La Cañada

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EDITORIAL
Identifying High Nature Value farmland

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Cattle on the flower-rich High Nature Value farmland of the Gargano peninsula, southern Italy.

In 2003 the European Environment Agency (EEA) commissioned a pilot study on possible approaches for identifying High Nature Value (HNV) farmland in the EU-15 countries. EFNCP was a member of the project team, which combined our direct experience of HNV areas with data processing and interpretation skills of the other partners. The reasons for that work and some of results are summarised in a joint EEA/UNEP report (see http://reports.eea.eu.int/report_2004_1/en).

Amongst the innovations of the study was a first attempt at defining HNV farmland. After much thought and debate, we agreed on: *'those areas in Europe where agriculture is a major (usually the dominant) land use and where that agriculture supports or is associated with either a high species and habitat diversity or the presence of species of European conservation concern or both'*.

In the report we also suggested that for ease of thought, HNV farmland should be divided into three types. Type 1 is farmland dominated by semi-natural vegetation. Type 3 is farmland that is important for a small number of rare or threatened species (often birds), but otherwise is of low intrinsic nature value, both in terms of species and habitat diversity.

Type 2 is by far the most difficult to define. This farmland is characterised by a mosaic of small-scale features, some natural, some artefacts, for example, field margins, remnant areas of semi-natural vegetation, ponds, earth banks and stone walls, etc. These features are an integral part of most Type 2 farmland and the reason for this is that the working part of the farms is 'low-intensity'. What that term means in practice is, of course, to some degree still dependent on the productive capacity of the land, and further investigation of the geographical variation in the relationship between farming intensity and biological value is an urgent need.

The brief for the project team required investigation of a number of data sources, all of which had to be available at a European scale. Our detailed conclusions can be read elsewhere, and we were not always able to come to a consensus even within the team, but it is fair to say that we all agreed that local data were essential to refine (or amend) conclusions arrived at using broad-scale information.

Although the EEA was keen to produce a map of HNV farming areas in Europe, one very important lesson learnt during the project was that data that are not mappable can nonetheless be very informative, and that the legitimacy which mapping gives to information can sometimes lead the analyst and especially the general observer astray. In all cases, one needs to refer back to real life!

Reactions to the project

Early last year, EEA convened an expert meeting to discuss some reactions to the project and to their joint report with UNEP. The range of responses was very interesting.

Portuguese civil servants had grasped the concept wholeheartedly and saw its significance for their country. The difficult decision now to be made was what impact this acceptance would have on policy measures: would it be narrowly focused or more wide-ranging?

La Cañada 19

Contents

Finnish experts had grave issues with the assessment of HNV farmland in their country, but rather than condemn the HNV farmland concept, these weaknesses had spurred them to a different approach. The problem for them is that while they seemed to accept the validity of the land cover approach used by the project, the land covers that they see as HNV are at a smaller scale than the CORINE interpretation of satellite imagery that was used.

For someone living in a very open landscape in Scotland, accepting, as the Finns seem to, that any non-wooded farmland should be classified as (essentially) Type 1 HNV and not have to pass through the filter of some sort of Type 2 test, was very difficult!

In Slovakia, researchers with the environmental NGO Daphne were using another approach using the national survey of semi-natural grasslands. While the mapping was not quite complete, they were already in a position to compare this data to other more policy-related information. The degree of match with IACS mapping of farms was to me particularly significant. It was generally good, but some of the the mismatches were important and highlighted issues which will have to be resolved (e.g. communal grazings) if support is to be properly delivered to this part of Slovakia's HNV grasslands. In how many other countries do such problems exist?

In the Netherlands presentation, the problem it seemed to me was defining the 'lower limit' of HNV. They have produced data sets there are extremely good and fine-scaled but large areas of semi-natural farmland are rare. Nevertheless, I was very impressed by the work presented.

Experience tells us that the Dutch are not holding up their most interesting farmland, thereby underlining a need to have an *alternative* focus to the 'crown jewels' of HNV farmland which is the subject of work elsewhere in Europe. Indeed, the Dutch have provided funding to many of the surveys in Central and Eastern Europe. However, we need to be careful to defend the fact that some Member States have more HNV farmland than others, and that any move to concentrate on the best that a Member State might have to the detrement of the best that *Europe* has to offer, should be resisted.

Looking forward

Where does HNV go next? The stakes are high. We had a very explicit commitment at Madrid in 2003 (*La Canada 18, Noticeboard*). Now the European Commission has raised expectations even further. The draft Rural Development strategy guidelines, issued in July 2005 (*see Noticeboard*, page 16), states that 'to protect and enhance the EU's natural resources and landscapes in rural areas, the resources devoted to Axis 2 [land management] should contribute to biodiversity and preservation of high nature value farming and forestry systems' should be one of only three priorities for this theme of Community policy.

The Joint Research Centre is undertaking development work at a European scale. However, my feeling is that we need some 'ground-truthing' – some touchstone at a local and a national level as to what HNV farmland really means (see "Saltus" article, page 9).

In Ireland, there is already research planned into how to better define HNV farmland there (see page 15).

EFNCP hopes to be part of this process. We are going to seek funding for some regional workshops in Spain, Romania and Bulgaria. We are also discussing with UNEP how we might co-operate at a pan-European level.

'Study nature not books' said the philospher Agassiz; 'study HNV farmland not policy papers' might be an appropriate rewording.

Gwyn Jones

Important Plant Areas and High Nature Value Farmland in Bulgaria

Plant diversity in Bulgaria

Bulgaria has one of the highest levels of plant diversity in Europe and contains one of the world's Centres of Plant Diversity, the Balkan and Rodopi Mountains. Many of these plant species, including a high number of endemics, are found in agricultural areas and rely on traditional grazing and agricultural patterns to survive. Bulgarian agriculture has gone through a period of sustained change through the 20th century and will certainly change with accession to the EU. A national grassland survey and a preliminary Important Plant Areas (IPA) project have been completed recently and they provide much valuable data with which to identify agricultural areas rich in biodiversity. The question remains whether or not new policies, such as the Kiev Declaration on High Nature Value farmland and EU agricultural and nature conservation programmes, will save Bulgaria's internationally recognised plant diversity.

In 2003 Europe's Environment Ministers committed to identifying High Nature Value farmland and taking conservation measures to conserve these areas. In practice, the tools for conserving them are essentially protected area systems, either at a national or European scale, such as the Natura 2000 network of the Habitats and Birds Directives, or agricultural policy, particularly the Second Pillar of the EU Common Agricultural Policy, with its Rural Development Programme, Agri-environment Schemes and Less Favoured Areas Programmes. When Bulgaria joins the EU in 2007 the Natura 2000 network does have the potential to provide improved protection for selected sites. However, the current EU Agri-environment programme has yet to demonstrate that it can provide clear conservation benefits for biodiversity.

Important Plant Areas

The IPA Programme aims to identify the best sites for wild-plant conservation using consistent criteria and sound data, through national networks of botanists and specialists. The methodology is based on three criteria (threatened species, botanical richness, and threatened habitats) and is designed to support and underpin existing European conservation programmes such as the Bern Convention, the EU Habitats Directive, the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy (PEBLDS), and the identification of High Nature Value (HNV) Farmland. The IPA results for seven countries in Central and Eastern Europe have just been published and they underline the value of grasslands as biodiversity-rich habitats and the consistent threats of land abandonment and agricultural intensification (Anderson *et al*. 2005). These results also show that not all of the current IPAs have been identified as Natura 2000 sites:

- of the 800 IPAs identified, 56% contain threatened grassland habitats;
- 27% of IPAs are threatened by land abandonment and 29% by agricultural intensification (grazing, general and arable).

The Bulgarian national IPA team have identified 114 potential IPAs through analysis of existing data in the REC 'Plants Along the Borders' Project. Bulgaria contains 13 threatened grasslands habitats from the EU Habitats Directive and the Bern Convention, and 52 potential IPAs

contained good examples of these pastures and meadows. The number of IPAs identified for grassland habitats will undoubtedly increase based on future work and on the results of the recently completed grassland inventory (Meshinev *et al*. 2005).

Agriculture in Bulgaria

Bulgarian agricultural systems traditionally relied on arable and some stock-rearing in the lowlands, and pastoralism in the highland areas. Until the 1950s, 80% of the population lived in the villages. In the lowland areas, the agricultural land was divided into parcels with strips of wild areas ('sinuri') between the parcels. Traditionally, pastoralism in the highlands was based on natural meadows and pastures, with the herds being moved annually to the sub-alpine pastures for the summer. One nomadic ethnic group, the Karakachans (or Vlachs), practised transhumance, moving large herds from the mountain areas of Rila and Stara Planina to Greek pastures in winter. These long lasting agricultural systems provided a stable base for a rich biodiversity to develop.

After the Second World War, during the Socialist period, agriculture changed significantly. The land was collectivised and there was intensification of arable cultivation and stock breeding, including increased use of chemicals and machinery. In the lowland areas, the land parcels were united and the 'sinuri' ploughed up. In north-eastern Bulgaria large areas of pasture and meadows were ploughed up for cereal production. In the lowland areas the use of chemicals was one of the most important negative pressures for biodiversity, whereas in the mountain areas the closing of borders and the introduction of intensive farming with new breeds and forage feeding led to a rapid reduction of grazing in large areas of the mountains. One of the most important consequences of the economic changes during this period was the demographic change. By the end of the 1980s only 32% of the population lived in the villages and a large part of those inhabitants were retired.

