, salinised or hard soils with a high water table, typically found in the Banat region.

A significant amount of scientific research has been conducted in the Deliblato Sands area that has demonstrated that a well-balanced grazing regime with appropriate stocking densities is required to maintain this valuable environment, which supports species such as the imperial eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) that depend on open grassland habitats.

10. Grazing of commons in lowland villages

The centuries-old practice of exploiting communal pastures for grazing by non-ruminants continues in some parts of Serbia today. Until the 1960s, communal pastures were used for the rearing of geese (for meat, liver and feathers). However, the grazing of communal lands by pigs and poultry (mostly duck, geese and turkeys) is currently declining because of the threat of infection from *Trichinella* and avian influenza.

Key trends affecting the HNV farming systems

One of the most serious issues is the emigration of the rural population, which leads to a decline in the number of farmed animals, the deterioration of infrastructure and a lack of shepherds – especially of well-trained shepherds. This results in high losses of sheep to large predators, leading to the abandonment of pastures at higher altitudes.

Meanwhile, the ageing population in mountain regions is no longer capable of maintaining vertical migrations at the local, micro, level, endangering the sustainability of grazing/mowing systems.

After the disintegration of Yugoslavia, the introduction of new national borders, which cut through traditional migration routes from south to north and from the mountains to the lowlands of the Pannonian basin, put an end to the last transhumant sheep flocks.

The long-term neglect of agricultural extension services and grassland science in marginal areas has resulted in a lack of exposure to new marketing patterns, certificates and standards, which can all add value to products derived from traditional farming.

A simplified rural economy, with little scope for diversification to exploit natural resources and conditions, threatens the survival of HNV farmlands of exceptional value from the perspective of biodiversity conservation, cultural heritage and conservation of cultural landscapes.

The lack of systematic and long-term planned financial support, as well as problems with marketing products, give farmers a difficult choice: whether to intensify or to keep HNV farming practices alive. In the meantime, these vulnerable habitats will be lost as a result of natural succession.

Suzana Đorđević-Milošević

HNV farming network in South Eastern Europe (SEE)

In early February 2006, a meeting was held in Belgrade to focus for the first time on HNV farming in the Western Balkans. Many of the priorities set out at that meeting are still valid:

- Identifying the distribution and status of HNV farming across the region through common methodologies.
- Understanding and monitoring the ecological and socio-economic situation of HNV farming.
- Making HNV farming a policy priority at national level.

- Improved networking to facilitate understanding and progress, both within countries (e.g. bringing together environmental and agricultural ministries, involving more stakeholders) and between countries.

Dissemination of best practice

The challenge of maintaining HNV farming is especially apparent in this region of Europe, where HNV agriculture covers vast areas of marginal land which have few or no alternative uses. In these condi-

tions, maintaining traditional farming systems has a socio-economic as well as an environmental justification.

Despite some important developments since 2006, only some of the recommendations have been implemented and then only in very few countries (see, for example, the previous article). And importantly, the policy response has been inadequate in concrete terms, especially given the scale of the issue.

In general, there is very little exchange between countries in the region on the topic – each one is working in isolation, thinking that the issues it faces are unique. Someone must take the initiative to encourage the next step to be taken, implementing policies that can respond to the scale of the HNV farming challenge at



Gwyn Jones

Olive groves are limited to the coastal zone of the Western Balkans, but most are HNV, with old trees and terracing common, as here in Stari Bar, Montenegro.

a national level.

EFNCP has determined to facilitate this process, setting up a new South East Europe HNV network, co-ordinated by our Sofia team. This will provide not only a focus within the wider region itself, but will enable the network to learn first-hand from Bulgaria's recent experience, whether in developing HNV policy support or of the process of EU accession.

Aims of the new network

Our work aims to:

1. Provide a forum for networking and exchange of experiences among SEE countries, and between EU and non-EU countries;
2. Present information on the current state of HNV farming identification and support in the region;
3. Illustrate HNV farming in the region, with examples and case studies;
4. Identify common interests and develop joint activities on HNV farming in the region during 2011 and beyond.

