

# La Cañada



Newsletter of the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism

No 7 August 1997  
ISSN 1027-2070

## Forum continues to gain support

The main theme of this issue of *La Cañada* is Regulation 2078/92, the 'agri-environment' regulation, including summaries of some of the recent reviews that have looked at the progress that has been made since its introduction with the 1992 CAP reforms. This is timely as a new round of reforms are currently being discussed – the so-called 'Santer package' or Agenda 2000. Also included is a thought-provoking article by Colin Tubbs which draws together some of the philosophical and scientific thinking behind the work of the Forum network. It makes a start at developing a vision of the rural Europe we wish to see evolve.

Since the first edition of *La Cañada* a considerable amount of correspondence has been received in support of the Forum's work, particularly in raising awareness about, and explaining, the biological importance of extensively managed farmland. This correspondence has included letters from the New World and seems to support our contention that there is an urgent need for a much wider recognition, by both conservationists and policy makers, of the high biological value of some managed landscapes. We hope to develop this theme more in coming issues.

Finally, we would like to draw your attention to the announcements on page 12 about the 6th Forum meeting in 1998 and, importantly about contributions to the Forum and receiving *La Cañada*.

## The Santer package – Agenda 2000 – and the future for the CAP

The Commission's *Agenda 2000* document, otherwise known as the 'Santer package', was published on 16 July. It sets out the Commission's preferred approach to the

enlargement of the EU, budget proposals from 2000 onwards, the future of the Structural Funds and a summary of the way forward for the CAP. The proposals for reform of the CAP are largely an extension of the 1992 reforms. They involve a further step towards world market prices, provided as partial compensation direct payments and the development of a more 'coherent' rural policy.

### Cuts in support prices

The principal proposal is to cut intervention prices for cereals by 20% from the year 2000 onwards. Farmers would receive compensation in the form of a non-crop specific area payment calculated on a similar basis to the MacSharry reforms, with a payment of ECU 66 per tonne. At the same time, the reference

ECU 1,950 per tonne over the period 2000-2002. Compensation would be in the form of a headage payment. Unfortunately, the Commission has rejected alternatives such as area payments. There would be a new dairy cow premium of ECU 70 and substantial increases in premiums for suckler cows and beef animals. The Commission intends to reflect on ways of improving the effectiveness of the 'extensification' premium.

The current milk quota system, by contrast, would not be changed before 2006, although unspecified improvements would be made to the flexibility and simplicity of the regime. Support prices would be decreased by 10% between 2000 and 2006. This would be compensated for by a second annual premium for dairy cows, on top of that proposed under the beef regime, of ECU 145 per head.

A particularly controversial proposal is the introduction of ceilings on direct income payments per farm (modulation-capping of payments). Member States may also be given greater flexibility in devising their own criteria for paying supplementary forms of support within commonly agreed rules.

### Changes in rural policies

A greater concentration of support from the EU's Structural Funds on fewer regions and a smaller number of Objectives is foreshadowed in the document, with a reduction from the current six Objectives to three, of which Objectives 1 and 2 would incorporate rural areas. The LEADER initiative would be continued and some reorganisation of other existing rural policy measures is proposed but the descriptions provided are somewhat opaque. Changes are foreseen for the LFA support system which would be moved from the Guidance Section of the EAGGF to the Guarantee Section where it would join the accompanying measures and 'be applied horizontally and implemented in a decentralised way' following the model of the agri-environment, early retirement and forestry regulations. In rural areas outside Objective 1 and new Objective 2 areas, Member States will be able to make available and implement the reorganised suite of rural development and accompanying measures in a more integrated way, giving most weight to those of particular relevance to the region concerned. This is a step towards the Cork agenda, although market support



Summer grazing huts in the Picos de Europa, northern Spain.

rate for compulsory set-aside would be reduced to 0%, which would still permit the Commission to use set-aside as a supply control instrument if it wished. The support for silage cereals, mainly paid for silage maize, would end, which would be a welcome development from an environmental perspective. Consideration would be given to enabling Member States to attach environmental conditions to direct payments for arable crops and set-aside.

For the beef sector, the Commission proposes a 30% cut in support prices down to

rather than rural development will dominate the CAP if this plan is adopted.

### Agri-environment measures

Agenda 2000 explicitly states that agri-environmental instruments will be given greater importance in the coming years. 'Targeted' agri-environment measures should be reinforced and encouraged through 'increased budgetary resources and, where necessary, higher co-financing rates'. As examples, the text refers to aid for organic farming, the maintenance of semi-natural habitats, tradi-

tional orchards or hedgerows, continuation of alpine cattle keeping, the upkeep of wetlands and measures which have the effect of reducing yields such as buffer strips. More tentatively, it is suggested that the LFA support system could be transformed into an instrument to maintain and promote low input farming, perhaps merging with the less targeted agri-environment measures.

Although the document makes many positive statements about the environment and the value of agri-environment schemes, the proposals are disappointing in many

respects. No major steps towards integrating environmental objectives into the basic design of the market regimes have been proposed and agri-environment policy has not been put forward as a core element of the CAP, as many had hoped.

It remains to be seen how governments and the European Parliament will respond to the Commission's vision; some may be alarmed by the further retreat from established forms of production support.

*David Baldock and Karen Mitchell, IEEP London*

## Nature conservation benefits of the agri-environment regulation

### Environmental opportunity

The reform of the Common Agricultural Policy in 1992 saw the introduction of a European regulation which was heralded a breakthrough in environmental policy: Regulation EEC/2078/92, otherwise known as the agri-environment regulation. Five years down the line, was there real cause for such optimism?

The answer, according to a major new report<sup>1</sup> published by BirdLife International and part-funded by DGXI of the European Commission, is that such optimism was rather premature. Poor design and implementation of the agri-environment programmes across many Member States has resulted in few benefits to species and habitats of high conservation importance. Equally, few programmes approved under the regulation have been used to help fulfil the requirements of important European legislation such as the Birds and Habitats Directives. Yet the regulation itself does present Member States with a tremendous opportunity to pay farmers for environmentally friendly land-management. So what has gone wrong?

### A Europe-wide study

BirdLife International – a global partnership of organisations working for birds, their habitats and the environment – started the study in 1994. They looked at national agri-environment programmes in eight countries: France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and the UK. The work was co-ordinated by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds in the UK and the overall findings of the study compiled in a summary report. This report makes 47 recommendations to improve the design and implementation of agri-environment programmes.

The study's original aim was to analyse the extent to which agri-environment programmes were aiding the conservation of

priority bird species and associated agricultural habitats across Europe. But, in many countries, it was simply too early to tell whether programmes were having a positive impact. This was not helped by the fact that few countries had introduced rigorous monitoring programmes and lacked adequate baseline surveys of important species and habitats. Programmes were analysed according to their likelihood of having a positive impact on the environment, by comparing them against a checklist of ideal criteria which was developed. Such criteria include, for example, the overall scope and structure of the scheme, the presence or absence of clear environmental objectives and targets, the flexibility of prescriptions, the levels of payment and overall funding and the provision of advice and training.

### Performance of programmes

Few programmes compared well against the criteria. Many had some of the main features of a good agri-environment programme but few had all of them. The optimum scope and structure for agri-environment programmes is one which provides opportunities for all farmers to manage land for conservation, since almost all farmland has some importance for biodiversity. However, some sites are of particularly high conservation value and should, ideally, be specially targeted. BirdLife International found that the degree of overlap between important sites and agri-environment programmes is often poor. This is largely a result of few Member States having a clearly stated conservation strategy for their programmes which sets out priority species and habitats and key areas to target.

