La Cañada

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Editorial
Continuing change but little progress

K de Rijck

Gwyn Jones (right foreground) with delegates at the 2006 Uist workshop in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland. A number of key issues for the future of Natura 2000 sites emerged during the workshop. It seems unlikely that comprehensive solutions will be provided by the 2007-13 Rural Development Plan, despite the fact that the present farming system is economically unviable and may not survive to 2014.

This issue of *La Cañada* is devoted mainly to reporting on the EFNCP activities over the past year. The strong East European bias to these is a direct reflection of the growing interest in and concern about how EU accesssion and candidature is likely to affect nature. However, the reports from Bulgaria (pages 13-14) and Romania are not very encouraging. It seems to be an inevitability that, despite all the policy rhetoric about an increased awareness and concern for the environment, there are no mechanisms or initiatives to maintain the traditional *farming systems* associated with the most biologically rich and diverse areas.

It may be politically incorrect to mention it, but support often needs to reach the most marginal areas not in order to change them but to help them stay the same; and whilst from the outside we might think that social pressures will lead to change anyway, the experience from the Uist Workshop (pages 9-10) suggests this is not always the case. From my own experience of farming in a High Nature Value area in the Hebrides, I would say that 'every day that we can keep things the same we are making progress', but there are few signals of this kind from either our agri-environment schemes or agricultural support to help achieve it.

So what of the future? The Common Agricultural Policy 'health check' is approaching, yet we have barely got to grips with the implication of decoupling, nor the fact that not all Member States have completely decoupled. At the same time, the future shape of the Less Favoured Area scheme is uncertain, and the definition and potential application of the HNV concept (see *La Cañada* 19) is far from clear. We plan to cover some of these issues in *La Cañada* 21.

Eric Bignal

La Cañada 20

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Uppsala Conference June 2007 – Can the market work for nature?

A conference organised in conjunction with the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation 4th-6th June 2007, Wiks Castle, Wik, Uppsala, Sweden

A central plank of the Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has been the decoupling of support payments from production, freeing farmers to respond to the market. Meanwhile, the importance of High Nature Value (HNV) farmland for maintaining Europe's biodiversity is being given considerable prominence, with its support becoming a major goal of the EU's rural development policies.

The Conference asks whether these policy threads are compatible with each other? If so, then under what conditions?

Many questions

Can HNV farmers, most of whom work in the most marginal areas, respond to the challenge of the MTR and increase the return from the market? What stands in their way? How can they be helped to adapt? Can their systems retain their value for nature while becoming profitable?

Protected labels are one method of raising the profile of certain regions or production methods. The EU has a legislative framework for such labels ('traditional' products, AOC, etc.). To what extent do these currently benefit farmers in HNV areas? As more and more niche products come on the market, how do HNV farmers promote their distinctiveness?

On-farm and small-scale local processing are two ways of adding value to meat and milk, maximising the amount retained by the farmer. The public expects safe food, and high hygiene standards are in force throughout the EU. However, the cost of meeting ever-changing standards can be off-putting for marginal farmers on low incomes. Are hygiene standards becoming too restrictive and bureaucratic? How can bureaucracy be kept to a minimum while ensuring food safety? How can rural development funds be used to support investments to ensure the highest quality products? Are the Rural Development Plans developed by EU states for the years 2007-2013 sufficiently well targeted to enable farmers in HNV areas to adapt to the market and ensure both their prosperity and the maintenance of HNV landscapes?

Gwyn Jones

Meat from cattle grazing the wet grasslands at Tysslinge, Sweden, is sold as high-value beef in the Närke 'nature meat' project. As a niche product it attracts a premium price, but the system is still dependent on direct payments coupled to livestock, from both the First and Secod Pillars.

EFNCP and SSNC have financial support for the conference from the European Commission (DG Agriculture) and the Swedish Board of Agriculture and the Federation of Swedish Farmers.

The conference lasts for two and a half days (following arrival on Sunday 3rd June) and, as well as a half day in the field, the programme includes sessions on the role of HNV farming, EU legislation and market orientation and perspectives for the future from a range of viewpoints. Full detail of the programme, registration, the location, accommodation and travel information can be found on the SSNC and EFNCP websites.