The next major phase of agricultural change occurred after the fall of the Iron Curtain in late 1989 and the consequences of this change are still being felt. The cooperative farms were broken up but the process of land reform started 15 years ago and is still not complete in some areas. The consequences for plant diversity of these agricultural, legislation and demographic changes are varied and dynamic. Land abandonment affects arable land (up to 18% abandonment for the past few years), pastures and meadows. There are major changes in the numbers of stock and the intensity of grazing – in 1985 there were 8,609,000 sheep and in 1995 there were 3,383,000). The use of chemicals has also changed dramatically. Since 1995 there have been economic changes such as the availability of credit for seasonal work, seed, fertiliser and investments, and since 2001 the Special Accession Programme for Agricultural and Rural Development (SAPARD) has been implemented in Bulgaria.

High Nature Value farmland at two IPAs in Bulgaria

Rila Mountains

The Rila Mountains proposed IPA covers the area of Rila National Park and and part of the Rila Monastry Nature Park. Rila, in the south-west of the country, is the highest point in the Balkans and is hydrologically important in Bulgaria. Rila has a high level of endemic flora and fauna and rich habitat diversity. The area was proposed as an IPA on the basis of seven threatened species and 12 threatened habitat types. Two of the threatened grassland habitats found in Annex 1 of the EU Habitats Directive (6250 'mountain hay meadows' and 6170 'alpine and sub-alpine calcareous grasslands') cover about 25% of the area of the IPA. The use of the pastures and the meadows is traditional at the site, although the grazing pressure has varied over time.

Both Rila and Rila Monastry NP have agreed management plans. The Rila plan illustrates that the changes in human activity over the past 15 years, declines in building, pasture pressure and summer tourism, have had a positive effect on the regeneration of forest, pastures and populations of rare species. Changes to the pasture communities are very significant. Large areas that were dominated by *Nardus stricta* have become dominated by *Festuca vallida*, *F. airoides*, *F. riloensis*, *Belarfiochloa violaceae*, *Poa alpina*, etc. However, the abandonment of some pastures has led to them being overgrown by the juniper *Juniperus sibirica* and the broom *Chamaecytisus absinthioides*.

There is now a management system for the whole territory in which five zones are recognised:

- strict reserve,
- zone with limitation of human activities,
- zone for intensive tourism,
- infrastructural zone, and
- poly-functional zone.

Pasture is the only agricultural activity permitted and there are accepted standards (1 cow per 0.8ha and 1 sheep per 0.2ha in the zone with limitation of human activities, 1 cow per 0.4ha and 1 sheep per 0.1ha in the poly-functional zone). There are marked routes for the flocks and herd movements and changes of pasture are obligatory. There is also a programme to evaluate the productivity of grass communities and the conservation status of important species in progress.

The Rila Mountains proposed IPA has several features which qualify it to be included as a Natura 2000 site under the EU Habitats Directive.

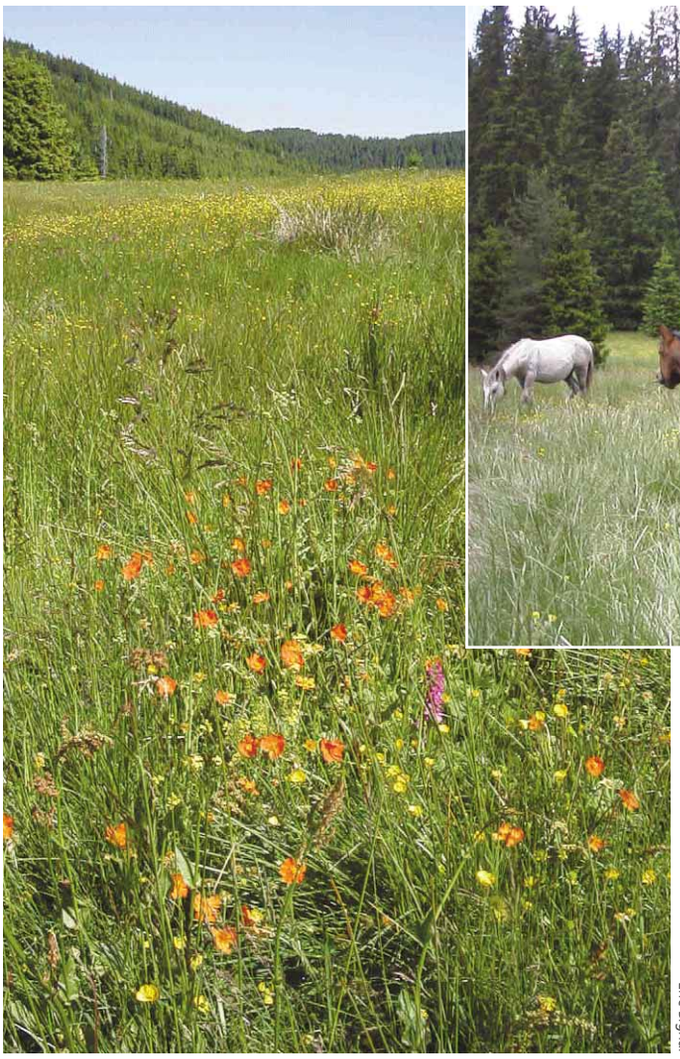
Samokovski Livadi (Samokov Meadows)

This proposed IPA is a large meadow complex formed as part of a Pleistocene kettle basin and branched river system between Rila National Park in the south and Vitosha Natural Park in the north. It is located in the municipality of the town of Samokov at an altitude range of 870-1,010m.

Within the meadow complex there are a variety of soil types and moisture regimes, which produces a diversity of hydrophilous and mesophilous plant communities. This area has one of the best examples of lowland hay meadow (6510, Annex 1, EU Habitats Directive) in Bulgaria and has a large range of plant species. There are many boreal and subboreal species, which are rare in Bulgaria, and in the strips of sand there are Balkan endemic species such as *Armeria rumelica*, *Dianthus moesiacus* and *D. quadrangulus*. The total area of the meadows is about 5,700ha and the potential IPA also includes about 2,800ha of adjacent pasture.

There are 13 villages in the basin, as well as Samokov town. The meadows are privately owned and the pastures are owned by the municipality. Traditionally, meadows are an important resource for the inhabitants and are used to support both cattle and sheep. A large part of the meadows are cut twice a year. Grazing on the meadows is allowed until the middle of April and on the aftermath. During the Socialist period the stock was united in the co-operative farms, but individual families used to own a cow or up to five sheep. The meadows were included in the co-operatives and a common management system of mowing, channel irrigation and fertilising was in use.

After 1989, the former owners received back their land and part of the co-operative stock. People still maintain their traditions of stock breeding but there are significant changes. The age structure of the inhabitants means that families keep only one or a few animals. Only a few people keep between 10 and 20 cows. Parts of the meadows are not cut but burned in February. Lots of people now prefer to grow potatoes as the climate is appropriate and they receive a better income from potatoes than from stock rearing. Sometimes they plough up meadows to grow potatoes, use the new fields for a few years and then plough up a new patch. This has led to a lot of negative changes for



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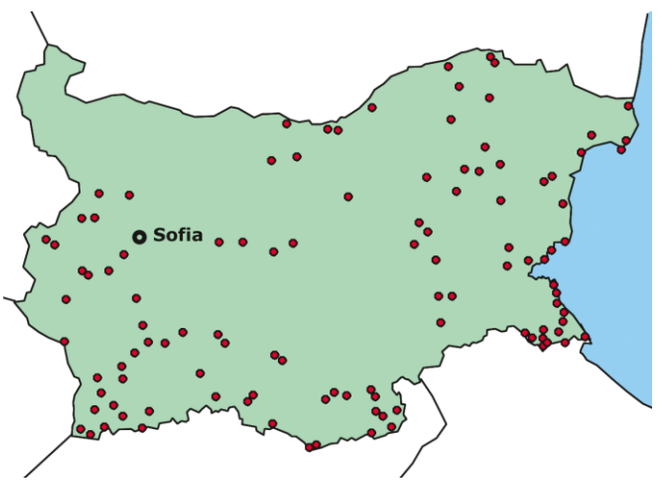

Plantlife International

Above **Flower-rich grassland in Bulgaria.** Above right **Ponies grazing in wood pasture in the western Rodopi Mountains.** Right **The locations of the proposed IPAs in Bulgaria.**

plant diversity such as invasion by weeds, changes in the hydrology, and the extinction of species which are sensitive to chemicals, such as orchids.

According to the strategy for the development of Samokov municipality (2001) tourism is the first priority, as the Rila Mountains NP offers excellent possibilities; it is the largest winter resort in Bulgaria and includes Borovetz. In the area of agriculture, potato production is a priority and there is a programme for its development. Stock-rearing is partly subsistence and partly to supply the local tourist industry. It should be noted that, for the moment, the local people do not receive any support for stock rearing.

The current situation for these plant rich grasslands is not optimistic. A lot of work needs to be done to save the meadow complex. Some positive prospects are the proposal for including this area in the EU Natura 2000 network and the work of Vitosha Natural Park staff for the development of the northernmost villages. On the basis of the data of the new grassland inventory (Meshinev *et al*. 2005) there are contacts with the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry for including this area in the pilot regions for the Agri-environment schemes.