Individual agri-environment schemes and programmes must be designed to meet clearly specified conservation objectives. These objectives should set out the priorities for protection and enhancement of species and habitats, consistent with national and

international conservation priorities. Too few schemes across Member States have clearly stated objectives which relate to environmental legislation, such as, for example, the Birds Directive.

Programmes in Spain, France and the UK are quite good, while environmental objectives are poorly specified in many Portuguese and German programmes. Objectives also need to be translated into targets or performance indicators for species and habitats, to enable a proper evaluation of schemes against objectives. Yet few programmes have set formal targets which can be monitored. The UK has made most progress in this area by identifying performance indicators for its Environmentally Sensitive Area schemes.

Poorly specified objectives often seem to result in prescriptions which limit conservation benefits. Several examples of inappropriate prescriptions were found. For example, limits on the maximum size of farms eligible to enter agreements in the Portuguese cereal steppes are so low (<50ha) they exclude the majority of farms of high conservation interest – 87% of holdings are larger than 100ha. In Spain, meanwhile, limits on grazing levels are high enough to actually damage habitat quality.

We have found many examples of situations where the conservation benefits of schemes are restricted by limits on individual payments (Ireland, Portugal, Scotland, Germany and parts of Spain) or on the overall level of funding. Low payment rates are often an attempt to restrict uptake of agri-environment programmes to keep spending within budget, but this suggests that administrative procedures rather than conservation priorities are more important. BirdLife International has argued that within budgetary constraints, Member States must ensure that payments and funding reflect conservation priorities and that agreed objectives are met.

Poor promotion of agri-environment programmes was put forward as a factor restricting uptake in several Member States, including Spain, Portugal and Italy. The provision of advice, training and support also appears to be important, both to per-

suaide farmers to enter the programmes with confidence and to help achieve conservation objectives. However, only a limited number of countries have implemented such programmes, even though provision is made for these within the agri-environment regulation.

### Conclusions

The above examples illustrate quite clearly that much could be done to improve the design and implementation of agri-environment programmes throughout the European Union. That some Member States have experienced problems is not unexpected: this is a new regulation and at the time of study, many agri-environment pro-

grammes were in their early stages. BirdLife International believes that the situation can now be significantly improved. We are urging the European Commission (DGVI) to carry out a significant review of the way in which the regulation has been implemented. In particular, we believe DGVI should be constructively critical of national programmes and give evidence, based on their experience across Europe, to individual countries. They should also make good use of the knowledge and experience gained by government agriculture and environment departments, environmental organisations, academic establishments and others over the past five years.

Ultimately, we believe that agri-environ-

ment programmes are the key measures by which sensitive management of farmed habitats can be secured. And they can do this by providing a system of payments for the environmental products from farming. Without them, the future for wildlife across large swathes of rural Europe would look bleak.

Vicki Swales & Hannah Bartram, RSPB Sandy Beds, UK

<sup>1</sup> BirdLife International European Agriculture Task Force (1996) *Nature Conservation Benefits of Plans Under the Agri-environment Regulation (EEC/2078/92)*. RSPB, Sandy, Bedfordshire

Copies of the report are available from Catherine Holding, RSPB, Sandy

## Implementation of Regulation 2078/92 in Europe

It is now four years since the end of June 1993, the date on which national authorities were to have submitted the first agri-environment programmes under Regulation 2078/92 for EC scrutiny and funding. It is time to review progress and look for patterns amongst the maze of diverse initiatives now in place in 15 countries. How have Member States taken up the challenge of implementing a policy widely seen as a model for the future?

Regulation 2078/92 allows Member States a great deal of discretion in determining their own agri-environmental measures within the broad framework set out in the text itself and in the implementing Regulation 746/96. Further guidelines for implementation are provided in working documents put before the STAR committee by the European Commission but not published. Measures may be devised and operated by national, regional or even local authorities. In Denmark, for example, the counties have an important role in implementing the measure. In several countries, including Germany, Italy and Spain, regional authorities have taken the lead. However, all schemes must be approved at Community level before becoming eligible for funding.

About 117 programmes, many containing several different schemes, have been approved by the European Commission. In principle, these should cover a wide range of objectives including: reduced consumption of fertilisers and pesticides; extensification of crop and livestock production; maintenance of the countryside and the landscape; the upkeep of abandoned farmland; long-term set-aside, particularly for biotope restoration and the protection of hydrological systems; and improved public

access to agricultural land.

Since implementation of the Regulation began in 1993, Member States have moved at varying speeds. Some were able to develop new schemes rapidly or to adapt existing national measures to the new EC framework and obtain consent from the Commission to begin within a year. Several German Lander were amongst the first in the queue for EC approval. Others, such as Luxembourg and Greece, have started more slowly and some schemes are still being introduced.

### Expenditure

The CAP budget, FEOGA, meets half the costs of payments to farmers (75% in Objective 1 areas). Total FEOGA expendi-

ture for the period 1993-97 was expected to be in the region of ECU 4.3 billion, but is likely to be lower than this in practice. In 1993-95 it was less than ECU 500 million a year, as implementation built up, but by 1996, the first year of more complete implementation, expenditure was close to ECU 1.4 billion as shown in the table. The results for Austria are distorted because expenditure in 1995 has been included as well, so the annual figure is nearer to half the sum shown. However, the budgetary importance of the schemes in Austria, Finland, France and Germany emerges clearly. In 1997, expenditure is expected to decline slightly to around ECU 1.2 billion.

Total expenditure remains small compared with that of the CAP as a whole. However, recent statements from the Commission, including the important *Agenda 2000* document, suggest that they

### Traditional olive groves near Ronda, Andalucia, Southern Spain.



Bob Gibbons

**Expenditure from the CAP budget (FEOGA) in 1996 on agri-environment programme by Member States (million ECU)**

Member State	EC share of agri-environment expenditure (million ECU)
	Total
Belgium	1.5
Denmark	5.8
Germany	231.7
Greece	1.5
Spain	32.8
France	118.9
Ireland	43.4
Italy	41.5
Luxembourg	0.0
Netherlands	7.6
Austria	541.0
Portugal	40.0
Finland	256.6
Sweden	43.4
UK	25.5
EU 15	1,391.2

Source: European Commission, cited in House of Commons' Agriculture Committee, Second Report, Session 1996-97 *Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Other Schemes under the Agri-environment Regulation*, HMSO London

would support a further expansion of the agri-environment budget in future. It is perhaps not surprising that expenditure is still relatively modest in southern Member States, where there was little experience of agri-environment schemes. However, this imbalance will need to be addressed if voluntary schemes are to reach large areas with important concentrations of high nature value agriculture.

**A wide variety of schemes**

Several Member States have built on or simply continued national schemes which were in place prior to 1993. This has the advantage of ensuring continuity, although in some cases opportunities for innovation and reconsideration of the objectives of the Regulation have been lost. Others have constructed wholly new policies, for example, Ireland, Finland, Portugal and Spain have been amongst those initiating entirely new schemes. The rapid expansion in the number and variety of agri-environment schemes and their establishment in countries with little previous commitment to this approach is one of the central achievements of the Regulation.

Although no official evaluation of the results of Regulation 2078/92 is yet available, there is a growing literature on the subject (see for example de Putter 1995; Whitby 1996; BirdLife International 1996 (see page 3); House of Commons 1997; Pain & Pienkowski 1997). DGVI has prepared a report on implementation of the Regulation but this had yet to appear at the time of writing in July.