We will address the following specific questions:

- What types of HNV farming exist in the partner countries and what is their

approximate extent and location?

- What are the environmental and socio-economic values of these farming systems?
- What socio-economic and other challenges are faced by farmers and farming communities?
- How can the implementation of EU policies best address these challenges, to ensure an economically and ecologically sustainable future for HNV farming, as intended by the EU?
- How can monitoring systems be established in order to monitor trends in HNV farming systems and the impact of rural development policies, as required in the EU?

Overview of HNV status and trends

The team has produced an overview of the current status and key challenges of HNV farming in the Western Balkans. The input and comments provided by the partner organisations were very important for the quality of the findings. It was no surprise that, despite the specific regional differences, common elements between the countries prevailed. The general trends,

for example, are almost universal:

1. Traditionally extensive upland farming has been further intensified in the last couple of decades.
2. River valleys and plains are the main intensive agriculture regions and are expected to be further intensified.

Overall, the Western Balkans are still dominated by large areas of HNV farming and related farming systems such as:

- Transhumance, traditionally practised throughout the region but nowadays becoming more and more geographically restricted and limited to shorter distances.
- Common grazing, reported as a normal practice by experts (although official data are usually lacking).
- Forest grazing, again practised in most countries, but co-existing with the official idea that 'all grazing in forests is bad'.
- Extensive mosaic land use around mountain and hill villages; less so in the more intensive lowlands.
- Extensive olive groves along the coasts of Albania, Montenegro and Croatia, with extensive orchards inland.
- Significant land abandonment occurs

in most remote regions and areas due to out-migration and reduction in the number of animals, compounded in some areas by the lasting effects of the Balkan wars of the 1990s (population movements, minefields).

The overview can be downloaded from <http://see.efnecp.org/>, in English, Albanian, Croatian, Macedonian and Serbian.

Network meeting

The first meeting of the network was held in early December 2010 in Sofia. The plans agreed for the coming period include:

1. Increase the number of network members and partners

The network will actively engage with organisations which have a shared interest in nature conservation in farming and are supportive of the introduction and operationalising of the HNV farming concept in the region.

2. HNV Farming in SEE Policy Workshop

The network determined to hold a policy event focusing on HNV farming in SEE in 2011. The event will respond to a number of perceived needs. First, policymakers in the region are largely unaware of the importance and urgency of implementing concrete policy actions if HNV farming and farming systems are to survive in the

region. Second, discussions of agricultural policy are dominated by questions of agricultural competitiveness, risking the large-scale disappearance of socially and environmentally critical farming systems. Third, the countries are advancing (each at their different pace) towards EU accession and are preparing to implement the EU Acquis – a process which itself requires action to identify and develop policy support measures for HNV farming.

3. Expand the use of the internet

The web provides an easily accessible and visually arresting means of getting messages to a wider audience. The network will produce a series of case studies and other pages for the EFNCP SEE network website.

4. HNV farm mapping and identification – exchange of experience in SEE

So far, only Serbia has mapped its HNV farming areas and tried to link HNV farmland to the known HNV farming systems in the country (see pp. 11-12). This process was not without its difficulties, encountering problems which again will be common to many, probably most, countries in the region. It was agreed that the network will collaborate on the production of a regional (SEE) HNV farming map and help with the integration of the SEE HNV

farming maps into the work carried out at the European scale by the Joint Research Centre of the EU.

5. HNV farming and food products demonstration days

One of the best chances for promoting the HNV farming concept among farmers and the public at large is to link it to the still-valued traditional food products it produces. The possibility of doing this at existing rural events, especially events organised by the partners and members of the SEE HNV farming network, is being discussed.

6. Practical experience exchange for HNV training and farm advisors

The training of farmers and farm advisors in HNV farming areas is crucial for their survival. Overall, this is one of the major gaps in the system. There are a few good models where NGOs have taken up this role and are very actively working with farmers (e.g. BSPB, see pp. 6-7). The network will identify and disseminate best practice from the region, building links not only between NGOs, but with other interested actors such as farm advisors from state institutions.