Conclusions

Much of the background work to identify Bulgaria's High Nature Value farmland is already in progress. Projects such as the grassland inventory and the IPA inventory will provide a list of sites to be targeted for increased protection, for example, under the EU Natura 2000 network, and sites to be included in Rural Development Programmes such as Agri-environment schemes.

Management plans such as that of Rila National Park are beginning to produce conservation benefits for the rich plant and animal communities, but many protected areas have no such plans or no means of implementing them. Inclusion in the Natura 2000 network is one way of increasing the focus on such sites, but national governments and the European Commission still have to demonstrate they will provide adequate funds to manage the sites in this network.

Areas such as the lowland meadows in Samokov demonstrate that systems such as traditional pastoralism need to be supported by targeted funding if these High Nature Value areas are to be conserved.

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High Nature Value farming systems in Spain: experience and future prospects

Juan Oñate

Late summer in the Sierra de Guadarrama – a mix of semi-natural vegetation and pasture used by marginal farming systems.

Specialists are generally unanimous in valuing as positive the effects of the CAP on the Spanish agricultural economy since accession to the EEC in 1986. In spite of the constraints of its physical environment and climate, Spain has become a medium-sized agri-food power in recent decades. The CAP has supported the market-oriented development of those Mediterranean products with higher potential, while at the same time contributing in a significant way to the maintenance of the marginal and fragile inner region's arable cultivation.

The main (single?) strategic instrument for rural development in the country during the past century, the Irrigation Policy, has contributed markedly to these results, having received substantial European funds. The resulting expansion of the horticulture, olive oil and wine sectors could be considered inevitable.

Publicly promoted irrigation in inner regions has had an unexpected result beyond its social role in maintaining populations in declining territories. It now supplies intensive agri-husbandry which has developed and consolidated during recent decades, and which competitively delivers pig, sheep and cattle meat for home consumption and export. A 'productivist logic', centred on trying to overcome the structural deficit that had traditionally encumbered Spanish agriculture before EEC accession, has successfully developed to take advantage of CAP regimes in recent years.

However, the main victim of this modernisation process has been the social and environmental value of HNV farming systems. Nevertheless, Spain still holds the greatest share of these systems in a European context, with species and habitats, which are highly valued by European directives, existing well beyond the boundaries of Natura 2000 sites. Following the CAP mid-term review there will be a new rationalisation of agricultural spending that will result in new (perhaps more intensive) productive systems. At the same time there is a requirement to maintain and enhance remaining HNV farming systems. Unless full advantage is taken of the available opportunities, those areas marginalized by the recent modernisation process of Spanish agriculture will be left in a precarious situation (both in social and environmental terms).

My thesis is that in future the most appropriate objective of maintaining incomes for marginal holdings in less intensive areas should not be linked to increasing output but to biodiversity conservation. The challenge is enormous.

What do we have?

Analysis of the current extent and state of HNV farming systems, which in Spain are often characterised by their 'landscape mosaics' at all scales, is severely hindered by the recent drastic changes. The available agricultural statistics are not able to reflect, at adequate scales both in space and time, the necessary management variables (i.e. stocking density or agro-chemicals use). In Spain, a new difficulty is the need to record land use variables that are rapidly changing (i.e. irrigation expansion, fallow reduction, shrub encroachment of pastures or infrastructures and urbanisation developments). Such data collection seems to be of no interest to the authorities (national or regional). Furthermore, spatial information at a national scale on the distribution and trends of the main vertebrate species has only become available since 2003, whilst adequate habitat mapping of the country is only now being developed.

The current state of HNV farming systems in Spain strongly reflects the impact of this recent intensification of Spanish agriculture. Surviving extensive husbandry systems in the Atlantic region, almost dismantled following the introduction of the CAP dairy regime and milk quotas, are in a delicate situation, threatened by widespread abandonment of communal pastures and over-grazing, as well as pollution around farms.

In the Less Favoured Areas in the *páramos* (upland moors) and inner mountain ranges, rural development initiatives, along with tourism and afforestation, have not managed to stop the accelerating trend for depopulation and the decline in agricultural workers, especially shepherds. As a result, scrub encroachment of pastures and pseudo-steppes provides clear evidence on the ground of the abandonment of traditional livestock rearing.

The fate of *dehesas* and extensive pasturelands in western Iberia and the Sierra Morena has been somewhat better. Here the less financially marginal and often large estates have benefited from pork-rearing and game management. Regarding olive groves, the simultaneous enjoyment of both the high market competitiveness of olive oil and generous subsidies has almost wiped off the map the traditional low-yield extensive groves. At the same time, this has resulted in the expansion of intensive new plantations along mountain fringes and cereal valley bottoms (the next farm census can be expected to demonstrate the brutal change, for instance in Andalucía).

But probably it is the cereal pseudo-steppes (extensive rotations of cereal and leguminous crops with fallows and pastures, occupying no less than 10 million hectares of the country) that constitutes the most profoundly transformed HNV farming system. This type of environment has almost disappeared in the south-west coastal regions of Almería and Murcia, as a

consequence of the spectacular expansion of semi-industrialised horticulture production. Biodiversity has been ruined by the expansion of irrigation over vast areas of traditional cereal landscapes in the Guadalquivir river valley and the lowlands of the Tagus and Duero rivers. Even without the irrigation impacts, there are few cereal areas in the vast interior regions that have not undergone structural simplification (through land consolidation increasing unit size at the expense of field margins, uncultivated land and river fringes), over-use of production factors (such as machinery and herbicides) or habitat homogenisation (through reduction of leguminous crops and fallow land).

What has been done in this respect?

The inertia generated at all levels by this production logic (National and Regional administrations, farmers' organisations, agro-chemicals lobby, etc.) has effectively marginalized the various Agri-environment initiatives emanating from the CAP in recent decades. The typical argument has been that the demographic equilibrium hangs on the maintenance of farm incomes, and that this in turn rests exclusively on production incentives. As a consequence, the take-up of Second Pillar initiatives has always been low, and even when implemented, their design has always made a priority of evenly distributing the available funds among potential beneficiaries.

The first opportunities to declare Environmentally Sensitive Areas (Regulation EEC 1760/87), and to promote extensification (EEC 1760/87) and set-aside (EEC 1094/88), were totally disregarded, as the authorities saw them as inappropriate for already extensive farming systems. Compensatory allowances in Less Favoured Areas have always been approached in terms of 'one little cup of coffee for everybody', without any sound environmental focus in either design or management.

Implementation of the first Agri-environmental package (EEC/2078/92), in spite of its split-level design, horizontal measures for the entire territory ('broad and shallow') and zoned measures for specific actions ('deep and narrow'), was delayed until 1995. Even then, take-up was below 30%, with the 'lack of budget' as the repeated official explanation. In spite of its bigger budget, it does not seem that the second package (EC/1257/99) will be able to reverse the trend in most regions, given its radically new and unfocused design and the small percentage of farmers that were involved with the former scheme.

Furthermore, the process of transferring political power from the central administration to the 15 autonomous regions (the celebrated 'transition to democracy') has begun to have a strong impact on agricultural policy. The new structure of the Agri-environmental package, offering exclusively horizontal measures that the regions may develop and manage (or not) as they choose, will result in a disruption to HNV farming systems that is both unfocused and variable between regions. This seems ridiculous given that the environmental values do not recognise administrative borders. The National Ministry seems to have abdicated its role of coordination, updating and information interchange, which would be necessary to provide a global view of the situation.

The same is about to happen with the implementation of cross-compliance, where the regions (except Navarra and Aragón) have yet to precisely define (independently of one another, of course) the applicable statutory management requirements.

Indicative of the shared fears related to abandonment threats in marginal areas, options for the partial decoupling of CAP payments have been decided commonly. However, also common to all is the complete lack of interest in scientifically evaluating the effects of these measures on biodiversity (a deficit seriously impeding a learning-from-doing process deemed fundamental for developing Agri-environment policy). As has been the case with other aspects of environmental policy in Spain, it seems that political decentralisation has not been beneficial for HNV farming systems.

Future prospects

In the light of all this, future prospects for biodiversity conservation in HNV farming systems might seem pessimistic to the reader. Nevertheless, after the last CAP reform and with the perspectives for future rationalisation of agricultural spending on the table, the potential role of the Agri-environmental approach appears today clearer than ever. In those areas which are sensitive to future reductions in direct payments, support for agricultural activity alone has not managed to prevent depopulation or biodiversity decline in recent years. Therefore, the message for the future should be that the protection of farm income in less intensive areas cannot continue to be based exclusively on production increases, but needs in future to incorporate conservation aims as a parallel objective.

Changes in agriculture administrations

Limiting actions to those consistent with a traditional 'production mentality' has no future; agriculture administrations (both national and regional) must in future adopt a more broad-minded approach that will take advantage of the new and existing opportunities of the reformed CAP. It makes no sense to wait until an ever-changing CAP reaches a more stable framework, or to excuse inaction with the 'lack of budget' argument, expecting more funds without national co-financing. It is a matter of political priority and leadership. The process of CAP 're-nationalisation' is now on the table at least with respect to rural development. The inaction option poses too many risks in view of the sharp habitat deterioration and biodiversity declines, as well as the social problems of remote rural areas. An approach is needed that will directly involve farmers and their activities, as well as the expertise of agriculture officials.

In designing the new framework, collaboration with others involved in agri-environmental issues (environment administrations, NGOs and scientists) is imperative, given the lack of knowledge and training on biodiversity issues which currently hamper agricultural bodies. In this sense, little can be expected at present from the National Ministry.

