

Extensive grazing

Sustainable nature conservation on
pastures in the EU, the German federation
and its federal states



Extensive grazing in Europe

Extensively grazed grassland is a feature of many cultivated landscapes in Europe. Agricultural regions which have traditionally been used for grazing maintain a particularly rich biodiversity, contributing to income generation for the rural population. For many reasons, the retention of extensively grazed grassland is an important task for future agricultural policy. This paper summarises the associated arguments and requirements.

European challenges

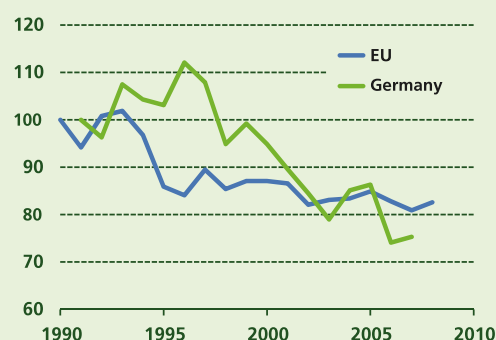
The European Union obliges its Member States to protect and develop biological diversity, water, bodies of water and the climate. Within this, by 2020, the target is to have halted the reduction in biodiversity and for measures to be in place to reverse this trend. A good conservation status must be established for the species and habitat types contained in the Habitats Directive. The European Biodiversity Strategy sets out specific targets and appropriate measures for achieving these targets.

All previous attempts have fallen a long way short of achieving these targets. Only 17% of the most endangered European habitats and species covered by the Habitats Directive have reached the desired conservation status. Meadows and wetland habitats in particular are most vulnerable. Grassland birds such as the lapwing, black-tailed godwit, red kite, skylark and whinchat, which have previously been common, are in serious decline – as evidenced by the Farmland Bird Index for 36 bird species.

So far, less than half of surface waters have achieved the good ecological status for bodies of water demanded by 2015 in accordance with the EU's Water Framework Directive because nutrient inputs – primarily from intensive farming – are too high.

Agriculture will need to take into consideration the impact of land use on climate change. Grassland and, in particular, damp grassland and bogs act as carbon sinks. In contrast, drainage and the ploughing up of grassland, intensive crop farming and intensive indoor housing of animals inflict a massive burden on the climate.

Farmland Bird Index



The Farmland Bird Index has fallen from the reference level of 100 in the basic year 1990/91 to 82.6 (2008) in the EU-27 and to 75.3 in Germany (2007) – more effort needs to be made to achieve the target value of 100.

FLOCKS OF MIGRATORY SHEEP AND HERDS OF CATTLE CHARACTERISE CULTIVATED LANDSCAPES IN EUROPE



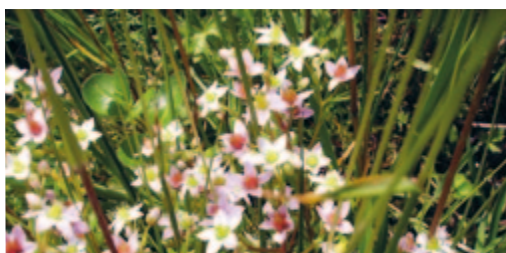
Multiple benefits from near-natural grazing

Agriculture has a major role to play in achieving European targets for the protection of biodiversity and environmental resources. The extensive use of grassland in the form of large-scale, near-natural grazing systems could make a considerable contribution to the protection of species diversity, water, soil and climate.

To name just a few examples:

... more plant and animal species

Modern sowed grassland often consists of a maximum of ten different grass and legume species. In contrast, 200 or more plant species thrive in large-scale, extensively used pastures. Unfertilised mountain meadows and grazed calcareous oligotrophic grassland are particularly rich in species. On a large scale, the number of species increases when grassland is grazed extensively and all-year round, leading to a greater diversity of habitat conditions for flora and fauna. Moreover, grazing landscapes constitute an ideal foundation for an effective biotope network.



TAKEN ROOT IN THE WET FOOTPRINTS OF GRAZING ANIMALS: HAIRY STONECROP, THREATENED WITH EXTINCTION

... reduced contamination of waterbodies

Too many nutrients, such as nitrogen and phosphates, leach into our waterbodies. Riparian buffer strips are unable to alleviate the problem adequately. The problem can be tackled much more effectively if the flood areas and sites close to groundwater are transformed from arable land to extensive grazing systems and are no longer fertilised. When practised on a large scale, the peaks of nutrient loads in bodies of water can be capped and, crucially, average loads reduced.