Yanka Kazakova & Vyara Stefanova;
yanka@efnecp.org, vyara@efnecp.org

Basic support for mixed farming systems – a first draft of a possible approach

How can we respond to the serious decline in mixed farming systems and the maintenance of less extensive permanent pastures within those landscapes? Is it possible to design a basic holistic measure, to which other measures could be added, for achieving more targeted goals (late hay mowing and/or management of landscape features)? We believe so, and present here a possible approach which emerged from discussions with national experts in France.

Underlying principles

The main goal of this proposal is not to maintain grassland per se; it is to retain extensive pastures and meadows within a mixed farming system. For biodiversity management, it is better to have 20ha of oligotrophic permanent pasture, with a low stocking density, than 40ha of temporary or permanent grassland receiving 100kg N per ha and/or with a high stocking density.

The precise agronomic interaction occurs in a variety of territories. The link between biodiversity and the farming system can only be understood in the context of these territories. However, the common thread is that extensive farmlands are an integral part of the farming system through fertility transfers; they do not exist in isolation – intensifying in some areas may favour extensive management in another.

From an agronomic perspective, the proposed measure is therefore founded on two prerequisites:

1. The existence of oligotrophic extensive permanent pastures, with no mineral fertilisation and limited organic fertilisation (i.e. *saltus*; semi-natural vegetation), from which there is a net export of biomass in the form of animal forage;
2. Fertilisation through animal manures, with a balanced mineral/organic fertilisation, which minimises the need for or dependence on mineral fertilisation.

Spatial coherence

The measure can also support an optimal distribution of semi-natural vegetation, for example, through a bonus for land next to natural areas and/or streams and/or woods (at ecotones). The Swiss approach to the mandatory retention or provision of a percentage of 'ecological' land gives us one possible way forward.

Avoidance of threshold effects

It is crucial to avoid 'threshold' effects and favour progressivity, if at all possible. HNV is not black and white – so there is no point in creating a border which does not exist and in the process creating a lot of enemies, who will immediately see the concept as excluding. But on the other hand, we must support the extensive and also, where appropriate, the *intensifying*.

Eligibility

There should be no minimum threshold of extensive pastures for eligibility. For example, an existing system-based agri-environment measure in France (low-input farming systems) has a 55% grassland threshold at the farm level. We see no virtue in this. For example, 10% of extensive pastures would be highly welcome in Bourgogne. There is also no point in excluding systems where livestock is a

secondary enterprise. One could argue that it is pointless to propose a measure for 1ha of pasture lost in 100ha of crops. Indeed, but it is unlikely that a farmer in this situation would find it worth applying (unless this parcel was in Natura 2000, in which case it should benefit from complementary measures).

On the contrary, we might even, given that we are considering supporting 'mixed systems', propose a minimum percentage of crops fertilised by animal manure (the idea being to have a sufficient surface for balanced organic fertilisation; nitrogen produced on permanent pasture must be usable on crops).

Payment principles

To ensure that the measure is progressive, one could imagine a points system:

- proportional to the area in long-term permanent pasture
- proportional to the *extensiveness of practices on those permanent pastures* (indicators could be stocking rate and fertilisation)
- proportional to the extensiveness of arable practices, measured long-term in relation to a reference level of mineral fertilisation

The two first points would need to carry more weight.

For example, in Normandy, studies shows that 0.8-1LU/ha is an optimal stocking rate for the floristic diversity of permanent grasslands. On the other hand, 1.4LU/ha (the maximum threshold for French basic agri-environment measure) is too intensive.

In this case, each ha of permanent pasture with a stocking rate of 0.8-1LU/ha should yield 10 points; each ha of permanent pasture with a stocking rate of 1.4LU/ha should yield 0 points. Between those two milestones, a linear equation gives the total points (1.2LU/ha = 5, etc.).