But it is not all bad news. Recent initiatives in some regions show some promising signs. For instance, in Castilla-León the environment administration has successfully managed to implement some Agri-environmental measures and LIFE funds in HNV farming systems. In Aragón agriculture and environment bodies have jointly opened a wide process of reflection, with participation of a wide array of experts, for the design of the future Agri-environmental programme. These types of initiatives need wide dissemination so that other regions can follow their lead. Cross-compliance design and inspection and the setting up of farm advisory services are clear fields for further cooperation. In this regard, the National Ministry should not continue to neglect its constitutionally assigned tasks of coordinating and disseminating the actions of regional governments.

Change in environment administration

The development of environment administrations since 1986 has been spectacular in Spain. Their main fields of activity have been industrial pollution control, environmental impact assessment, management of protected areas, forest fire prevention and environmental education. However, farmed environments and their management have never been a target. Indeed, it is questionable whether environment administrations are capable of assuming such new competences at the moment. New human and economic resources would

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Spanish meseta landscape in Toledo, with low intensity cereal, pasture, permanent crops and field margins. This is typical habitat of the threatened Little Bustard (*Tetrax tetrax*).

probably be needed before they could carry out successfully the new role expected of them.

The idiosyncrasies of farmers and farming activities suggests a need for establishing a mixed agriculture-environment body, to which both existing administrations should contribute with officials, infrastructure and budget. Probably, the contribution to these new services would be greater for agriculture administrations, since they actually hold the greater share of resources and have more experience in dealing with farmers.

Addressing the biology of farmland needs a holistic approach, as agri-environment issues cannot be solved with standardised rules and sanctions. A multidisciplinary approach is needed to assess local realities (past and present) and to design and implement efficient instruments for the future. This means that new measures should be developed that target areas where biodiversity resources need protecting, as well as where these may need to be restored in order to link existing HNV areas.

Knowledge and transparency

Several issues require further attention. The mapping of HNV farming systems at the national scale is a complicated task. Up to now, pastures, natural grasslands and agro-forestry areas have proven easier to map, as their identification relies mainly on the habitat/biotope perspective. More difficult to map are the pseudo-steppe environments, where nature value is linked more to species than habitat. Here there is still a lack of adequate data, as well as knowledge of the factors affecting habitat selection by most species. In both cases, however, the influence of rapidly changing management regimes on the environmental quality and biodiversity of these systems significantly reduces the usefulness of existing map data.

An alternative (and probably unavoidable) approach would be to work at the scale of the region or sub-region. Currently available are the SCI and SPA delineations, which, together with BirdLife's IBAs, are the most complete environmental information sets available. In Spain, however, they firstly need to be updated in terms of present habitats (both semi-natural and farmed) and the spatial and temporal trends of key species.

Secondly, access to the socio-economic and agricultural reality developing inside these areas is needed. CAP subsidies databases should be used for the purpose of characterising the pressures on and state of the system. However, farm level registers also need to be complemented with information on management variables (something which is currently not available). Wide use should be made of satellite imagery, cadastral maps and GIS to combine all these data, and to make them available in a user-friendly format. Again, it is clear that collaborative efforts between both agriculture and environment administrations are needed.

There is a clear need for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the applied instruments on both biodiversity and farm income. As to the former, the most effective and reliable approach would be to integrate evaluation studies into the programmes from the very start, in order to avoid lack of base-line data. Both pressure and state indicators are clearly needed and at different spatial scales. However, up until now the only two known evaluations in Spain are on programmes that have already been running for several years. As for farm incomes, mathematical programming methods should be employed to simulate and assess the economic consequences of desirable alternative farming patterns. Recent research has shown that the implementation of a biodiversity-targeted agri-environmental programme could efficiently reduce the risk of abandonment in Spanish pseudo-steppe systems.

Finally, there needs to be a public participation process. It is important to disseminate the values of these systems to the wider society, as well as the goals, difficulties and outcomes of the new approach.

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Olives in Spain – an update

The Spanish Government has announced the model chosen for implementing the reform of the CAP olive regime. The result is a tremendous disappointment for anyone interested in the maintenance of the more traditional, upland olive farms, but is good news for the owners of intensive and high-yielding plantations.

As explained in *La Cañada 18* (page 11), Member States have the option of using a national envelope of up to 40% of their olive budget for supporting olive plantations of environmental and social value. This option provides an excellent opportunity for correcting the massive imbalance in the current support system where competitive, intensive olive plantations with irrigation can receive up to 20 times more subsidy per hectare than the most marginal upland plantations.

The Spanish decision is to use a national envelope of only 5% for the new olive payment. The remaining 95% of the budget is decoupled from production and goes into the Single Farm Payment, to be paid on the basis of historic receipts per holding. Once this new system is established, the funds can never be put back into a national envelope, they are effectively 'lost' as a policy mechanism.

The Government defends this decision on the grounds of 'avoiding serious distortions in the economies of olive production systems'. In other words, the big, intensive producers would not accept any loss of subsidy. The Government also argues that the most productive plantations have higher costs, thus justifying the higher Single Farm Payment they will receive. This is a highly deceptive argument: they have higher costs, but also higher levels of production and income, so that their net returns per hectare without subsidy are far higher than is the case for marginal, dryland plantations.

Five categories of olive area are defined for receiving the new olive payment:

- municipalities where over 80% of the cultivated land area is under olives;
- olive plantations of advanced age with high cultural and landscape value, or on terraces;
- olive areas with permanent natural handicaps: steep slopes, low rainfall, etc;
- olive plantations at risk of abandonment due to low productivity;
- olive plantations participating in schemes such as Denomination of Origin, Organic Production, etc.

These categories cover practically all possible olive situations in Spain, and merely provide a common national framework. The details of implementation are to be decided by the Regional Authorities.

Similar approaches (no regionalisation of the Single Farm Payment, minimal use of national envelopes) is being applied to other sectors affected by the 2003 reforms, showing that there is little willingness to redistribute CAP support in favour of less competitive farming areas and systems in Spain.

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Traditional olive groves near Guadalupe, Extremadura.

Global pastoralist gathering in Turmi, Ethiopia

In January 2005, over 200 people from 23 countries gathered in Turmi, a small town in the South Omo valley, Ethiopia. Most of them were native pastoralists who had left their herds for the duration of the gathering. All came accompanied by a translator since most of them spoke nothing but the language of their region.

The gathering was organized by the Pastoralist Communication Initiative – PCI (a UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs [OCHA] structure based in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia), the Sussex Institute of Development Studies and UNDP. It was funded by the UK Department for International Development.

The aim of the gathering was to encourage working pastoralists to get to know each other, exchange ideas about their way of life, the problems they encounter and the way they deal with them. The meeting was an unqualified success as, with the help of their translators, people with quite different cultures and languages managed to talk together during four days and to discuss important issues affecting their lives and the future of their cultures.

To many of these peoples, the main problem is simply to be recognised by their governments. Nomads are considered economically useless, a reminder of 'the old days', with no value for the future. In some places they are accused of overgrazing or of destroying crops of settled farmers. The fact is that in most countries where these problems occur, the nomads have been dispossessed of the land they were using and forced onto the least suitable areas. Land tenure was an important issue discussed during the gathering. In some countries, there are regulations giving the nomads or transhumant pastoralists the right to use the land they need. Those who do not have these rights were keen to hear about how this came about and how they might obtain similar rights.

Marketing came up as a recurring theme and an issue where many could profit from the experiences of others. However, there were many questions: How can they process their products in order to be able to sell them? What are the transboundary problems to be solved before being allowed to export products? Also, the whole question of veterinary diseases were an important point of discussion in that context. How can vaccinations of the livestock and of the herders best be accomplished?

These questions give a flavour of the kind of discussions we had during the gathering. Some of the participants found answers, but many questions remained unanswered, although all benefitted from the discussion process. To find solutions to these unanswered questions will be the aim of the World Initiative on Sustainable Pastoralism (WISP), a worldwide project that was launched shortly after the Turmi gathering. The WISP project will provide resources for research to look for solutions to the most important questions. It will also be a forum for lobbying for and advocating on behalf of pastoralists in their own countries and at an international level. There will be more gatherings of pastoralists, with regional ones going deeper into problems on the ground, and global ones consolidating these and lobbying for policy changes at both national and international levels.

The EFNCP represented European pastoralism at the Turmi gathering. It was good for there to be a voice from Europe at the meeting because very few people knew that there was still pastoralism in Europe. Also our policy experience in Europe (in relation to pastoralism) was of interest to other pastoralists, especially now that the CAP is embracing ecological and socio-economical aspects (marketing, land tenure, etc), as well as market issues. But knowledge transfer works both ways and Europeans could learn a lot about the problems of pastoralists from other areas of the world and about how they dealt with these problems.

The Forum plans to take an active part in the WISP project and we will invite people from WISP to our own meetings as well as helping to organise WISP regional gatherings and other meetings.

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Jean-Pierre Biber

One of the meetings at the Turmi gathering of pastoralists.

Le "saltus" : un cadre d'analyse pour saisir les enjeux des systèmes agraires européens à Haute Valeur Naturelle (HVN)

Les zones HVN à la croisée de deux regards à articuler

Les enjeux associés aux systèmes agraires à Haute Valeur Naturelle doivent croiser deux regards : un regard naturaliste, considérant la dimension « habitat » des zones HVN, et un regard agricole, considérant les pratiques et modalités de gestion des systèmes de production contribuant à l'existence même des zones HNV.