... Renaturalisation and flood sponge

With extensive grazing, riparian areas can also be included in the pasture – an ideal system for the economic revitalisation of streams and the implementation of the EU's Water Framework

Directive. Changing stream courses – a very important dynamic for the balance of nature – conflicts with the interests of land use to a much lesser extent. In the event of flooding, grassland areas in floodplains hold back the water, absorbing it like a sponge.



CATTLE HOOF-PRINTS IN RIPARIAN AREAS CONTRIBUTE TO GENTLE RENATURALISATION, PROVIDED LIVESTOCK IS LOW ENOUGH

... fewer greenhouse gases

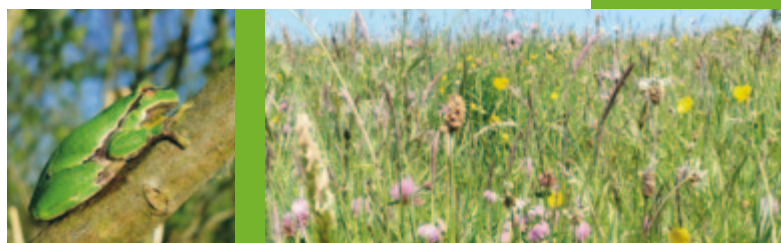
Near-natural grazing is considerably kinder to the climate than intensive grassland use. Even compared to mowing, grazing methods, which do not exploit the vegetation fully, reduce emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide. Abstaining from the use of fertiliser additionally intensifies the effect. For this reason, extensive grazing offers significant advantages that are conducive to climate protection.

... Grazing animals shape recreational landscapes

Consider what poorer places alpine pastures, coastal saline grassland and numerous upland meadows would be without grazing animals. They have a doubly positive impact on human recreation: the animals grazing on pastures enliven the landscape. They also help to sustain the landscape, creating diversified pastures and colourful meadows carpeted with flowers (after all, cattle also need hay in winter). In addition, grazing landscapes can help to secure jobs and generate income in both agriculture and tourism, particularly in remote rural areas.



THE TREE FROG BENEFITS FROM EXTENSIVE GRAZING AT POND EDGES; COLOURFUL FLOWER-RICH MEADOW FOR HARVESTING HAY AND ARNICA (FROM LEFT TO RIGHT).



Extensive grazing – a forward-thinking approach

Farms with extensive grazing livestock farming therefore represent modern, multifunctional agriculture, because they provide numerous public goods at low cost. They make a valuable contribution to effectively tackling the European challenges of protecting biodiversity, the climate and bodies of water. In return, they should be fairly rewarded.

In order to enable these contributions to be effective, grazing cannot simply be limited to small “residual areas” that nobody else can utilise. On the contrary: extensive grazing should take part on preferably large and coherent areas of land. The following, for example, are ideal landscapes for grazing:

- ... upland landscapes characterised by grassland,
- ... organic (boggy) soils, particularly those currently used as fields, following wetland rehydration,
- ... river and stream meadows in flood areas,
- ... former military areas.

Required changes to the Common Agricultural Policy

Integrate extensive grazing in the first pillar

1. Grant direct payments for all extensive pastures

There must be subsidies and direct payments for all areas used for extensive grazing – even in places where nature conservation and landscape management are the primary objectives of the agricultural use. This was how the European Court of Justice ruled in a leading decision (C- 61/09) in 2010. Extensive pastures are expressly eligible for funding even if the purpose is subject to the instructions of the nature conservation authority.

On the basis of this decision, the European Commission has to set a new course. For instance, eligible “permanent grassland” and “green forage crops” need to be redefined in accordance with Commission Regulation 1120/2009 Article 2c) within the definition of nature conservation. The objective must be to grant direct payments, without exception, for all extensively used agricultural areas, including also for heaths, gappy pioneer fields, arid grassland,

sedge stands, moist dips, riparian zones, reedbeds, traditional forest pastures and semi-open pastures with wood structures, as well as former military areas. Otherwise the objectives for Natura 2000 areas and special wildlife conservation measures cannot be realised adequately.

2. Make landscape features eligible for funding

It should be possible to integrate up to 30% of landscape features – in particular copses – into the eligible area, reducing administrative costs. After all, it is virtually impossible to measure copses, which are often eaten away and occurring in different parts of a pasture over the years, and to exclude them from the effective area. In addition, successional and scrub encroachment stages often substantiate the special value of extensive grazing landscapes. On the other hand, it must be possible to reduce excessive scrub encroachment. Due to this dynamic, landscape features on extensive pastures should be removed from the cross compliance (CC) obligation.



