



High Nature Value grasslands: securing the ecosystem services of European farming post 2013

Message of Environment Commissioner Janez Potočnik

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Although I cannot be with you in person, I am delighted that this conference is taking place. High Nature Value grasslands are a key part of Europe's biodiversity. Grassland habitats and species are among the most threatened categories in Europe. We need urgently to make people understand the importance of High Nature Value farming. Farmers, like my own father back in Slovenia, already know. They know the impact of changing cutting times, but they also have to be able to make a living while keeping biodiversity alive.

Environmental experts and policymakers often view it as just another farming issue which puts pressure on nature. Not so. High Nature Value grasslands are often the result of centuries of co-operation between man and nature. This is why you can't just fence off this grassland and forget about it. It needs careful farming which respects local ecosystems. Despite this harmonious relationship, these grasslands are under threat from both underuse and also overuse. These grasslands can't compete with other more lucrative income types of farming. As policy makers, what can we do?

European Union environmental policy already has a number of policy instruments to address the problem. But we have to make agricultural policy stronger. In particular, we have to use the patchwork of existing measures, things like Natura 2000 payments and Less-Favoured Area payments, to work better.

I am working closely with my colleague and Agricultural Commissioner Dacian Cioloș who is very much aware of the importance of High Nature Value farming systems. We both know that we need Member States to implement effective policies at their level. We know that existing instruments such as the Agri-environment and Natura 2000 payments are simply not sufficient when it comes to very extensive and remote farming areas. However, we should ensure funding for High Nature Value farming systems also in the areas outside the scope of Natura 2000. My view is that we can do this best through the CAP reform.

This could be done, for example, by reallocating a portion of the direct payments specifically to High Nature Value farming. Providing public goods by targeting CAP resources in this way is, I think, the priority. It reflects wider public opinion about the importance of ensuring EU money is well spent. It is also the road we must go down if we want the CAP to be politically viable in the longer term.

Ladies and gentlemen, I am convinced, just as you are, that we need High Nature Value farming. It is a crucial part of our biodiverse world and we know now more than ever just how important economically-valuable biodiversity is to all of us.

This is why I welcome this excellent initiative and I wish you all a very successful day.