Si ces deux regards ne sont pas exclusifs l'un de l'autre, notre expérience montre que leur croisement dans le cadre d'un débat de politique publique, en particulier, ne va pas de soi. Ainsi, si la plupart des acteurs politiques s'accordent à dire qu'il faut maintenir des zones agricoles HVN, la question est aujourd'hui posée de savoir si cet objectif peut être atteint uniquement avec des outils thématiques protégeant des sites aux attributs environnementaux définis (via les mesures agri-environnementales – MAE — ou l'ICHN) ou en jouant sur des exploitations agricoles intégrées dans des systèmes sociaux, politiques et économiques plus larges, dont les dynamiques sont aujourd'hui globalement contradictoires avec le maintien des HVN si l'on en juge par leur recul sur les dernières décennies.

Un enjeu est donc posé d'articuler d'une part analyse environnementale et agricole des zones HVN et, d'autre part, de considérer plusieurs échelles allant du local au global. Nous défendons ici l'idée que le concept de *saltus* peut contribuer à avancer dans cette direction. Deux temps dans notre propos : le premier porte sur une caractérisation et une définition du *saltus* et ses liens avec les systèmes agraires HVN ; le second porte sur les différentes mises en perspective que l'on peut proposer de ce concept.

Le *saltus* : caractérisation et définition

Le *saltus* est un concept de géographie et d'histoire agraire, qui distinguent trois types d'espaces dans les paysages ruraux européens : l'*ager* (terres labourées), la *silva* (les espaces boisés) et le *saltus* (intermédiaires entre les deux premiers espaces). Ce dernier est constitué de l'ensemble des espaces non labourés (prairies et pâtures) et des éléments paysagers permanents (haies, bosquets, mais aussi bords de champs…) pleinement intégrés dans les systèmes agricoles. Le *saltus* était présent dans la plupart des agro-écosystèmes européens jusqu'aux années 50 en tant que composante essentielle des systèmes polyculture élevage. À beaucoup d'égard, il demeure un élément tangible du modèle agricole européen.

Dans sa variété et sa richesse, le *saltus* joue un rôle central dans le fonctionnement des agro-écosystèmes à forte valeur naturaliste de par ses fonctions de source de nutriments (avec la forêt, seul le *saltus* est capable de prélever les nutriments du sol) et d'habitats pour les espèces auxiliaires ou sauvages. Les animaux domestiques (herbivores, mais aussi omnivores comme les porcs) permettent l'exploitation du *saltus* et les transferts de fertilité vers l'*ager*, moyennant des pratiques permettant le « bouclage » des cycles de nutriments. À ce titre, le *saltus* peut être appréhendé sous l'angle de sa double contribution aux systèmes fourragers et à la durabilité des systèmes agricoles.

La diversité des espèces animales et végétales abritées dans le *saltus* contribue à l'équilibre d'ensemble des espèces et limite les risques de prolifération de parasites. Le *saltus* est l'élément clé de la gestion globale de la fertilité, sans apport d'intrants extérieurs qu'il s'agisse d'engrais ou de produits phytosanitaires.

Au total, si les interventions humaines sont nombreuses dans la gestion du *saltus* et en font un espace fortement anthropisé, sa dimension naturelle est patente au regard de sa similitude fonctionnelle avec des écosystèmes forestiers ou herbacés

The *saltus:* its contribution to European HNV farming systems

High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems are best understood in relation to their ecological and agricultural dimensions. Although such a statement might appear obvious, experience shows that different perspectives between environmental and agricultural analysts — whether researchers, stakeholders or field actors — create many difficulties, especially when the analysis is aimed at policy options. Two of these biggest difficulties are: 1) to analyse and understand both natural and anthropological factors; 2) to deal with issues at different scales so that all the factors affecting HNV farmland are incorporated.

The main article (in French) explains why the *Saltus* project is proposed as a cross-cutting concept that can embrace in a common framework both the ecological and agricultural dimensions of HNV.

The concept has its roots in rural geography and history whereby three types of spaces in European rural landscapes were described. These are: the *ager* (cultivated areas), the *sylva* (woodlands) and the *saltus* (literally, the 'jump' between the two first spaces). The *saltus* is the mix of non-ploughed areas (grassland and pastures) and anthropogenic and natural features (hedges, drove roads, stone walls, rocky outcrops) integrated into the agricultural systems. In its variety and richness, the *saltus* plays a central role in the sustainable functioning of HNV agro-ecosystems. It is capable of being a source of nutrients from natural biological cycles and includes a great variety of habitats for both domestic and wild species. It also plays a role in the physical functioning of ecosystems, regulating hydrological and micro-climate fluxes, with impacts on erosion and wider risk management. Domestic animals are the key to the transfer of fertility between the *saltus* and the *ager*.

The *saltus* was an intrinsic part of most western European agro-ecosystems until the 1950s. In most regions, some of its former functions are now replaced by an increasing use of fertilisers and pesticides, but others – such as buffer zones and habitats – are simply not replaced, resulting in a net loss in the positive biological role of agriculture. Agri-environment schemes often try to 'reinvent' some aspects of the *saltus* in some places. But the appropriate management of *saltus* requires a large amount of human effort (labour) as well as a systemic set of knowledge (now often lacking). Also, the management components often lose their value when operated outside the context of their agricultural system.

The combination of different types of *saltus*, of livestock and of cropping systems varies considerably across Europe. From entirely integrated systems (mixed systems with minimum artificial inputs – those of highest nature value) to highly specialised systems in which the *saltus* is replaced by 100% imported inputs (e.g. indoor livestock systems or cereal systems) and has little or no nature (biological) value.

The agro-ecological dimensions of *saltus* is the key to why we believe it is a valuable tool for the analysis of most European HNV agricultural systems, as it provides a common conceptual way of thinking about nature and farming. It would also facilitate using the '*saltus*-livestock-crop' combination as a framework for the analysis of EU agriculture for nature conservation purposes and with respect to policy development. Most HNV farmland is by definition managed with an agricultural rationale and contributes to the farming economy and to EU markets (in competition with other farming systems that destroy nature values). As a result, its future still depends primarily on the same factors that affect agricultural decisions as a whole. HNV farmland will not survive with separate, remedial policies, whilst the main agricultural policy is 'business as usual' with intensive agriculture out-competing *saltus*. On the contrary, there needs to be a policy shift so that *saltus* is incorporated as a core of the (so -called) European model of agriculture in which there is a balance between economic, social and ecological aspects.

susceptibles de se perpétuer dans le temps selon des mécanismes naturels similaires, en prévenant néanmoins les évolutions auxquelles sont soumises les écosystèmes naturels (boisement, dégénérescence, incendies…).

La place du *saltus* dans les systèmes agraires européens est variable. Certains peuvent être considérés comme reposant intégralement sur des espaces non labourés appartenant au *saltus* : il s'agit typiquement des systèmes pastoraux entièrement herbagers, dans lesquels les aliments importés peuvent être nuls ou quasi nuls. Les transferts de fertilité se font alors au sein des compartiments du *saltus*. D'autres combinent *saltus* et *ager* dans une proportion variable : dans certains cas, le *saltus* est la source unique de nutriments et détermine un niveau d'équilibre entre espaces cultivés et non cultivés fixé par leur productivité relative. Ce sera le cas des systèmes polyculture-élevage autonomes sur le plan fonctionnel. À l'extrême, le *saltus* peut intégralement disparaître, remplacé par les engrais de synthèse et les aliments importés, effaçant le lien cultures/élevage/*saltus*.

Les liens entre saltus et systèmes agraires HVN

Sur ces bases, quelle est la relation entre les terres agricoles HVN et le *saltus* ? À la lumière de ce qui précède, on comprendra aisément que le *saltus* soit souvent en soi support d'espèces animales et végétales à fort intérêt naturaliste. Le *saltus* est souvent une condition suffisante de présence d'espèces et d'habitats qui renvoient à un caractère HNV, qu'il s'agisse d'agro-écosystèmes à caractère « herbacé » ou « boisé » (plantations fruitières extensives). La plupart des espèces sauvages — par exemple celles de Natura 2000 — associées à l'agriculture dépendent souvent du maintien *a minima* d'une fraction de *saltus*. En plaine céréalière, par exemple, l'avenir de l'outarde canepetière dépend de la présence d'espaces non labourés préservant des espaces de nidification et le maintien d'une population de criquets. Le *saltus* est ici une condition nécessaire qu'il faut appréhender à une échelle paysagère. Il est ainsi difficile d'envisager un certain niveau de biodiversité dans un agro-écosystème sans la présence d'au moins une fraction de *saltus*, remplissant des fonctions d'abri et de nourrissage pour de nombreuses espèces animales.

Il ne faut cependant pas assimiler l'existence d'espaces agricoles non cultivés qui définissent le *saltus* automatiquement à celle d'espaces HVN. Le surpâturage peut, dans certains cas, dégrader la qualité floristique de certaines prairies. Dans de nombreux cas, la présence de cultures céréalières peu intensives, qui diversifient l'écosystème et recueillent les déjections animales est préférable à une monoculture d'herbe gérée de manière moyennement intensive ne présentant pas de caractère écologique particulièrement intéressant. Les diverses pratiques de gestion du *saltus* interviennent dans la qualité finale des agro-écosystèmes ; le maintien de haies ne suffit pas à soi seul, il faut également les gérer de manière appropriée.