L'élevage ovin et caprin en Europe : orienter les politiques vers une prise en charge plus efficace des systèmes à Haute Valeur Naturelle

Dans le courant de l'année 2006, la Commission Européenne (DG agriculture) a confié au Forum une étude sur l'impact environnemental de l'élevage ovin et caprin en Europe et sur les conséquences du système d'aide tel qu'institué dans le règlement du Conseil n°2529/2001 sur les formes d'élevage . L'objectif final de l'étude était d'identifier les adaptations à apporter à ce règlement – et plus largement dans la conduite ultérieure de la réforme de la PAC, dans la continuité du règlement n° 1782/2003 instituant la réforme à mi-parcours – pour viser une meilleure intégration environnementale dans le secteur considéré.

Précisons que cette étude s'inscrivait dans un contexte de ressources bibliographiques et statistiques plutôt pauvre (comparé aux bovins, par exemple), s'expliquant en partie par la place marginale des ovins et des caprins dans l'économie agricole européenne, mais aussi par la nature même des animaux, comme nous le verrons. De ce fait, l'étude a généré un certain nombre de connaissances originales, au premier rang desquelles une typologie des systèmes de production à l'échelle européenne et des traitements statistiques inédits. Dans le cadre de cette note, il n'est néanmoins pas question de rendre compte de l'intégralité des résultats, mais de rendre compte de grands enseignements.

Les ovins et les caprins : des animaux opportunistes et multi-usages

Au plan européen, le secteur ovin-caprin reflète des caractères originaux de ces deux espèces, liés à leur physiologie et leur génétique. En premier lieu, on rappellera leur capacité à valoriser des milieux extrêmement variés, allant de la riche pâture à des habitats ligneux en passant par des pelouses sèches ou des landes. Qui plus est, comparés aux bovins, les besoins en eau sont moins marqués et sont concentrés sur la période de mise bas et d'allaitement, soit environ 3-4 mois dans l'année, ce qui en fait des animaux adaptés aux milieux semi-arides. Enfin, les troupeaux peuvent se déplacer sans dommage sur de plus ou moins grandes distances, ce qui explique la place historique allouée aux systèmes transhumants ou *trasterminante*.

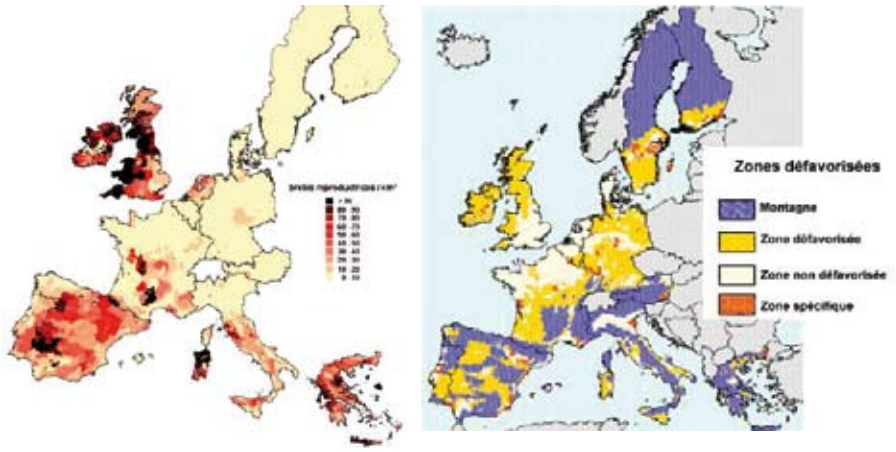
Un autre caractère que nous évoquerons est la diversité de finalité des animaux : si la laine est en perte de vitesse – mais historiquement, c'est elle qui a dessiné les grands bassins de production européens –, la complémentarité lait-viande reste prégnante, notamment dans les pays médi-

Principales caractéristiques de grands types d'exploitations ovines et caprines en Europe (typologie FECNP)