The closer to the optimal stocking rate a farmer is (a symmetric equation for stocking rates under 0.8LU/ha can be imagined), the more he gets. (Ideally, the equation should not be linear but should strongly favour extensification, but the approach needs to be clear and easy to administer.) Parcels next to natural/semi-natural vegetation could have a bonus (for example +20%).

As for crops, it could be that 1ha with a 100kg mineral N = 5 points; 1ha with 150g N (and higher) = 0.

Each score should have an equivalent value in terms of payment. Capping could be envisaged in order to avoid a dilution



Small-scale mixed farming in eastern Europe.

of payments.

The important points are:

- The farmer is not encouraged to optimise an average stocking rate at farm level, as is the case under the current French basic agri-environment, where farmers are driven towards the maximum permissible of 1.4LU/ha.
- The farmer has freedom to choose. The novelty is that he is given a payment for extensiveness; intensification is not forbidden in itself, it is just not supported.
- Farmers whose systems are already extensive and those willing to extensify are both addressed by the scheme.
- Mixed organic systems are quite consistent with the requirements, but the stated goals in terms of extensive permanent pastures add a clear biodiversity objective which is at present often missing.

The farmer's obligations

The farmer must prepare a spatially explicit management plan, defining the different types of forage units (extensive, semi-intensive, etc.) and displaying technical livestock units across different forage units at farm level (off-farm pastures can be included, where relevant). The plan must demonstrate coherence between the overall number of animals at farm level and their distribution in space and time.

A complementary fertilisation plan for crop systems (farm-produced organic manure + mineral) should be produced at the same time.

Plans should be set for a 5-year period, but a farmer wanting to opt out could do so, paying back the payments relating to the 'lost points'.

Advice

Technical advice on the optimal use of land for biodiversity will be needed to help draw up these farm-level plans. Advisers should be paid, from agri-environment funds, to engage those farmers who are already extensive but are not involved in agri-environment schemes. Advisers should have specific training in biodiversity management at farm and landscape levels.

Control

Control can be made on the basis of a combination of farm documents and the consistency of technical indicators (livestock/types of pastures and crops/fertilisation plans), including those inspected in the field, with the objectives set.

Xavier Poux & Blandine Romain;
xavier@efnecp.org

Noticeboard

Romanian HNV Farming Coalition

Four of EFNCP's Romanian partner organisations have decided to collaborate in a High Nature Value Farming Coalition. This was a major outcome of a recent meeting organised by the Pogány-havas Association (www.poganyhavas.hu) and the Mozaic Project Working Group (www.project-mozaic.com) and attended by Fundatia ADEPT Transylvania (www.fundatia-adept.org) and Green Agora (www.green-agero.ro). All four groups are working on HNV farming, applied rural development, nature conservation and biodiversity research.

After a field trip to stunning hay meadows and pastures in the Csík and Gyimes mountains, the organisations shared their experience, discussed how to harmonise their methodologies and defined possible common aims, for example the development of HNV indicators. It was clear that the groups have overlapping and complementary interests and that by collaborating, the whole could be greater than the sum of its parts.

The new Coalition will not only aim to co-ordinate research on HNV farming and farmland in Romania, but to bring forward field-tested, socio-economically pragmatic proposals for improving the delivery of biodiversity objectives through agricultural and rural development policies in the country. A first step on this path was the proposal of modifications to the Romanian agri-environment measures, for example, to recognise the use of small hand-driven mowing machines in the traditional farming package and to adapt the mowing date to local conditions.

Sweden pushes permanent pasture issue in reforms

The Swedish Government has identified the definition of permanent pasture and CAP

eligibility criteria (see pp. 1-3) as one of the key areas of interest in the CAP reform, following an ongoing debate with the Commission as to whether or not pasture with lots of trees should be regarded as eligible for Single Farm Payment.

The Government has initiated a project to develop a proposal for a new definition by the end of 2011. This work will involve a detailed consultation process with a very broad range of stakeholders.