Les différentes mises en perspective du *saltus*

Les lignes qui précèdent inscrivent d'emblée le *saltus* à la croisée des champs agronomiques et écologiques, conformément à l'objectif alloué à notre propos. Le *saltus* est tout à la fois facteur de production agricole, notamment dans l'optique d'une production fourragère, et habitat pour les espèces sauvages associées à l'agriculture.

Nous avons déjà largement évoqué le champ d'analyse environnementale : les fonctions de refuge, de reproduction et d'alimentation du *saltus* peuvent être mobilisées dans les dynamiques de population animales (insectes, oiseaux et mammifères), par exemple. Dans une approche davantage phytosociologique, ce seront les pratiques « stationnelles » qu'il conviendra d'analyser.

Si nous avons davantage mis l'accent sur les aspects de biodiversité spécifique qui fondent la notion de HVN, le *saltus* joue également un rôle dans le fonctionnement géo-chimique des écosystèmes, en régulant les flux hydrologiques et microclimatiques, avec des impacts sur la gestion des risques. La valeur paysagère des éléments du *saltus* est incontestable.

Dans une perspective agricole, le *saltus* peut être analysé sous différents axes. À l'échelle des systèmes agraires, la fonction de production fourragère est essentielle. Les différents modes de gestion techniques du *saltus* renvoient à des déterminants sociaux (savoir faire, identités locales) et économiques (gestion du risque), sans parler d'une analyse sous l'angle de l'organisation du travail agricole. La valorisation économique du *saltus* dans les produits, comme en témoignent certaines Appellations d'origine contrôlées (AOC) fromagères valorisant la biodiversité prairiale dans le prix de vente des produits.

Pour tenter de recouper ces différents angles d'analyse, une question générique pourra être : quelle place du *saltus* dans les stratégies de conduites des différents systèmes de production à l'échelle d'une petite région ? En quoi ces stratégies sont compatibles avec les fonctions écologiques remplies par le *saltus* ?

On peut resituer ces questions dans un cadre d'analyse plus large, considérant les différents facteurs qui affectent les usages du *saltus*. Sa dimension fourragère débouche sur l'analyse des filières d'alimentation animale et la concurrence entre différentes sources d'alimentation envisageables pour une même production. Il est alors possible de resituer cette question sous l'angle de la dynamique des différents systèmes d'élevage à l'échelle européenne : quelle est la part relative de ceux valorisant des éléments du *saltus* (et en premier lieu les prairies permanentes) et de ceux reposant sur des cultures fourragères annuelles (maïs, céréales complétées par des protéagineux) ou de prairies temporaires à faible potentiel en terme de biodiversité ?

Conclusion : intégrer le *saltus* dans les analyses des politiques européennes

Si le *saltus* ne peut pas être appréhendé à l'échelle « macro » avec la même finesse et la même richesse qu'à une échelle locale, il peut servir de repère utile pour faire le lien entre l'évolution des systèmes agraires européens et contribuer au débat décisionnel à ce niveau en lien avec la biodiversité HVN. Réciproquement, la prise en compte de facteurs « macros » est particulièrement utile pour envisager le futur du *saltus* et, partant, des zones HVN.

Chaque producteur, qu'il valorise du *saltus* ou non, est confronté à la baisse tendancielle du prix des produits agricoles, à la baisse de certains facteurs de production (comme le blé pour l'aliment du bétail par exemple, ce qui le conduira à substituer des aliments achetés à du *saltus*) ou à la hausse d'autres (l'équipement, l'énergie). Ces faits macros-économiques contribuent à expliquer les dynamiques locales dans la gestion du *saltus*. Ils suggèrent également que l'on ne peut séparer les analyses d'ensemble de la PAC, par exemple, de celles de l'enjeu de préservation et de valorisation de la biodiversité à l'échelle européenne.

En proposant le concept de *saltus*, tel que nous venons de le développer, nous visons de construire un objet commun, contribuant à faire le lien entre environnementalistes et acteurs d'une monde agricole d'une part et entre acteurs locaux et acteurs « globaux » d'autre part. Si les analyses contribuent à montrer que les systèmes HVN ne sont pas que des systèmes traditionnels à protéger artificiellement des autres systèmes agraires productifs au seul titre de la protection de la nature, mais qu'il s'agit de systèmes productifs au cœur du modèle européen, le *saltus* aura rempli ses fonctions dans le débat politique.

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The LFA scheme: how important is it for the future of High Nature Value farming and how should it be reformed?

On the 9th of February this year the EFNCP organised a seminar in Brussels with the Scottish Crofting Foundation, Euromontana and the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, on the future of Less Favoured Areas (LFA) policy, and the implications of this policy for marginal farming in High Nature Value areas[1]. See EFNCP website (www.efncp.org) for a full report on this event.

This article argues that the recent reforms to Pillar 1 have largely dismantled the positive role of the mainstream CAP in helping to maintain farming activity in marginal areas of Europe. At the same time, they failed to achieve a redistribution of Pillar 1 support in favour of these areas and the less competitive farming systems that tend to be found there.

In the search for policies that can help secure a future for HNV farming, the balance of opportunity seems to be shifting towards Pillar 2. Here, the LFA scheme is perhaps the most appropriate instrument to provide a broad, simple support system. Now that Pillar 1 has been reduced to an absurdity, there should be a major transfer of funds into broad payment systems of this sort, designed to maintain farming activity where it is most needed, and most threatened.

However, there are some fundamental problems with the way the existing LFA scheme is operated. The Commission proposed changes to the LFA scheme in the context of the new European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) Regulation, but the proposals were vague and not fully thought through. In the face of Member State opposition, the Commission has since agreed to postpone reforms until 2008-10. This is not far away.

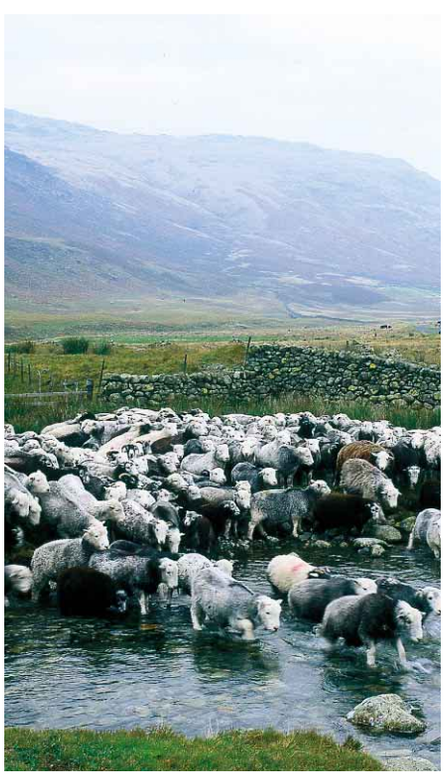
The LFA scheme is a valuable policy. Changes need careful consideration and above all should be pragmatic and aimed at correcting the various failings in the current system. A radical change in approach is not needed. Rather than revolutionary reforms, as applied to Pillar 1 with all the inherent problems, we need evolution (as once promised by Commissioner Fischler).

The end of a positive role for CAP Pillar 1?

The old CAP (pre-2003 reforms) was open to many criticisms, notably that the production-linked subsidies encouraged intensification, over-production and dumping, and put most of the budget into the inherently most productive and competitive farms and areas.

However, EFNCP defends the need for HNV production systems to be economically viable, and until now Pillar 1 subsidies have contributed to this viability, thus helping to maintain low-intensity farming in Europe's more marginal rural areas, along with the socio-economic, environmental and cultural values that accompany this activity.

From the point of view of HNV farming, Pillar 1 could have evolved into a valuable public policy, by introducing mechanisms for favouring low-intensity farming systems and less productive land, and by capping payments to the largest recipients of subsidy. Over the years, some such mechanisms were introduced (e.g. beef extensification), but these were always very limited (why beef but not sheep, goats, cereals, etc.?) and with basic weaknesses in design and implementation.



Bob Gibbons

Herdwick sheep crossing a river during the autumn round-up in Cumbria, England. The need for an effective LFA payment to maintain active farming in Europe's marginal areas is more necessary today than it was in the 1970s.

At the end of the day, an evolutionary approach to Pillar 1 reform, involving a gradual shift of support in favour of certain farming systems and regions, was not possible because individual sectors, regions and countries put the defence of their own slice of the CAP cake above the public interest of creating a more rational policy. For example, shifting funds from larger farms to smaller farms was blocked by the UK, because of its larger average farm size; within Spain, shifting olive subsidies from more productive to less productive plantations was blocked by Andalucía, with its high concentration of more productive and irrigated plantations; and so on.

Some countries (England, Germany) have adopted the 'regionalisation' option in implementing the 2003 reforms, thus converting Pillar 1 into a flat-rate payment per hectare, with the redistribution of support that is inherent in this decision. But in many other countries this option seems impossible to implement, whether because the greater extremes of productivity between one area and another (e.g. irrigated and non-irrigated land) would imply a more dramatic redistribution of funds, or because the political will to contemplate such changes is not present.

Across much of the EU, therefore, the reality seems to be that a significant adaptation of Pillar 1 to new objectives is impossible. A large proportion of the CAP budget will simply continue to be paid out in a way that is fundamentally inequitable and unjustifiable and, as a result of decoupling, is less related to policy objectives than ever before.