COPSES ACT AS A REFUGE AND HABITAT – UP TO 30% OF SUCH LANDSCAPE FEATURES SHOULD BE ELIGIBLE

3. Dedicated land use code for agriculturally used nature conservation areas

Practitioners require a separate land use code for "nature conservation areas used for agricultural purposes" (such as extensive pastures) to be able to integrate them into first pillar funding with minimal administrative effort and risk of sanctions. The provisions of cross compliance should not contradict this. The framework:

- ... Priority is given to nature conservation – agricultural production may, but need not necessarily, take place.
- ... Entire extensive pastures shall be considered eligible, including landscape features within them, as well as stony and rocky areas.
- ... Spinneys are not digitised in these areas and do not form part of the CC obligations.
- ... Nature conservation authorities should check the management of the areas based on nature conservation factors.

Continue to develop agri-environmental measures in the second pillar

4. Introduce stronger EU co-financing of agri-environmental measures for extensive grazing

With an EU co-financing rate of up to 90%, clearly defined extensive forms of grazing are to be obligatorily anchored in the Member States' subsidies policy because they deliver extensive benefits to society. In this way, financially weak federal states and Member States are also given the opportunity to offer attractive incentive programmes. Natura 2000 areas, other nature conservation focal areas and measures concerning the Water Framework Directive should receive the highest levels of co-financing.

5. Introduce obligatory agri-environmental measures for pastures throughout Europe

Two aspects of grazing methods should be made obligatory agri-environmental measures in Europe:

- ... **Creation of new extensive pastures** – *converting areas previously used for intensive farming into extensive grazing land* (e.g. fields being turned into grassland). Grazing livestock farming should therefore be able to become established in landscapes that were not previously core areas of nature conservation. In this way, extensive grazing can be developed on organic soils and in flood areas in place of arable use. Farmers must not be allowed to re-convert new pasture land into fields at a later date.
- ... **Promotion of existing grazing** – *extensive grazing of habitats that are valuable from a nature conservation perspective* (e.g. arid grassland, lowland bogs, heathlands, salt meadows, forest pastures, species-rich grassland). This measure would enable the natural balance to be achieved in important nature conservation focal areas, such as those in Natura 2000 and flood plains, as well as in hotspots outside Natura 2000.

6. Enable long-term planning stability

Pasture management requires long-term investment (pasture logistics, animals, etc.). For this reason, the long-term funding of the measures must be reliably guaranteed. To this end, it should be possible to offer long-term contracts valid for periods of up to 20 years.

EXTENSIVE GRAZING BY KONIKS, HECK CATTLE, GOATS AND SHEEP - NOT THE AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION BUT OFTEN NATURE CONSERVATION IS IN THE FOREGROUND





SOLITARY TREE,
AFFECTED BY
FORMER GRAZING

7. Refund transaction costs

Since participation is voluntary, attractive assistance packages are a basic requirement for the measures to gain acceptance. Agri-environmental contracts are typically associated with bureaucratic effort and a high risk of sanctions. Farmers will be required to expend considerable effort providing information and holding consultations as well as preparing and completing contracts. To ensure agri-environmental measures are taken up sufficiently in the future, these additional costs must be reimbursed as "transaction costs." The transaction costs should be calculated across the board at a fixed hectare rate of at least 20% of the support granted.



BRINGING DOWN CATTLE FROM SUMMER PASTURES

8. Integrate extensive pastures in the GAK

Extensive grazing measures must generally be included in the support framework of the joint task "Improvement of Agricultural Structures and Coastal Protection" (GAK) of the Federal Republic of Germany to support the co-financing of high-priority EU objectives in the federal states.

9. Establish landscape management programmes in the second pillar

In addition to agri-environmental programmes, Article 57 of the Council Regulation on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) – "Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage" – must be extended to all funding levels. Support should not be granted for fixed periods based on area but should be based on measures with flexible contract periods. Support should focus on the objectives of nature conservation and climate protection, as well as the EU's Water Framework Directive. Special circumstances where action has been taken to support extensive grazing must also be eligible – such as the maintenance of extremely steep hillside locations

through grazing or the removal of shrubs to enable the integration of areas into the agri-environmental measures. Investments in grazing logistics (troughs, enclosures, fences, pasture gates, pasture shelters) should also be included in this funding framework. In addition, the development of grazing management plans and the acquisition and husbandry of endangered species and breeds of grazing animals should be eligible.

It is necessary to be able to combine elements of agri-environmental programmes with aid from the first pillar on identical areas.

Offer environmental advisory services for farmers

10. Integrate environmental farming advice in the federal state programmes

Extensive farming advice is of central importance for farms that keep grazing animals. Such advice should cover at least the following elements: participation in agri-environmental programmes and their dovetailing with other funding schemes, such as direct payments and landscape management support, soil protection, water protection (in particular, the implementation of the EU's Water Framework Directive), climate protection, land consolidation, grazing management and planning, hygiene, building laws, individual commercial aspects (e.g. products, marketing, advertising), inter-farm cooperation (e.g. pastoral communities).