Regional Policy Workshop: Policies to Support HNV Farming in South Eastern Europe (SEE)

EFNCP and Ecologica are proposing to hold a workshop in Zadar, Croatia, in autumn 2011 to:

- understand the importance of SEE, in terms of farming-related biodiversity and ecosystem services, in the context of HNV farming systems and areas;
- discuss and assess existing and planned measures which are likely to support HNV farming in SEE countries;
- discuss the key needs, opportunities and challenges for developing and implementing targeted HNV farming policy support, in view of EU accession alongside a changing CAP post-2013;
- provide a networking opportunity for policymakers and interested NGOs.

Details are still to be finalised (spaces will be limited). For more information on the workshop, e-mail yanka@efncp.org.

Help improve La Cañada – online reader survey and mailing list

Please tell us your opinions of *La Cañada* – good and bad – so that we can make it more interesting and relevant to your work.

The questionnaire is genuinely short and can be found at: <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/B65DKGQ>.

Future editions of *La Cañada* may be sent as a pdf file. To help us keep the mailing list up to date, please send your current e-mail

address to gwyn@efncp.org. Please take two minutes and help us to help you! Thank you.

EFNCP contacts

The Forum's policy team is led by Guy Beaufoy (guy@efncp.org), with Xavier Poux in France (xavier@efncp.org). Concha Salguero (concha@efncp.org) represents us on a number of DG Agriculture advisory groups.

Working out of Sofia, our South-East Europe team consists of Yanka Kazakova (yanka@efncp.org) and Vyara Stefanova (vyara@efncp.org).

The Ireland project, funded by the Heritage Council, is run by Patrick McGurn (patrick@efncp.org).

Other staff are engaged mainly in support work with our partners – Laci Demeter with Pogány-havas in eastern Transylvania (laci@efncp.org); Marius Bărbos with the Mozaic Project in Cluj (marius@efncp.org); Nat Page with Fundatia ADEPT (nat@efncp.org); and Viv Lewis with the Foundation for Common Land in the UK (viv@efncp.org). Nat also carries out some liaison work with the EU institutions.

In charge of running the Forum is Gwyn Jones (gwyn@efncp.org), while Karen MacRae is the accounts manager (karen@efncp.org). The web manager is Ben Hill (ben@efncp.org).

Seminar in European Parliament – a new departure for EFNCP

On 28th June, EFNCP held a seminar in the European Parliament on HNV farming and the CAP, in conjunction with Pogány-havas Association (Romania) and Birdlife International. The event was hosted and generously supported by the Romanian MEP Sógor Csaba (European People's Party), who also chaired the event with great enthusiasm.

Co-hosting the seminar were George Lyon (Scotland), from the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, and Iratxe García Perez (Spain), from the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Liberals for Europe.

The aim of the seminar was to raise awareness amongst MEPs about HNV farming, its values and challenges, and how a reformed CAP can and should help to support this type of farming. A brochure was presented, giving four examples of HNV farming – from Romania, Scotland, Spain and Poland – and brief policy recommendations.

The room was packed and there were many questions from the floor, and we felt the event was a success overall. It was also a fine example of co-operation between different NGOs and political parties.



Speakers at the HNV farming seminar in June in the European Parliament.

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



Edited and published by the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism. This issue was supported by the European Commission DG Environment. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

© copyright 2011 EFNCP

The editor would like to thank the following: Guy Beaufoy, Edita Dîfova, Miroslava Dikova, Suzana Đorđević-Milošević, Yanka Kazakova, Dimitar Plachiiski, Georgi Popgeorgiev, Xavier Poux, Blandine Romain and Vyara Stefanova.

Views expressed within *La Cañada* do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, the supporting organisations or the publisher. Editor of this issue of *La Cañada*: Gwyn Jones, 5/8 Ellishadder, Culnancnoc, Portree IV51 9JE, UK; tel: +44 788 411 6048; e-mail: gwyn@efncp.org