If a redistribution of funds within Pillar 1 is not going to happen, and the link to farm production has been broken anyway, then the value of this policy instrument for HNV farming is clearly decreased. Although Pillar 2 has a much smaller budget, and this is threatened with cuts, modulation has started a process of shifting funds from Pillar 1 to Pillar 2, and in the longer term this can be expected to develop further.

As Pillar 2 resources are not linked so directly to particular sectors or regions, there is slightly less blockage due to the defence of 'established incomes' and more scope for targeting support in a way that responds to policy objectives, including those relating to HNV farming.

The LFA scheme

The LFA are the rural areas of Europe that rural policy makers should be most concerned about. They are particularly fragile in environmental and social terms, they harbour the greatest natural values,

and they have a particular need of active farming and forestry in order to maintain the social fabric and to manage the land.

The current arrangements are clearly inadequate. Amongst the problems are the enormous disparities in payment levels between one country and another, crude delineation of LFAs that leads to some very productive land being included alongside extremely marginal land, and insufficient differentiation according to different degrees of natural handicap.

National differences in implementation make some LFA schemes almost unrecognisable between one country and another. For example, in Scotland there is no upper limit on the amount a farm can receive and payment levels are relatively high, so that larger holdings can receive annual payments of tens of thousands of euros from the LFA scheme, making it a very significant element in farm support policy. Spain is at the other extreme: over 80% of the country is designated as LFA but the maximum payment per holding is around €2,000, rendering the policy almost useless as a means of maintaining land uses.

Opinions differ on how to improve the policy. The Commission wants to do away with socio-economic criteria for the classification of LFAs, as Member States apply these in different ways and some areas designated using such criteria can no longer be considered 'less favoured'. The Commission proposes that all LFAs should be designated on the basis of natural handicap and land productivity, and the focus of the measure should be on land management.

Some NGOs believe that the concept of paying financial compensation in return for natural handicaps should be replaced with a more 'positive' approach, under which payments are calculated as remuneration for environmental services.

Unfortunately, these conceptual changes, that may sound very logical in the context of policy debates in Brussels meeting rooms, do not in themselves address the range of practical issues affecting the LFA scheme at present. In fact, their implementation would undoubtedly throw up a another set of practical problems.

A pragmatic approach

The aim of LFA payments should be to maintain farming in marginal areas for the public benefits it delivers, as intended when the scheme was first introduced. However, this broad aim needs to be translated into more detailed objectives for each homogeneous LFA zone, for which an essential starting point must be:

- to identify which are the land uses and particular farming systems that are considered beneficial, and which are the benefits in question;
- to develop a vision for the pattern of land use that should exist in the future in order to keep these benefits;
- to establish the level of payment that is needed in order to maintain the land uses.

It is a fact that farming in marginal areas is at a disadvantage compared with other areas, especially as a result of natural factors (climate, soil, altitude, remoteness, etc.) and it is appropriate to keep the current system of compensating for this disadvantage. However, socio-economic criteria are also a reality that puts farming in certain areas at a disadvantage and that should be recognised in the designation of LFAs. Extremely low population density or highly fragmented land holding are examples of this.

It is also a reality that farming in marginal areas contributes socio/economic and cultural benefits. Crude statistics showing the insignificance of agriculture in the national economy hide the fact that in the many of Europe's most marginal rural areas, it is farming that maintains the basic fabric of rural society and economic activity. This role is inextricably linked with the land-management role, and policy makers should recognise this in the context of LFA policy design and justification.

Clearly to ensure that the scheme's objectives are 'delivered', the payments must be coupled to some requirements, to do with maintaining the production system and the land management system (in practice these two are not separable). Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) obviously is not enough of a requirement, as the payments are compensating for a *farming* disadvantage – of *reaching* GAEC, not going beyond it. If a farmer disposes of his stock and mows the land to comply with GAEC, then there is no farming disadvantage.

Typical LFA ground in south-west Ireland – here near Sneem, County Kerry – with high hills of moorland, grassland and heath and more fertile meadows and pasture in the valley, which are grazed by sheep and cattle.

Eric Bignal

HNV wood pasture is common in many parts of southern Europe, such as here in Gargano, southern Italy, but may not be eligible for new CAP payments.

Andrew Branson

Furthermore, the objectives of the scheme are not being met: the land use with its social and environmental values is not maintained – the 'good condition' and economic activity maintained by mowing are not comparable with the values maintained by a farming system.

Something like the Good Farming Practice existing under Regulation 1257/99 is therefore needed for the LFA scheme. This should include minimum and maximum stocking densities appropriate to the natural values of the areas (the maxima may be lower than the densities considered acceptable in production terms), and possibly a points system based on criteria determined for the area, so that a farmer whose system is best suited to maintaining environmental values receives higher payments. Employment criteria could also be included, for example, to encourage beneficial and labour-intensive activities such as shepherding.

Unlike Agri-environment schemes, the LFA payments are not (and should not be) calculated on the basis of additional costs or income foregone resulting from a *change* in management – the scheme is intended to maintain existing land uses, so the level of payment should be calculated on the basis of the amounts needed to keep these land uses viable. Current payment levels in some countries are a very long way short of this amount. Budgets therefore need to be increased, and better use made of the available funds by targeting on a smaller area and on the most justified cases.

Some adjustment of existing boundaries is necessary, as previous decisions on demarcation were not always based on objective analysis. The aim should be to take out areas of land that are relatively more productive than most LFA land.

Certain types of land should be excluded from receiving payments, such as irrigated crops (except for certain mountain meadows and pastures traditionally using flood irrigation), as this land has overcome the natural disadvantage and does not maintain natural values. Greenhouses and indoor livestock systems should also be excluded for the same reasons.

National LFA payment systems should be required to include some common mechanisms, such as:

- a maximum payment per holding (as applied in some countries, e.g. Germany and Spain, and proposed by the Commission in the EAFRD drafts), or a degressive system by which the larger the holding, the smaller the payment per hectare;
- weighting in favour of the poorest land, so that the more productive LFA land receives a lower level of payment (the opposite of the current system in Scotland);
- there should be no exclusion of part-time farmers and no prioritisation of young farmers; both mechanisms are currently applied in Spain. Part-timers and the elderly constitute a large proportion of land managers in many LFAs.

New criteria proposed by the Commission

In proposing changes to the scheme, the Commission has focused on the definition of the 'intermediate' category of LFA. A paper was produced making proposals for criteria that would replace the current very loose mix of natural handicap and socio-economic criteria. In the absence of comprehensive data on land productivity in many Member States, the proposals try using criteria such as the proportion of permanent grassland and average yields in certain farming sectors.

The proposals are very unsatisfactory. If presence of permanent grassland is used as a criterion, then a stocking-density factor needs to be added to avoid more intensive permanent grassland from being counted. This factor would be set in accordance with local conditions, for example, the stocking density could be higher in wet areas than in dry areas, or on different types of permanent grassland. However, excessively high densities must be avoided, in order to exclude intensively used grassland (always <1LU/ha?).

In the case of olives, the Commission proposes setting a threshold based on the number of trees per hectare. This is not a good reflection of natural handicap, as planting patterns also depend on local traditions and topography. Olive data-bases are sufficiently developed to be able to estimate average yields per district. A simpler approach would be to exclude all irrigated olive plantations from receiving LFA payments, without adjusting the existing boundaries. The spread of irrigation in some of the main olive-producing areas, such as Andalucía, has become a major resource-use issue, and farmers who overcome the natural handicaps in this way should be excluded from LFA support.

The Commission's proposals for criteria in the arable sector are based on a yield threshold, calculated as a percentage of the EU average. In Spain, this approach is reported to lead to some unacceptable changes to LFA boundaries, such as the exclusion of the clearly disadvantaged province of Soria (an area with some irrigated arable production and large areas of very low-yielding dryland production). This problem possibly would be addressed by excluded irrigated land from the calculation of average yields.

Overall, it is hard to see the Commission's proposed criteria as an improvement on those applied currently. However, with more analysis and discussion it may be possible to devise a framework that could be applied effectively.

Conclusions

For farmers with productive land and competitively sized holdings in good locations, the 2003 CAP reforms provide more freedom to choose their preferred production patterns, with a generous public subsidy in the form of the Single Farm Payment to help them on their way. Farmers with poor land in marginal areas have very limited opportunities for changing their production patterns, yet their current farming often makes little economic sense in the absence of a production subsidy. The most logical choice for many will be to do the minimum level of activity required by GAEC.

The need for an effective LFA payment to maintain active farming in Europe's marginal areas is thus a greater necessity today than it was in the 1970s. In fact, the LFA scheme is one of the more rational and sensible instruments in the CAP, and is certainly not an anachronism. The basic approach is sound: these areas are especially fragile and valuable. The people living in these areas, especially those trying to make a living from the land, need special attention from rural policies. Socio-economic considerations are important, and cannot be separated from the land-management objective.

The LFA policy needs to be developed and strengthened, with particular attention to national implementation. In particular, authorities need to develop clear objectives for each area and to target the scheme in such a way as to deliver these objectives. Rather than wholesale reform, the scheme needs some pragmatic adjustment and evolution towards a mechanism that is more in tune with present day policy objectives and with the realities of LFA across the EU.

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1 The seminar was funded by Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, the Highland Council, Scottish Natural Heritage, Swedish Society for Nature Conservation and the Shetland Islands Council.