	chargement indicatif sur la SFP de l'exploitation	Finalité des animaux: Viande ou Lait Ovin ou Caprin	ZD/hors ZD
Atlantique			
sédentaire, chargement élevé, prairies temporraires	1-3	- Ovins viande complémentaires d'autres animaux - Spécialisation vers l'engraissement	typiquement pas en ZD, mais aussi dans les meilleures zones des ZD
ovin sédentaire et céréales	1.4 - 1.8	- Ovins viande - pour valoriser les terres les plus pauvres - associés à des cultures céréalières.	typiquement hors ZD
sédentaire, fourrages semi-naturels	0.01 - 0.6 (systèmes ovins spécialisés) 0.2 - 1.8 (systèmes mixtes)	- Ovins viande pour valoriser de grands espaces semi-naturels (intensification concentrée sur les meilleures terres de l'exploitation)	typiquement en ZD (montagne)
Continental			
sédentaire, prairies temporaires	0,8-1,3	- Ovins viande complémentaires d'un autre élevage. - Spécialisation vers l'engraissement ou des produits de haute qualité	typiquement en ZDS
sédentaire, cultures et prairies	1,8+	- Ovins viande - pour valoriser les terres les plus pauvres - associés à des cultures céréalières	typiquement hors ZD ou en ZDS (plaine)
sédentaire, cultures fourragères	1,3-2	- Chèvres laitières, rentables, sur une SFP limitée (mais coûteux en travail)	typiquement hors ZD
Méditerranéen			
sédentaire, cultures fourragères	0,8-1,8	- Viande/lait ovin/caprin comme complément à une production mixte - Lait spécialisé à haute valeur ajoutée	ZD et hors ZD (hors zone de montagne ou plateaux de haute altitude avec précipitations)
pastoral	2,5+	- Viande/lait ovin/caprin exploitant des pâtures semi-naturelles (herbe, broussailles, bois).	en ZD (montagnes)
sédentaire, prairies semi-naturelles	<0,8	- Ovin viande (parfois production locale de lait) comme seule possibilité de valorisation de prairies très sèches.	en ZD (hors zone de montagne: steppes sèches et dehesas)
pastoral sur chaumes et jachères (gardé par un berger)	2+, souvent des systèmes sans terre, le chargement est en réalité très bas (<0.3UGB/ha)	- Lait/viande ovin/caprin pour valoriser une friche privée, intensification des surfaces de l'exploitation pour le stock hivernal de fourrages	hors ZD et en ZD (hors zone de montagne, plateaux secs)
hors-sol	3+	- Lait industriel	ZD et hors ZD (e.g. îles méditerranéennes)

Main characteristics of the sheep and goat farm types in Europe (EFNCP typology)

	Rationale in use of animal: Meat or Milk Sheep or Goat	LFA/non LFA
Atlantic		
sedentary intensively stocked, managed grassland	- Meat sheep as a complement of other livestock - Specialisation for fattening	typically in non LFA, but also in best areas in LFA
sedentary sheep and arable	- Meat sheep to utilize "poorland" and complement crops (cereals)	typically in non LFA
sedentary semi-natural forage	- Meat sheep to maximase vegetation potential of forage (also on-farm intensification on best land for fodder production)	typically in LFA (upland)
Continental		
sedentary managed grassland	- Meat sheep as a complement of other livestock - Specialisation for fattening or high quality product	typically in LFA (simple LFA)
sedentary crops+grassland	- Meat sheep to value "poorland" and crops (cereals)	typically in non LFA or in "plaine" LFA
sedentary fodder crops	- Goat milk profitable on limited MFA (but labour demanding)	typically in non LFA
Mediterranean		
sedentary managed fodder area	- Meat/milk sheep/goat as a complement of mixed production - Specialised milk high value added	in non LFA and LFA (non mountain or high altitude plateaus with some rainfall)
pastoral	- Milk/meat sheep/goat exploiting semi-natural grazing (grass, scrub, woodland)	in LFA (mountains)
sedentary semi-natural grassland	- Meat sheep (some local milk production) as the only productive use of very dry grasslands	in LFA (non mountains, rather dry steppes and dehesas)
pastoral on stubble and fallows (shepherded)	- Milk/meat sheep/goat to value private fallow, on-farm intensification for winter fodder stock	in non LFA and LFA (non mountains, dry plateaus)
indoor	- Industrial milk	LFA and non LFA (e.g. Med. islands)



Comparaison des zones défavorisées et de la répartition des ovins en Europe communautaire. (Comparison between LFAs and sheep density in Europe)

terranéens. Les pays d'Europe du Nord (Royaume-Uni et Irlande) sont spécialisés dans la production de viande (agneaux lourds).