The Regulation requires that agri-environment schemes are all to have 'positive effects on the environment and the countryside' but may address a range of objectives set out in Article 2. In practice, many schemes have multiple objectives which are often not clearly specified. Often the main priority is the maintenance of less intensive farming systems, sometimes over considerable areas, as exemplified by the *prime à l'herbe* scheme in France. Take-up in areas of intensively farmed land is limited in most countries. In general there is more grassland enrolled in measures under the Regulation than arable.

Some national or regional authorities have developed schemes which are intended to cover most farms in an administrative area and have avoided onerous environmental constraints in order to attract a high take-up rate. OPUL in Austria and GAEPS in Finland might be taken as examples. Such schemes may have an important role in maintaining broadly appropriate production systems over a sizeable area, but tend to be less effective at securing more specific forms of management on sensitive sites.

A second group of schemes is more highly targeted, both thematically and geographically. Some apply only within a particular national or nature park (as in Portugal) and are designed to address critical local issues. Others focus on a specific topic, such as the continued management of traditional hay meadows or wet grassland, but are open to farmers over a wide area. Most of these schemes have smaller budgets, although the payments per hectare may be relatively high. Countryside Stewardship in England is a good example of a scheme targeted at specified landscape and habitat types and potentially well adapted to the implementation of the Birds and Habitats Directives.

It is encouraging that a large area of less intensively managed farmland has entered management agreements in many Member States. In principle, the agreements should prevent most forms of environmentally damaging intensification from taking place and largely, if not completely, control the process of declining management which adversely affects conservation values. However, a high take-up rate and the effective enforcement of agreements is important for the success of these schemes. Sometimes this is not achieved, particularly in regions where competition from other schemes or economic incentives to intensify production create conflicts with agri-environment objectives.

**Take up of schemes**

One disappointing result of current schemes has been the reluctance of many farmers to participate in agreements with more demanding prescriptions, although these

are compensated by higher payments. The great majority have preferred to accept lower payments entailing fewer changes in their farming methods. Where a scheme offers a choice of higher or lower tier agreements, farmers tend to opt for the less demanding alternatives, as illustrated by take-up of the relatively long-running Environmentally Sensitive Areas' scheme in the UK. Inadequate incentives for higher tier prescriptions are likely to be at least part of the explanation. However, there are some examples of more demanding agreements with a high take-up rate. Organic conversion schemes have been popular in certain countries, such as Denmark and Austria, and there have been good participation rates in some schemes targeted at specific habitats and landscapes.

Participation in 20-year set-aside schemes has been limited even where they have been applied – which has not been in all Member States. Potentially this reduces the scope for habitat creation under Regulation 2078 since most other schemes rely on short-term agreements, typically of five years. Relatively few farmers have been attracted to the incentives offered for the management of abandoned land, although this offers a way of managing habitats vulnerable to scrub invasion or other symptoms of management withdrawal.

**Monitoring**

Until recently, most agri-environment schemes were not subject to systematic monitoring and evaluation; those in the UK are amongst the notable exceptions. Monitoring is now required under Regulation 746/96 and procedures are being put into place for a large number of schemes. It will be some time before these yield results but the process of review and evaluation does not need to wait until studies are complete. We need a lively debate about the objectives, design and implementation of agri-environment schemes in Europe. Forum members have the knowledge and expertise to make an important contribution.

**References**

BirdLife International 1996 *Nature Conservation Benefits of Plans under the Agri-environment Regulation (EEC 2078/92)*. RSPB, Sandy House of Commons Agriculture Committee 1997 *Second Report Session 1996-1997. Environmentally Sensitive Areas and Others Schemes under the Agri-environment regulation*. HMSO, London  
 Pain, D J, & Pienkowski, M W (eds) 1997 *Farming and Birds in Europe: The Common Agricultural Policy and its implications for bird conservation*. Academic Press, London  
 de Putter, J 1995 *The Greening of Europe's Agricultural Policy: The Agri-environmental Regulation of the MacSharry reform*. LEI-DLO, Den Haag  
 Whitby, M (ed) 1996 *The European Environment and CAP Reform: Policies and proposals for conservation*. CAB International, Wallingford

David Baldock, IEEP, London

# A Strategy for the Forum

At a recent Executive Committee meeting it was agreed that the Forum had reached a juncture where the Forum ought to spell out its rationale and develop a strategy firmly based in science and making the maximum use of its pan-European network of collaborators and contacts. As a precursor to this, we needed to develop our vision of the rural Europe we wish to see evolve in the coming decades. This article is a tentative first step in this process. Comments would be welcome. The strategy is ambitious and it would be helpful to have views about its practicability.

## Historical perspective

What we seek from the future is largely influenced by our perception of the past. The Holocene ecological history of Europe can be seen as a panorama of continuous change, a succession of more or less traumatic events of varying duration and amplitude, each of which has given the ecosystem a shift in direction. I see this process as one in which man is part of the ecosystem, not, as is commonly perceived, set aside as a predatory witness waiting for opportunities to exploit it.

It is doubtful if the conventional palaeo-ecological portrayal of the natural development and anthropogenic recession of a climax forest has much place in this concept of the past, though it certainly does not deny the idea of natural succession as such. The main point, however, is that man and his economic activities are an important part of nature: he has both developed with the system and influenced its development in the same way as the grazing and browsing of wild herbivores, lightning strikes, hurricanes, disease, extremes of drought and flood and other factors which have driven ecological change and circumscribed biological diversity.

The conventional view is that in Europe the dominant process in the past five or six thousand years has been the clearance by man of an unbroken primeval forest which became established from the Mediterranean to the tundra in the wake of the retreating ice at the end of the most recent glaciation. This process was accompanied by a decline in biodiversity expressed as numbers of species and individuals of plants and animals. But a high proportion of Europe's fauna and flora depends on open landscapes and could hardly have survived in unbroken forest. The European landscape of Atlantic times must always have been more varied, with extensive regions of open habitats: probably these formed the nuclei for initial human settlement. To take one small

example, I calculate that at least 34% of the 139 bird species known to have bred in the administrative county of Hampshire, southern England, are physiologically or morphologically adapted to open habitats of various kinds, whilst a further 31% are marsh, riverine or coastal species: only 35% are woodland species, though many have adapted to scrub, hedges, gardens and other habitats of modern origin.

Human communities modified the early postglacial vegetation into a wide variety of farming systems which included croplands, orchards, olive groves, meadows and large scale rangelands supporting the extensive pastoralism also essential to the survival and prosperity of local communities. Farm systems varied in response to local and regional conditions, but their common characteristics were that they were low-input, low-output, usually labour intensive, and economically and ecologically sustainable. The rationale underpinning the Forum is that these farm systems have not only provided the habitats essential to Europe's open ground flora and fauna, but, so long as fertiliser and pesticide inputs remained low or absent, have enriched it by enhancing small scale diversity of habitat around settlements whilst also creating and maintaining the large tracts of relatively uniform vegetation required by the flora and fauna of steppe, moorland, mountain and comparable habitats. In Hampshire, I believe the period of maximum biodiversity was around the middle of the 18th century rather than at some more remote period.