Consultancy increases the acceptance and use of subsidies, thus improving the effectiveness of programmes. It reduces the risk of penalties for farmers who make use of the programmes.

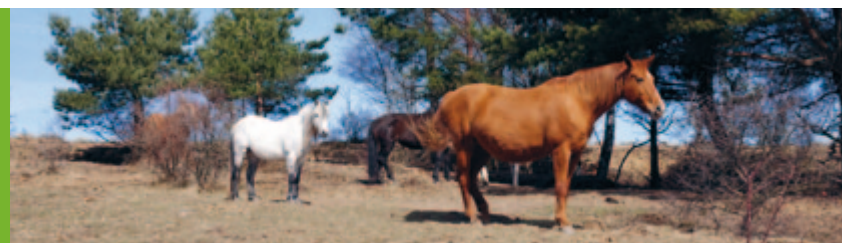


ENVIRONMENTAL ADVISORY SERVICES ON WINTER GRAZING

The EU should work towards integrating such advisory services for extensive livestock farms compulsory into the countries' programme planning and financing. It should be co-financed by the EU via EAFRD.



RHÖN SHEEP, HORSES
AND GOATS ON PASTURE





Cut red tape

11. Adjust animal husbandry regulations to grazing

It is virtually impossible to apply current animal husbandry provisions to hardy breeds in large-scale grazing landscapes and to traditional shepherding. The current volume of legislation can be considerably reduced without lowering standards of food safety and veterinary hygiene:

... **Identification of animals:** It is very difficult and dangerous to capture newly born animals on large-scale pastures for identification. The European Commission permits animals to be identified when they leave the stock or the suckler herd or in specific cases (bovine animals: Commission Decision 2006/28/EC; equidae: Commission Regulation (EC) No 504/2008). Member states should implement this increased level of flexibility.

... **Veterinary medical surveillance:** The deadlines stipulated in the Livestock Epidemic Act (TierSG) must be shaped more realistically and flexibly – with inconspicuous stocks just one blood test prior to leaving the stock, for zoonoses (brucellosis, leucosis, tuberculosis) just one annual random sample.

... **Slaughtering:** For reasons of safety, animal protection and the quality of the meat, it is preferable to stun or destroy (by shooting) grazing animals kept outside all year round in their habitat. This possibility must be listed at EU level in Annex III Section III of Regulation (EC) 853/2004/EC, in particular for hooved animals of the bovine genus that are kept in suckling or extensive grazing herds or for landscape management. Until then, a regulation should be passed by the BMELV at national level in accordance with Article 10 (3) of Regulation (EC) 853/2004/EC. Mobile slaughter boxes must be recognised as part of the slaughterhouse.

... **Carcasses:** To promote numerous highly endangered invertebrates and birds of prey, it would be highly desirable to leave large medication-free carcasses in special areas as an exception. In large-scale grazing landscapes this should also be possible in Germany, as is the case in the Netherlands, under strict guidelines and with scientific monitoring. Regulation (EC) No 1774/2002 (European Parliament 2002) allows exceptions.

Summary of required political changes

- Integrate extensive grazing in the first pillar of CAP:
 1. Grant direct payments to all extensive pastures
 2. Gross principle: pastures should include up to 30% landscape features without affecting eligibility
 3. Standard special code for all extensive pastures
- Continue to advance agri-environmental measures (AEM) in the second pillar:
 4. Greater EU co-financing of AEM for extensive pastures
 5. European-wide obligatory AEM for pastures: extensive pasture (a) on previously intensively used areas (such as fields in floodplains); (b) in habitats that are valuable from a nature conservation perspective
 6. Longer contract periods for the purpose of planning reliability
 7. Create incentives by reimbursing transaction costs with a minimum 20% surcharge
 8. Integrate extensive pastures in the joint task "Improvement of Agricultural Structures and Coastal Protection" (GAK) in the Federal Republic of Germany
 9. Establish landscape management programmes
- Environmental advisory services for farmers
 10. Offer environmental advisory services for farmers, co-financed by the EU via EAFRD
- Simplify regulations:
 11. Extensive grazing needs tailor made regulations for animal identification, veterinary medical surveillance, slaughtering (shooting on the pasture, mobile slaughter boxes), controlled leaving of carcasses

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Extensive grazing is considered to be a key tool for tackling numerous challenges together with agriculture. These challenges include protecting species diversity, the climate and bodies of water, as well as developing attractive landscapes. The German Association for Landcare presents proposals for extensive grazing to be embedded more firmly in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).