L'ensemble de ces facteurs permet de dresser les caractères originaux du secteur :

- un usage privilégié des « mauvaises terres » corrélé à un faible niveau de chargement dans une grande diversité de contextes géographiques – des îles Shetland aux plateaux espagnols, des collines du Limousin aux montagnes grecques. Très souvent, l'élevage ovin-caprin est la dernière production possible avant l'abandon des terres (« *last option* »), ce qui explique la très forte présence dans les zones défavorisées (90% des animaux en 2000) ;
- un caractère très souvent opportuniste de la production – pour exploiter ce qui ne pourrait l'être autrement – qui explique la combinaison fréquente avec d'autres spéculations, comme l'élevage bovin et, plus rarement, les cultures céréalières.
- un statut du foncier exploité plus « souple » que pour les autres productions agricoles européennes, avec la place importante des terres collectives (qui peuvent représenter 75% de la surface exploitée par les animaux en Grèce) ;

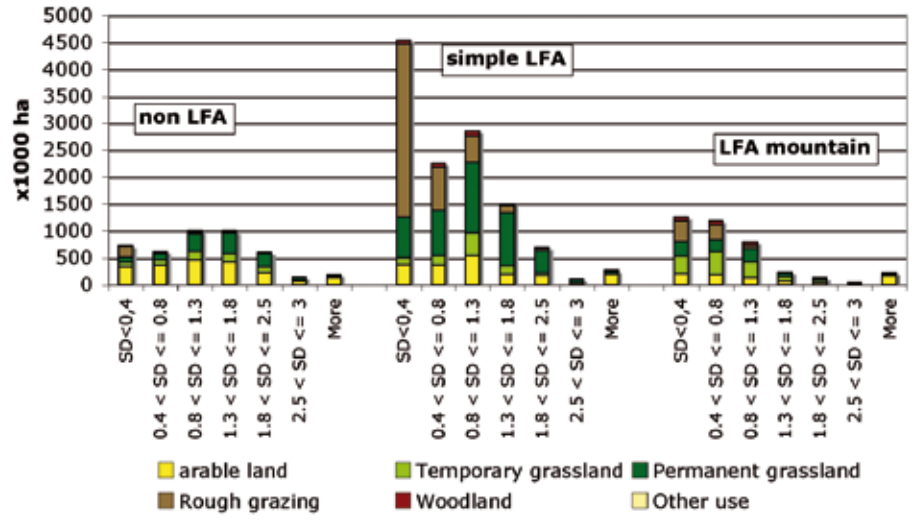
Le graphique suivant reflète l'ensemble de ces caractères, en distinguant les grands types de milieux exploités .

SD = stocking density : chargement exprimé en UGB/ha

La typologie : rendre compte d'une diversité de situations et de stratégies

Un des enjeux de l'étude était de rendre compte de la diversité des systèmes de production pour expliquer à la fois les impacts environnementaux (d'où l'entrée par les systèmes fourragers privilégiée) et les réponses différenciées aux signaux des politiques communautaires (d'où l'importance de distinguer l'orientation viande ou lait, la première étant beaucoup plus dépendantes des aides que la seconde).

Usage des sols agricoles dans les exploitations du RICA ayant plus de 10 ovins. (Land use of the agricultural area in the FADN farms which have more than 10 sheep)



Sans prétendre épuiser la question, le tableau suivant rend compte de l'ensemble des types de systèmes de production caractérisés dans le cadre de l'étude.

Cette typologie fait ressortir la diversité des stratégies envisageables, entre spécialisation ou diversification, entre intensification fourragère ou usage de grandes unités pastorales. Au total, si la production présente des grands traits « extensifs » rappelés ci-dessus, certains systèmes reposent sur une stratégie d'intensification et de recours à des intrants extérieurs. À un niveau d'analyse plus fin, des usages très extensifs de l'espace à un moment donné (en été notamment) peuvent coexister avec une alimentation intensive des animaux en bergerie.

Les impacts environnementaux : une contribution majeure mais fragile aux zones HVN

Le passage en revue systématique des caractéristiques des différents systèmes de production avec les différents thèmes environnementaux (eau, sols, biodiversité, paysages, air, risques naturels…) a fait ressortir la place centrale des thématiques liées à l'usage des habitats semi-naturels. Les caractéristiques des déjections des ovins-caprins (teneurs en azote, rapport C/N, siccité élevée) limitent les risques de pollution des eaux et de l'air, par exemple, comparés aux autres espèces animales.

Nous avons vu que les caractéristiques du secteur lui conféraient un rôle très favorable dans la gestion de ces milieux, en lien avec le maintien d'habitats agro-pastoraux HVN. Ce constat est confirmé par la forte contribution des ovins-caprins dans la bonne gestion des sites Natura 2000 (sans se limiter à ces seuls sites, d'ailleurs). Plus largement, la contribution du secteur à maintenir des espaces ouverts et à lutter contre des risques d'incendies ou de fermeture des milieux (boisement) est largement reconnue.