## The 20th century

In the second half of the 20th century, there has been a new kind of perturbation in the European ecosystem which has involved a massive decline in biodiversity. This has arisen primarily through the industrialisation of farming via high energy inputs, notably in the form of agro-chemicals and machinery, made possible by the postwar agricultural policies of European governments and latterly through the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union (EU). Farming became highly subsidised and subsidies were in general so shaped as to favour or result in farm specialisation, increase in farm size and a diminution in the labour force, with the consequential break-up of rural communities. Farming has widely become detached from its roots in sustainability. Farm systems, and the flora and fauna of farmland, have been grossly simplified. These events had their beginnings in 19th century fertiliser inputs into Europe (and especially Britain), but are

essentially phenomena of the second half of the 20th Century.

Concurrently, many former low-intensity farm systems have been destroyed by afforestation – conifers in Britain, eucalyptus in Iberia, for example – though whether afforestation or decline in the old land-use systems came first is sometimes debatable. The decline in European biodiversity has been compounded by urban and industrial growth, the locations of which often have been ecologically or geomorphologically unsound and frequently justified by specious resort to the 'over-riding national interest'. In European states where the environmental movement has been weak, argument has often not even arisen. The Forum's origins and *raison d'être* lies in widespread concern among ecologists, conservation managers, rural sociologists and farmers themselves, about the decline in sustainable rural land-uses and the landscapes and human communities to which they give rise. However, neither the changes which have occurred nor the policies which sustain them are immutable.

The Forum's primary functions are to inform policy makers of the ecological and sociological changes arising from the rural land-use policies, and to identify modifications necessary to correct the European-wide slide into biological, and hence landscape and social, impoverishment. These are functions for which its pan-European network of scientists and expert advisors make it best adapted, whilst leaving conventional environmental lobbying to others.

## Shifting attitudes

Since the advance of the subsidy-sustained 'New Agriculture' in Europe, the penetration of policies by the conservation movement has been largely thwarted by factors which include:-

- fundamental economic factors working against nature conservation;
- the public subsidisation of industrialised farming;
- perceptions of 'national interest' in government in which conservation is at best secondary to short-term economic benefit;
- a reluctance to consider incorporating low-input farming methods and appropriate elements of 'traditional' farm practices into mainstream agriculture, largely because of a lack of understanding;
- a bureaucratic reluctance among public administrators and politicians to meddle in what seems new and innovative;
- the superficial nature of environmental education;
- the absence of a vision among conservationists of what is sought.



Colin Tubbs

### **A pony and foal grazing in a valley mire in the New Forest, Hampshire, UK.**

Such is my perception of circumstances in the UK. With variants, something of the sort seems to have been European wide. However, there does now seem to be a genuine shift of attitudes in favour of the integration of nature conservation into holistic rural strategies. The base for this is more secure than at any time in the past. Despite predictions of a backlash, the Green Advance has been all-permeating. The proportion of the European population which has some understanding about its environment, is relatively large, though still pathetically small. The Body Politic is moving progressively and steadily towards a conservation ethic. Politicians now say supportive things about the environment which would have been unthinkable 20 years ago. This shift is firmly enshrined in international law. The countries of Europe, and the European Union as a body, have entered into international conservation commitments which include the Ramsar and Bern Conventions and, more fundamentally, the Rio Conventions. Within the EU these are reflected in the Birds and Habitats Directives. All such pieces of international legislation have their weaknesses and escape clauses, but the conservation writing is plainly on the wall. The Forum's experience with the European Commission tends to confirm this view.

The thrust of the Forum's activities so far have been to provide the EC policy makers with data which clearly demonstrates the relationships between low-input, low-output, sustainable agriculture and high biodiversity, both as a general maxim and in specific regional cases. Case studies have been used to demonstrate the great regional diversity of low-intensity systems and thus the conservation difficulties of applying uniform rural policies. No two places are

similar. In the short term there are no insuperable difficulties about advising on the policies required by each set of circumstances, but in the longer term such a process will benefit from an overall vision of the kind of rural Europe which the Forum seeks and from a set of overall objectives to achieve it.

### **A Forum vision for 21st century Europe**

The underlying rationale to nature conservation generally and the Forum's functions in particular seems clear. The 20th Century perturbation in ecological history is fundamentally different from previous events. Previous perturbations changed the nature and abundance of plant and animal communities, but did not universally diminish biodiversity, although there were certainly impoverishing impacts at the regional level, the most notable in Britain being the draining of the Fens. The present events can be distinguished from others by massive external energy inputs into agriculture and afforestation, derived from the fiscal policies of national governments and the EU, and by large scale, widespread bio-impoverishment which is likely to be irrecoverable if permitted to continue.

No vision for the future of European biodiversity can realistically aspire to the faithful reconstruction of lost, or part-lost traditional management systems and the restoration of past landscapes. There have been too many social and economic changes to permit this. In particular, the aspirations of individuals will not always extend to a return to labour intensive methods of production and the associated low outputs and financial rewards. A vision can, however, focus on the removal or modification of the external factors which have given rise to the ecological problems. The exact nature of the Europe of our vision will depend on the extent to which it proves possible to shift

financial support structures away from agricultural production towards broader socio-economic objectives in which the maintenance of low-input, biologically diverse systems and their rural communities is a major objective, and in which the restoration, particularly from forest, of pastoral lands, such as the former heaths of the European littoral, will be possible. That the latter is practical has already been demonstrated in a limited way by the retrieval in the 1990s of areas of lowland heath in southern England, which were afforested in the 1930s and 1940s.

Our vision of Europe cannot be a pen portrait of a continent. We cannot aspire to achieve a predetermined length of hedges or area of heathland. We have to accept that having modified the adverse policies, the countryside which develops will depend on a diversity of factors which include economic opportunity, the limitations or opportunities presented by soils, altitude, climate and other physical factors (just as in the past), the whims and needs of individuals who own or rent the land, and the specific management policies applied to those specially designated areas within which nature and landscape conservation is of paramount importance.

Our vision of rural Europe is thus one in which a high proportion of the land surface comprises a diversity of low-intensity farm systems and the extensive tracts of unenclosed mountain, moorland, heath, uncultivated or intermittently cultivated steppe and dry grassland, and saltmarsh, which sustain their necessary elements of extensive pastoralism. It is a vision in which policies are tailored to the needs of individual regions. It is not a vision which denies intensive production, nor would it be possible to comprehensively turn back the clock in this respect, but we visualise policy limits to regions of high productivity, the tight management of pesticides and artificial fertilisers and the funding of research into management methods which will limit their necessity. There are important places in our vision for the particular conservation management of places of special national or international importance to nature conservation and biological science. Equally there is a place for innovation involving the creation of Wilderness Areas in which deliberate management is minimal, formed from derelict landscapes, from former intensively managed farmland, or from the new forests of the 20th century – but, emphatically not from the extensive pastoral lands forming integral parts of low-intensity farmland. It has to be acknowledged that there will be major political problems in achieving the shift in support structures necessary to achieve such a vision, but this is not a reason for aiming at some lower target. This would scarcely be visionary.

## Towards a Forum strategy

The Forum has a particular part to play in transforming such a vision into a 21st century reality. Its strengths lie in its ability to field a pan-European network of ecologists and land managers with expertise and knowledge in the ecology of rural land-uses and the application of science to rural policy making. It is independent of national or international pressure groups and has sought to generate objective and factual evidence about the relationship between farm support regimes and farmland biodiversity. At the same time, its individual contributors are involved because they are committed to conservation in a wide ecological and socio-economic sense. Against this background, the following main elements of a Forum strategy for working towards its vision suggest themselves:-

- With *The Nature of Farming* report as a starting place, to prepare a European inventory of the extent and characteristics of low-intensity farming systems.
- Identify policies which mitigate against the survival of low-intensity systems at the local and regional levels, and suggest

restorative fiscal, social and other structures. This is based on the notion that a primary need is to sustain the riches still remaining to us.