Identification of High Nature Value farmland areas in western Ireland, with specific reference to grasslands

How can we develop methodologies to identify High Nature Value (HNV) farmland? A two-year MSc project in Ireland aims to help Irish policymakers to identify such areas. This will directly support the EC's policy to identify of all HNV farmland areas by 2006 and to support their economic and ecological viability by 2008.

This study will focus on a region in the east of County Galway. It is an Objective 1 Less Favoured Area, containing many habitats of conservation interest, including turloughs and lakes, and has a relatively low-intensity pasture-based economy.

Whereas it is comparatively simple to map habitats of high biodiversity, such as peatlands and woodlands, grasslands are a function of more subtle management differences and can disappear without being noticed. Linked with this is the socio-economic framework that has resulted in extensive grazing systems that favour species-rich grasslands. This research will focus on using GIS to map and catalogue known areas of potential biodiversity in the region, and will identify areas of known low biodiversity, such as conifer plantations.

This will be followed by fieldwork (ground-truthing) to classify the grassland areas into a range of categories of different species biodiversity. Thus, this study will aim to develop a local characterisation of specific elements that contribute to farmland in the east Galway region being of High Nature Value, and which elements should be prioritised for maintenance. This may help devise a more generic approach to identifying and characterising HNV farmland in Ireland. In addition to this bottom-up approach, we aim to use aerial photography and GIS datasets to examine to what extent large-scale indicators (such as farm size, field size, socio-economic indicators) are good predictors of the local occurrence of HNV farmland.

If agri-environmental payments become targeted at HNV farmland, land-owners could benefit from the HNV designation in regions that are comparatively less well-off than others in Ireland and elsewhere in Europe. A representative sub-sample of these HNV grasslands will be selected for consultation with land-owners. Through interviews, the past and current land-use practices will be identified and land-owners' opinions sought concerning HNV designation and how they would wish to benefit from it. A booklet will be produced for land-owners and agricultural advisors giving details of HNV designation and management applicable within similar areas of low-intensity pasture.

This work is made possible by an award of a MSc studentship by Teagasc's Walsh Fellowship Scheme to Drs Micheline Sheehy-Skeffington and Mike Gormally of University College Galway, and co-supervised by Dr John Finn, Environment Research Centre, Teagasc.

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Noticeboard

Agreement on the new European Rural Development Regulation

At the end of June 2005, the European Commission agreed the new Rural Development Regulation (RDR) for 2007-2013. This regulation provides the framework which Member States and Regions must use to draw up their Rural Development Plans (RDP) for the same period. The regulation requires that countries must allocate their rural development funding according to three priority 'axes':
1) competitiveness in agriculture and forestry which must account for at least 10% of the budget in each country;
2) land management (including forestry, agri-environment, Natura 2000 and LFA measures) which must account for a minimum of 25% of the RDP budget in each country; and
3) quality of life in rural areas which must account for a minimum of 10% of the RDP budget.

The final draft of the European Commission's guidelines contains guidance on the objectives for each axis. Of particular interest is the fact that the guidance for the land management axis states not only that it should be used to contribute to the implementation of the 2010 target to reverse biodiversity decline, but also that resources should contribute to the preservation of High Nature Value (HNV) farming and forestry systems. However, although political agreement was reached on the shape of the new RDR, the debate on the future of EU financing for the period 2007-13 is still continuing. Member States have so far been unable to agree on EU budgets and it is unlikely that this debate will be resolved this year. Hence the early development of the new RDPs across Europe will be carried out against a background of uncertainty about future funding.

LIFE limestone country project

The LIFE Limestone Country Project was launched in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, UK in 2002. The project is a joint venture involving the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority, English Nature, the EU LIFE-nature fund, the National Trust and a number of other partners. The five-year programme aims to preserve species of plants and flowers on two Natura 2000 sites, currently at risk from heavy grazing by sheep, by encouraging farmers to stock limestone pastures with mixed livestock regimes using native cattle breeds.

A website (http://www.limestone-country.org.uk) has recently been launched which explains the aims of the scheme, how it works and what the benefits will be for farmers and visitors to the limestone Dales. The website has been created for three main audiences: the farmers, the general public and the farming and wildlife policymakers. It will be regularly up-dated to keep people informed on the project's progress. Those interested in receiving such updates can register their details on the website.

Transhumance and biodiversity in European mountains

This book contains over 30 original papers and was produced as an outcome from the meetings of the European Commission 5th Framework Research Programme project: Transhumount: A review of the role of transhumance in mountain ecosystem processes and dynamics. The project was coordinated by ALTERRA in the Netherlands and was conducted in collaboration with a number of partners from throughout Europe. The overall objective of this project was to summarise the current status of transhumance in European mountains and its influence on the component fragile ecosystems. The Forum assisted with the organisation of one workshop and one larger conference and Forum members contributed a number of papers to the book. The book is published by the International Association of Landscape Ecology (IALE) and is available direct from them at the price of €35 for members or €45 to non-members. A contents list and order form can be found on the IALE website at http://www.landscape-ecology.org. Further information on the Transhumount project can be found at http://www.alterra-research.nl/servlet/page?_pageid=793&_dad=portal30&_schema=PORTAL30

Noticeboard
continued

Database on Cultural Landscapes and Ecosystems

The CULTBASE database is one of the main outputs from the work of PAN: Thematic Network on Cultural Landscapes and their Ecosystems. This network is funded under the European Commission's 5th Framework Research Programme and is coordinated by the University of Bergen in collaboration with partners from throughout Europe. The Forum has assisted with the organisation of two out of six workshops over a three year period. The database includes information on the specific cultural landscapes and their ecosystems that PAN has focused on and is focusing on at the moment. CULTBASE is open to other scientists, officials, organisations and others for the use and registration of other cultural landscape ecosystems. It is intended that the interactive and self-generating character of the database will ensure its continuation after the network has ended. The database can be found at http://pan.cultland.org/cultbase while further details of the PAN project itself can be found at http://pan.cultland.org.

Multifunctionality of agriculture and rural areas

The concept of multifunctionality is already embedded in a broad range of research approaches, scientific disciplines and social practices. MULTAGRI was a Specific Support Action undertaken within the European Commission 6th Framework Research Programme. With a partnership of 26 research organisations from 15 countries this project worked on a comprehensive overview of existing research, particularly in Europe, on different aspects of the multifunctionality. The results of the project were presented at a final seminar 'Multifunctionality of agriculture and rural areas: an essential component of sustainable development?' held in Brussels at the start of September 2005. The seminar discussed issues based on concepts, the coordination between supply and demand, and the implementation and assessment of policies through research activities. Further details of the seminar and the work of the project can be found at http://www.multagri.net.

Reconciling biodiversity conservation with declining agriculture in the mountains of Europe

Coordinated from Imperial College London, the European Commission 6th Framework Research Programme project BIOSCENE is investigating the implications of agricultural restructuring, decline and abandonment for biodiversity conservation in Europe's mountain areas. The project is taking six case study areas across Europe (Norway, Scotland, Switzerland, Slovakia, France and Greece) and combines ecological modelling with social survey to determine and analyse the relationship between biodiversity and farming trends in these mountain areas.

It is intended that the project outputs will detail the opportunities and threats arising from further agricultural decline and will evaluate the ecological, social, economic and political sustainability of different regional management scenarios and the predicted biodiversity consequences (the Bioscenes).

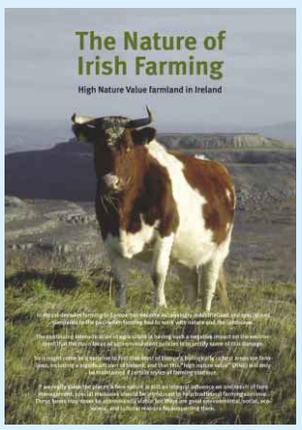
It is intended that practical recommendations for the development of EU biodiversity, agri-environmental and rural policies will be generated by regular interaction with regional stakeholder groups throughout the lifetime of the project. Further details of the project and an associated international conference which was held in Greece in September 2005 can be found at http://www.bioscene.co.uk.

European Nature Conference 2005

Land use in Europe is changing, especially in rural areas. These changes have an effect on biodiversity. The European Union has set a target to stop biodiversity decline by 2010. The European Nature Conference held in Apeldoorn (the Netherlands) in September 2005 was dedicated to nature and rural development. The conference focused on land use and land-use planning and presented good examples of management planning, compensation, sustainable hunting and legislative aspects of the implementation of directives relevant for biodiversity. The conference looked at connecting nature from three different perspectives:
1) opportunities to increase the connectivity between nature and nature areas in Europe;
2) opportunities to increase the interest and involvement of people in Europe with nature; and
3) opportunities to improve the implementation of European policies for nature, and to link policies to practice, and practice to policies.

During the conference a manifesto was prepared highlighting the measures which have to be undertaken to reach the 2010 biodiversity target. Further details of the conference can be found at www.natureconference.org.

Nature of Irish farming



A new leaflet, *The Nature of Irish Farming - High Nature Value Farmland in Ireland*, will be available soon from the Heritage Council in Kilkenny (www.heritagecouncil.ie). Written by Eric Bignal, the leaflet draws heavily on the findings of recent research work on HNV farmland in Ireland carried out by the Forum.

The leaflet will hopefully contribute to the debate on how to respond to CAP reform in a way which strengthens both agriculture and the environment in Ireland's most fragile areas. The Heritage Council plan to launch the leaflet/poster at the National Ploughing Championships in Cork in late September.

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

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