- Research, devise and propose methods of incorporating traditional management methods with new practices in order to help overcome the problems of reconciling individual social and economic aspirations with low-output farming.
- Support (and where relevant or possible help to promote) the production and marketing of regional products which sustain low-intensity systems.
- Research the practicability and promote the expansion and restoration of low-intensity systems, including the restoration habitats arising from extensive pastoralism, such as the lowland heaths, which have declined drastically in Europe.
- Research or promote research into the reduction in pesticide and chemical fertiliser use on intensive farmland, and identify and promote the shifts in policy needed to achieve reductions in the scale of use sufficient to restore significant

plant and animal diversity.

- Seek to determine the impacts of political change and in particular the possibility of EU membership, on former Eastern Bloc states; provide appropriate scientific, conservation and management advice ahead of or in harmony with EU membership negotiations; and provide support and advice for national institutions and governments in the countries of Eastern Europe seeking to maintain national biodiversity via the survival of peculiar national landscapes and farm systems.
- Advise policy makers in national governments and the EC on the basis of case studies and other informed scientific and socio-economic arguments. So far, the recipient of the Forum's conclusions and advice has been mainly confined to the EU via the European Commission. Should we expand our role to providing advice to national governments through appropriate Departments – and should we embark on lobbying as well the provision of factual information?

Colin R Tubbs

## Progress on implementation of the EU Habitats Directive in France, Germany and Ireland

As reported in the last edition of *La Cañada*, in July last year the French government suspended implementation of the EU habitats Directive in response to strong objections from a consortium of forestry, farming, fishing and hunting associations. The list of candidate Special Areas for Conservation (SACs) under preparation at that time comprised around 15% of the country. In January this year, implementation of the Directive was resumed with a considerably reduced list of potential SACs, reportedly amounting to approximately 2.5% of the surface area. The majority of the sites are already subject to some form of protection.

Germany continues to have problems transposing the Directive into national legislation and the Commission has initiated infringement proceedings in response. The difficulty appears to lie with the division of responsibility between the Federal government and the 16 Länder governments. In the case of nature conservation policy, the Federal government lays down framework legislation which the Länder implement. The federal Nature Protection Law contains an 'agricultural clause', according to which farmers and foresters are considered to be serving the goals of nature conservation if

they are acting in accordance with 'orderly agriculture' (a concept assumed to be equivalent to 'good agricultural practice'). Where the activities of land managers who are following 'orderly agriculture' are restricted, they are eligible for compensation which the Länder governments are obliged to pay.



Bob Gibbons

Consequently, the Länder are reluctant to implement the Directive under the current law.

A number of amendments to the Law have been proposed by the Federal government but in each case they have been rejected by the Länder authorities as none of them have adequately addressed the issue of compensation to farmers. Meanwhile, the Länder are preparing their lists of candidate sites. As with France, most candidate sites will be areas which are already protected under national or regional law.

In Ireland, also, the written constitution strongly defends private property rights. Apparently, landowners must receive compensation for any restrictions imposed on their activities. As with Germany, this has contributed to delays in transposing the Directive fully into national legislation. Recently, new legislation has been proposed which would provide payments to farmers in two ways. Those farmers whose land is designated as a SAC and who are enrolled in the Irish agri-environment Regulation 2078/92 scheme, known as the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS), would be eligible for an additional premium. Those farmers with SAC land and who are *not* enrolled in the REPS would be able to apply for compensation for restrictions to their activities on a site by site basis.

Karen Mitchell, IEEP, London

**Hay cutting in a riverside field in the Dordogne area of France.**

## Agri-environment measures and the Habitats Directive

National agri-environment programmes are coming to the end of their first five years and as such many Member States are planning to submit a second phase of programmes. This offers the European Commission the opportunity to provide guidance to individual Member States on programme design and implementation. Given that these measures have the potential to contribute significantly to the protection of Europe's biodiversity it seems appropriate to reflect on the link between 2078/92 and the Habitats Directive.

### Habitats Directive and LIFE

*Council Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and wild fauna and flora* ('Habitats Directive') was adopted in 1992 to ensure the conservation of biodiversity through the protection of habitats and species, by promoting different conservation measures. These measures should maintain or restore in a 'favourable conservation status' habitats and species of Community interest. The Directive sets out the establishment of a European Ecological Network, Natura 2000, as its main measure. Article 8 of the Directive expresses the commitment of the Community to aid Member States financially with its implementation and requests them to present their estimated cost to the Commission. At the EC level, there is only one financial instrument expressly linked to the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives, namely LIFE (Financial Instrument for the Environment based on Regulation 1973/92, amended in 1996). However, the LIFE budget is intended for specific conservation projects and is too small to make significant contribution to the implementation of Natura 2000. Other funding sources need to be considered to promote the concept of Natura 2000.

### Links with Regulation 2078/92

Regulation 2078/92, 'on agricultural production methods compatible with the protection of the environment and maintenance of the countryside' is a voluntary measure aimed at paying farmers for the provision of environmental goods. The regulation obliges Member States to introduce national schemes which can include, for example, programmes to encourage the appropriate management of habitats.

Many extensive farming systems of high nature value will be included within the Natura 2000 network and therefore, from a nature conservation perspective, it seems

logical to target Community resources such as Regulation 2078/92 to these areas. Also it would seem appropriate to use the EU Birds and Habitats Directives to define priority areas for implementation of agri-environment measures, while also making 2078/92 schemes available to farmers across the whole territory. In its current form Regulation 2078/92 does not define the characteristics of land which can benefit from aid. Member States can use a regulatory framework covering the whole country. They could also choose to focus implementation of 2078/92 on specific regions, species and habitats, as for example those listed in the Habitats Directive. The Habitats Directive requires that 'Member States shall establish the necessary conservation measures involving, if need be, appropriate management plans...(Article 6(1))'. Member States are obliged to ensure the adoption of measures, which could be composed of voluntary or contractual agreements. This has been the case in some countries where 2078/92 schemes are being used in designated areas. However, greater promotion of 2078/92 in Natura 2000 sites could be encouraged in many regions.

### Polluter Pays Principle

It is important to clarify 2078/92's role within the context of Natura 2000. Regulation 2078/92 was not designated to compensate farmers for regulatory obligations and hence should not be used for changes in management which are compulsory under national or community law. A number of difficulties may arise if 2078/92 was to be used in this way. First, the Regulation could come under criticism during the next round of GATT negotiations if it was considered to be compensating farmers for regulatory obligations. The EU could be accused of using 'green box' measures (i.e. measures which are decoupled from production and hence acceptable to our trading partners) to subsidise production thereby leading to market distortions. This could result in a phase out of 2078/92. Secondly, 2078/92 could be accused of bridging the Polluter Pays Principle if it was used to finance changes in management practices which are required by specific environmental laws.

However, there is nothing to stop Member States using 2078/92 for voluntary measures aimed at meeting defined nature conservation objectives under the Habitats Directive. Whether 2078/92 bridges the Polluter Pays Principle when used within

Natura 2000 sites will depend on the legal instruments used by Member States to designate Natura 2000 sites. It will also depend on the interpretation of the Polluter Pays Principle (PPP). Article 130r of the EC Treaty establishes the PPP. According to a number of legal interpretations it allows for the financing of clean-up measures from Community resources, and may even do so if the identity of the polluter is known. Such an interpretation of the PPP allows the use of 2078/92 within Natura 2000, even where Member States have defined strict management plans, including compulsory measures. A more rigid interpretation of the PPP could prevent the use of 2078/92 within these areas and lead to rather problematic situations where farmers within designated sites are no longer entitled to payments under 2078/92, while their neighbours outside of these zones could be paid for minor management changes which may still result in environmental degradation.

The rigid exclusion of 2078/92 funding from Natura 2000 which may result from a 'strict' interpretation of the PPP could lead to weaker implementation of the Habitats Directive, therefore Member States may choose to loosen the regulatory approach to Natura 2000.

In view of the above situation a specific Member State and case-by-case approach may well result, and may not lead to the most effective implementation of European policy. It, therefore, seems necessary to define a base line of management practices for specified habitats within Natura 2000 which could be mandatory and offer farmers incentive payments above these requirements. Such a voluntary approach will not be sufficient to ensure the protection of all important habitats and associated species. Regulatory measures will also be necessary. Where mandatory rules are used, other financial instruments may be needed to compensate farmers in special sites during a transitional period. The LIFE budget should certainly be increased to ensure this. The Structural Funds and Less Favoured Area (LFA) payments could also be considered for this purpose. Given that there is likely to be a significant overlap between areas included under the LFA Directive and those designated under the Habitats Directive, it seems appropriate to consider ways of using LFA payments to ensure compliance with management plans under the Habitats Directive during a transitional period. Nevertheless, it seems important, in the meantime, that 2078/92 schemes are targeted at areas of high nature value, many of which will be designated under the Habitats Directive.

*Natacha Yellachich, European Agricultural Coordinator, WWF European Policy Office, Brussels*



## Do as we say not as we do – a Hungarian case history with a message

The activities of a group of British farmers in Hungary have highlighted the wider threats facing wildlife in Central and Eastern Europe. Their action is threatening great bustards *Otis tarda*, but the case highlights a much bigger problem.

A somewhat surprising legacy of Eastern Bloc Communism, more accidental than designed, was the retention of widespread low intensity farming, with all its associated benefits for wildlife, especially farmland birds. Today, however, this legacy is being swept aside in a drive to modernise and intensify production in the region. Central and Eastern Europe looks set to suffer the environmentally damaging levels of intensification seen in Western Europe.

### Western investors

A number of factors are driving this change, not least the plan to incorporate Poland, Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic into the European Union. But more immediate is the activity of cash-rich Western European investors currently buying up cheap farmland in these countries. Their farming businesses are introducing highly efficient western farming methods into poorly managed ex-state farms and other under-performing areas of farmland, in an effort to maximise yields and make large profits. Intensive farming was pursued behind the iron curtain but inefficient state-run collectives failed to achieve the high yields of the West. Moreover, so-called 'marginal land', not amenable to the large-scale farm machinery of the State farms, was often ignored. The upshot today is a region of farmland comparatively rich in its biodiversity.

In addition to their farming activities, many foreign investors are speculating that land prices in the region will rocket once EU membership has been secured. As one RSPB spokesperson put it, 'We have a situation where British and other European farmers, armed with large EU subsidy cheques, are exporting to as yet unspoilt parts of Europe, agricultural practices known to damage wildlife.'

### A Hungarian example

BBC Radio's *Natural History Programme* (a weekly magazine programme that looks at wildlife and conservation issues) was contacted by BirdLife Hungary (the Hungarian Partner of BirdLife International) and told about a clash between British farmers and

local wildlife conservationists in eastern Hungary. The story began last year when a consortium of British investors (known as RNT) acquired the shares in a company called Bihar Kft which owned around 5,500ha of farmland in Biharkeresztes in eastern Hungary, part of the Great Hungarian Plain – an extension of the Russian Steppe. The land had been owned by a state farm. It is predominantly arable land ('ploughlands'), but around a third of the land is unploughed grassland. This grassland is the home to great bustards, a bird classified as globally threatened. Indeed, the area is one of the most important sites for the bird in Hungary, which, with an estimated 1,200 great bustards, has some 90% of the Central European population.



**Direct drilling into the steppe grassland at Bihar, East Hungary.**

In 1993, Bihar Kft's former owners signed an agreement with the local Hortobágyi National Park Authority (NPA) agreeing to certain restrictions on how some 1,400ha of their pasture land could be farmed in order to protect the great bustards. In September of last year, under the control of its new owners (RNT) and in breach of the 1993 agreement, Bihar Kft ploughed up some 150ha of pasture land. The NPA was outraged and demanded that the ploughing stop.

The NPA also attempted to fine Bihar Kft £9,000. The company managed to escape paying the fine on a legal technicality. Under Hungarian law the NPA only had power to levy fines where land was used for purposes other than the ones for which it is registered. It transpired that land referred to in the 1993 agreement and described as grassland was in fact registered as 'ploughlands' in the Land Registry Office.

Nevertheless, local people say that the land had never been ploughed – not in living memory at least. The confusion is thought to have arisen during the days of communism, when larger farm subsidies were attached to 'ploughlands' rather than pasture land, and corruption led to the deliberate faking of Land Registry records. Since January this year the NPA's legal powers have been strengthened but still they are doing battle with Bihar Kft over the protection of the great bustards.

### The investors response

In response, British farmer Tim Brown wrote to the NPA on behalf of RNT claiming that they were not made aware of any restrictions on the land when they bought Bihar Kft and in the circumstances denied that the restrictions applied to them as the new owners. Moreover, the letter stated that they planned to plough up 50% of the restricted land in 1996, the remaining 50% in 1997 and that they would only abide by any restrictions if they were duly compensated for doing so. They went on to suggest a sum of compensation of around £3 to £4 million. This sum is far in excess of the price paid for the land and is largely based on an estimate of profits the company could have made had they been free to farm the land as arable land. Although the NPA is considering buying areas of great bustard habitat in their efforts to protect them, the sum of money being demanded was, in the words of Gabor Szilagyi of the NPA, 'quite unrealistic' and could not even be considered.

In the event, Mr Brown's letter only served to highlight the gap between the two sides. On the one hand, you have the UK farmers quite accustomed to a system that compensates farmers when they are required to forego profits in the name of conservation, and on the other side there was an under-funded government body responsible for conservation, struggling to cope with the new commercial realities at work in Hungary.

In its defence, RNT argues that they were misled by the people who sold them the land; they are now pursuing legal action against them. They see nothing wrong in trying to secure 'just' compensation under Hungarian law for profits foregone. As for Mr Brown's letter, they say it was written at the request of the NPA who had asked them to state in writing what their intentions were regarding the land so that they could have the matter considered for a decision at a higher level. The NPA and BirdLife Hungary see things very differently. They say that the letter was high-handed in the extreme and amounted to a threat. RNT, they say, want as much money out of the land as possible and have no thought for the birds. If they did, they would stop destruc-

tive ploughing. Whatever the case may be, its plain that a resolution of the conflict is still a long way off.

BBC's *Natural History Programme* sent a reporter to the region to see the problem at first hand. On the day of that visit, Bihar Kft farmworkers were seen direct drilling maize into pastures inhabited by great bustards. Maize is precisely the kind of crop which the NPA wanted to avoid, as it provides a poor habitat for great bustards. During an interview on the programme, RNT spokesman Nick Yeatman-Biggs said that they decided to direct drill to get round the restrictions. He also made it clear that he could not give any undertaking that his company would stop further ploughing of grassland inhabited by great bustards – that, he said would have to wait the outcome of the negotiations taking place between Bihar Kft and the NPA. This was said in spite of the fact that RNT have been eager to stress their conservation credentials, pointing to Mr Yeatman-Biggs' own record in conservation in the UK.

### Two sides of the debate

As part of a wider defence of their actions RNT argue that they are acting in the best interest of Hungary and the great bustards. They say that by introducing western production values to the country they are revitalising the country's backward farming industry and bringing jobs and prosperity to the area. They point out that since the fall of communism, farm production throughout much of central and Eastern Europe has declined – as much as 30% in some regions. They add that great bustards flourish in arable farmland and a bigger threat to Hungary's great bustards is the fact that large areas of land are falling fallow. In short, foreign investment is the answer to Hungary's farming problems.

On the other side of the debate, RSPB spokeswoman, Hannah Bartram, challenged RNT's understanding of the habitat needs of great bustards, stressing the importance of a mosaic of grass and arable land to the bird. She went on to warn of the dangers facing wildlife in the region as a result of

uncontrolled foreign investment and the intensification of farming methods. The RSPB say that areas of rich biodiversity could end up as bleak as the arable lands of East Anglia, where intensive farming and the use of pesticides has been proved to cause major declines in the number and variety of farmland birds.

The overall message to emerge from this local debacle over great bustards is that the change presently sweeping through Hungary and elsewhere in Central and Eastern Europe needs to be carefully managed. If left to the free market there is a real danger that the wildlife of the region will be damaged. If former Eastern Bloc countries are to avoid repeating the mistakes made by Western countries, positive steps need to be taken to promote low intensity and low pesticide farming. This will mean the EU backing alternative models of agriculture for its new members and in the interim moving to fill the policy vacuum that has arisen in Central and Eastern Europe.

*Edward Odim, BBC, Bristol*

## Implementation of Regulation 2078/92 in Italy

In Italy, Regulation 2078/92 has been the most relevant intervention in agri-environmental issues and it will constitute the backbone of agri-environmental policy for the next two to three years.

The regulation foresees the development of zonal programmes containing the aid scheme in regions suited to the local charac-

teristics of the natural environment and the countryside. Only after the approval of the zonal programmes by the Commission, can regional administrations implement the aid scheme. Following the usual institutional procedure in force in Italy, the Ministry of Agriculture has delegated preparation of the zonal programmes to the individual regions. The 21 regional programmes were presented to the Commission by July 1993 with a separate national aid scheme for training courses and traineeships. In the second half of 1993 and in 1994 regional officials had several meetings with Commission officials in order to adapt the proposed programmes to Community rules

and limits on expenditure. For this reason only 13 regions implemented the regulation in 1994 with another five regions beginning in 1995. In 1996 only Campania was unable to implement any measures because the zonal programme had not been approved.

Most programmes show a zoning of areas with different environmental values in order to grade the incentive payments and the priority given to farmers' applications. Farmers in protected areas have the highest priority and together with organic farmers received the highest scheme payment. Environmentally Sensitive Areas (ESA) definition, however, does not exclude the farms outside of these areas from joining the programme. It is therefore a halfway situation between full segregation into well defined areas (such as ESA) and a more flexible integration over the wider countryside.

The zonal programmes include measures directly referring to the aid scheme (art. 2 of the Regulation) in almost all of the Regions. Compensation for substantial reduction of chemical inputs or for other extensification methods are proposed for all of the Regions, whereas the stocking rate reduction is not included in seven Regions. Other eco-compatible methods, such as upkeep of abandoned land and 20-year set-aside are envisaged in most programmes. The aid foreseen for public access land management has not been included.

In broad terms, Regulation 2078/92 contains two objectives, corresponding to two different lines of intervention: one concerns



Bob Gibbons

**Hay meadow and the Odle Dolomites, Puez-Odle National Park, Italy.**

reduction of the negative impact of agriculture on the environment through reduction in the use of chemical products and adoption of eco-compatible practices, while the other is aimed at compensating farmers for the positive management connected with countryside stewardship and environmental conservation. These two strategies are extremely mixed at a regional level, although the measures related to the former objective are needed most in the more fertile areas, and those aimed at environmental conservation mainly in more marginal areas. The allocation of funds for each measure in relation to the major ecological and land-use characteristics of the individual regions does not always appear to be followed in defining the programmes. In fact, it seems that Regulation 2078/92 is basically being used as an instrument to reduce the negative impact of intensive agriculture on the environment. The importance of more traditional agricultural practices is recognised in only the few regional areas where this has been accepted for a long time.

A comparison of the zonal programmes shows considerable differences in the expected impact of the aid scheme among the regions. Overall 13% of the agricultural area of Italy should be influenced by the measures, ranging from 22% of the farmland in Northern Italy to 6% in the South. Only 3% of the country's livestock would be affected by the agri-environmental measures, with little variation between regions.

The implementation after the first three years (1994-1996) involved 77,000 applications covering an area of 1,030,000ha and 25,500 livestock units. This represents more than 50% of the expected areas, but only 10% of the expected livestock units. Measures for reduction of fertilisers and pesticides have accounted for the largest share of participants (43,000) and areas (402,000ha). Positive implementation has been achieved from the eco-compatible measures mostly referring to pasture land, hedgerows and local breeds premiums, with 11,000 applications and 368,000ha of covered area. Organic farming has reached the third position with 5,500 applications and 157,000ha. The stocking rate reduction has completely failed. The other measures have had a limited participation by the farmers as expected.

These results, when compared with the forecast included in the zonal programmes, show a reasonable success for the implementation of organic farming (more than 75% of area involved over the expected area) and maintenance of the countryside and rearing of local breeds which have reached an appreciable implementation at around 50%. The implementation in terms of expenditure has been lower than was expected. After three years, at national level

50% of the EU funds has been spent, with large differences among regions (from 2.7% in Abruzzo to 135% in Tuscany).

### First evaluation

Regulation 2078/92 is an important test both of planning ability at the local level (in consideration of the new aims of the rural and agricultural policy) and of balancing the resources from public administrations at central and peripheral levels to obtain the maximum achievement of such objectives. The environment is likely to be an increasingly strong influence on the direction of agricultural policy at a European level, and hence at both national and regional levels also. Today, rural development, environmental protection and food quality seem to be the motivations that can increasingly justify allocation of public resources.

The implementation of such policies implies increased participation of both the central and local administrations and a need for them to co-ordinate planning, management and evaluation.

Regarding the planning function, a number of elements should be stressed, such as the need for better awareness of the most appropriate methods for identifying precise semi-natural communities and their threats, identification of the most effective management policies and possible environmental, economic and structural consequences of any actions taken. Also it is important to have better management and evaluation procedures to ensure that the processing and eventual monitoring of applications is carried out effectively.

The growing technical and institutional complexity of such policies as Regulation 2078/92 requires simplification of administrative procedures. A key to success will be the training and informing of farmers and, in the public agencies, the allocation of new institutional responsibilities.

### Extensive livestock productions and environmental policies

Extensive livestock systems (ELS) in Italy are found only in the hill and mountain areas where the soil fertility, climatic conditions and infrastructure do not favour agricultural intensification. The limitations of these systems compared with the highly productive plains is very apparent. Efforts to maintain farmers in marginal areas and to protect highly valued traditional landscape are extremely important. In many areas the only alternative to ELS is abandoning land. The sub-optimal size of the herds, inadequacy of the tenure system and the comparatively high land values and poor infrastructure are among the factors which make the maintenance of these systems difficult. Hence the importance of public intervention, which can provide a number

Bob Gibbons



**Ancient beech pollards in old pasture woodland, Abruzzo National Park, Italy.**

of options, from financial incentives and information to regulation.

With Regulation 2078/92, EU and Member States seem to have concentrated their efforts on economic instruments to solve agri-environmental problems. The decision of the regional administrations to implement most of the 2078 measures over the whole regional area has implicitly avoided the specific programmes really needed to sustain and support extensive systems. Specific measures to encourage mowing and grazing land are envisaged for only a few high mountain areas. In the other zonal programmes incentives for ELS are provided through aids for mountain pastures and the rearing of local breeds by measures to maintain abandoned farmland, reduce chemical inputs and convert arable to grassland. In all these cases environmental constraints already limit fertilisers and pesticides and livestock stocking density.

The relative success of the implementation of 2078/92 measures connected with ELS in some regions (mainly Piemonte, Valle d'Aosta and Trentino Alto Adige) comes from the well-established experience gained by these administrations in marginal areas policies. These new incentives join what has already been provided in the past through other types of public intervention (development of infrastructure and extension services) and a constant link with other economic sectors (most importantly, tourism). Such experiences prove that the policy of financial incentives is likely only to be effective in the long run in areas where specific land-use planning and full integration in the socio-economic system are pursued.

*Andrea Povellato*

## EU Inter-regional Agri-environmental Exchange Programme 1997/98

In the last few decades, changes in farming practice in many regions of the EU have had considerable impacts on biodiversity, soil, water and landscapes. In response, a number of national and EU environmental and agricultural policies have been adopted which aim to influence farming practices to the benefit of the environment. Progress on implementations of these integration measures varies between regions of the EU, with

some Member States, particularly those in the north, taking the lead.

In order to promote the sharing of information and experience of agri-environmental initiatives between Member States, the Institute for European Environmental Policy is operating a travel grant-aid programme. The 'inter-regional Exchange Programme 1997/98' provides financial support for mixed groups of farmers, advisers, administrators, environmental experts and others to undertake carefully prepared study tours to selected regions in other Member States. The programme is sponsored by DGXI (Directorate General for the Environment) of the EC.

The programme provides groups of farmers and others with the opportunity to meet organisations responsible for agri-environment and other schemes, to visit appropriate sites and discuss agricultural and environmental issues from all perspectives, e.g. from the development of measures, to their administration, to practi-

cal implementation at farm level and the results. Potential themes for study tours include: the management of farmland sites designated for protection under the EU Birds and Habitats Directives; incentive schemes being implemented under agri-environment Regulation 2078/92, including organic farming, grassland management, farmer training and habitat restoration; pollution control and implementation of the EU Nitrates Directive. There are also a number of important national or local initiatives which are being developed or are in operation, such as farm advisory services, education programmes, low input farming schemes, integrated pest and crop management projects, etc., which might also be of interest to groups.

For more information about the programme please contact Karen Mitchell at IEEP, Dean Bradley House, 52 Horseferry Road, London SW1P 2AG, UK. (Fax: +44 (0) 171 799 2244, e-mail: kmitchell@ieeplondon.org.uk).

## Announcements and Noticeboard

### The 6th Forum of Nature Conservation and Pastoralism – Luhacovice, Czech Republic 6-10 June 1998

After considering several options and possible venues for our biennial meeting, the Executive Committee can confirm that the 6th Forum will be held in Luhacovice, in the south-east of the Czech Republic, between Saturday 6 June and Wednesday 10 June 1998. The land surrounding Luhacovice forms part of the White Carpathian Landscape Protection Area and one of the outstanding features of this area is the survival of between 3,000 and 4,000ha of unimproved hay-meadows (see article in *La Cañada* Issue 3).

The proposed theme for the conference is *Managing high nature conservation value farmland: policies, processes and practices* and it is our intention that the meeting should focus on practical lessons to be learned from experiences in both the EU and central Europe. We are not only interested in comparing and contrasting

policies across these countries but also in considering how successful these policies have been when implemented on the ground in all areas of Europe. In particular we are keen to emphasise why a detailed understanding of the ecological links between farming practices and wildlife value is necessary in order to formulate clear and effective policies. The detailed programme is still in development but is likely to include:

- presentations on the success (or otherwise) of the different agri-environment schemes introduced within the EU;
- workshops concerned with the management of marginal and abandoned land (such as alpine meadows and pastures);
- presentations on the characteristics of high nature conservation value farming systems in central European countries.

Full details of the conference programme, fees and administrative arrangements will be finalised within the next few months. Anyone interested in attending the meeting in Luhacovice should complete and return the 'Expression of Interest' form enclosed with this issue of *La Cañada* – this will ensure that potential delegates receive further information and

booking forms immediately these become available.  
*Davy McCracken*

### Contributions to the Forum and *La Cañada*

As we explained in earlier issues, increasing numbers of people want to receive *La Cañada*. We are anxious to meet this need without reducing the other activities of the Forum, which exists on a very limited budget.

Following extensive consultation, we received a very positive response to the suggestion that recipients could contribute to the costs of producing and distributing the newsletter. Accordingly we introduced a number of ways to make payment and circulated a form with the last issue.

The annual rates (£10.00 for individuals, £5.00 for students/unwaged and £50.00 for institutions) were established in line with the results from the readers questionnaire, and represent exceptional value for money. We also tried to make it very clear that, if readers would like to continue to receive publications but had a difficulty in paying any or part of the contribution, all they had to do was to return the completed form with a note explaining this. Unfortunately we have to say

that the response to the subscription form has been very poor to date. Is this really because people are prepared to say they will contribute until they are asked actually to do so? Surely *La Cañada* readers are not like that! Perhaps we did not make the notice prominent enough, or perhaps people are just too busy to return forms.

We will try once more. A further form is enclosed with this issue. If you have already returned one, please ignore this (or pass it to someone else who might be interested). If you did not return the form last time, please do so now. Please do not leave it to do later. (If you are like me, that means that you will find it again after many months!)

To ensure that you continue to receive subsequent issues of *La Cañada*, PLEASE take a little time to complete and return the enclosed form now.

We have tried to make payment as easy as possible. We can accept payment by credit card or by British cheque or Eurocheque or Bank draft in UK pounds sterling. (Please do not send payments in other currencies; the contribution is so small that the entire amount is taken up in bank charges on cheques which require conversion.)

*Mike Pienkowski*

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.



JOINT  
NATURE  
CONSERVATION  
COMMITTEE



Edited and published by the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism.

This issue was supported by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee and WWF-UK.

The editors would like to thank the following: David Baldock, Davy McCracken, Karen Mitchell, Mike Pienkowski, Natacha Yellachich, Colin Tubbs, Andrea Povellato, Edward Odum, Vicki Swales and Hannah Bartram.

Views expressed within *La Cañada* do not necessarily reflect those of the editors, the supporting organisations or the publisher. Editors of this issue of *La Cañada*: Eric Bignal and Andrew Branson, Kindrochaid, Gruinart, Bridgend, Islay, Argyll PA44 7PT UK Telephone & Fax: +44 (0)1496 850330; e-mail: ericbignal@cali.co.uk Designed and produced by British Wildlife Publishing, Rooks Farm, Rotherwick, Hampshire RG27 9BG.