Mais compte tenu de la grande diversité des systèmes de production, il est difficile de généraliser sur la nature du lien entre élevage et préservation des zones HVN. L'enjeu principal d'un point de vue environnemental est en effet la pression de pâturage sur des habitats agro-pastoraux semi-naturels. L'équilibre est en réalité extrêmement délicat et les risques de sous-pâturage (embroussaillement) sont aussi grands que ceux liés au sur-pâturage (érosion, destruction d'habitats). Dans les faits, les deux se combinent souvent, le délaissement de certaines pâtures pouvant conduire à surexploiter l'espace restant.

Dans la plupart des cas, le principal facteur explicatif du caractère HVN de l'élevage ovin et caprin est ainsi la présence d'un berger capable de gérer la

pression de pâturage du troupeau dans le délicat équilibre dont dépendent beaucoup d'impacts, positifs ou négatifs. *A contrario*, la simplification dans la conduite des systèmes, conduisant à moins de main d'œuvre et plus de clôtures est largement dommageable compte tenu du caractère… moutonnier d'une espèce suiviste dans son usage de l'espace.

Les politiques sectorielles : un déterminant d'évolution parmi d'autres

Ce dernier point nous amène à l'analyse des politiques relatives au secteur : dans quel sens orientent-elles les systèmes de production ?

Un premier constat, sans doute structurant : d'autres facteurs sont déterminants dans l'évolution du secteur. En premier lieu, la distinction fondamentale entre le marché de la viande et celui du lait. Le premier est ouvert à la compétition internationale (Nouvelle Zélande notamment) et qui, bien que structurellement déficitaire au plan communautaire – la production ne couvre que 80% de la consommation – connaît tendanciellement des prix à la baisse, malgré certaines fluctuations conjoncturelles. Pour le lait, la situation est radicalement différente : l'engouement du consommateur pour les fromages de chèvre et/ou brebis typés, dessine des marchés nationaux soutenus et une croissance générale de la production dans les aires de production, à savoir les zones méditerranéennes et le centre de la France (pour le fromage de chèvre, souvent conduit sur un mode industriel).

L'autre facteur d'évolution essentiel est lié à la démographie agricole et à l'identité sociale associée au secteur. Le caractère « marginal », « sans terre » de la production combiné à des faibles prix historiques a contribué à une très forte restructuration dans le secteur : les bergers, dont nous avons souligné le rôle essentiel dans la bonne gestion des terres, ne sont pas remplacés. Plus globalement, nombreux sont les facteurs qui affectent l'existence des éleveurs traditionnels : la transhumance devient difficilement compatible avec le développement des voies de communication et l'urbanisation, les agriculteurs sont réticents à laisser pâturer leurs terres (quand ce ne sont pas les règles de non pâture des jachères PAC qui limitent l'accès aux ressources). Comme ailleurs, mais à un rythme plus élevé, la restructuration se fait au profit de systèmes plus efficaces économiquement, moins exigeants en main d'œuvre pour une production plus élevée par animal.

Au niveau interrégional, ces facteurs contribuent à des évolutions contrastées : les zones aux conditions pédoclimatiques les plus difficiles sont en perte de vitesse,

Louis Vidal, INRA

Les systèmes ovins gardés peuvent gérer de grands espaces à Haute Valeur Naturelle (Mont Dore, France).

avec un recul de l'élevage non compensé par d'autres activités (par exemple, dans les montagnes méditerranéennes isolées à orientation viande) alors que d'autres concentrent la production (par exemple les zones herbagères les plus favorables du Royaume-Uni ou d'Irlande ou les grands bassins laitiers du Roquefort et de Sardaigne). L'échelle à laquelle on caractérise le processus est d'ailleurs essentielle : ces phénomènes de concentration/abandon pouvant se faire au sein d'une même région montrant par ailleurs une certaine stabilité d'ensemble dans le nombre d'animaux.

Dans ce contexte, les politiques sectorielles n'ont pas été en mesure de fondamentalement changer cette dynamique, si tant est qu'elles aient eu cela comme objectif.

Dans les grandes lignes, le système d'aides en place mis en place de 1981 à 1992 a reposé sur un principe complexe de paiement compensatoire à la tonne produite qui a favorisé l'essor de la production dans les îles britanniques et l'Espagne, essentiellement dans les zones où les structures d'exploitation étaient adaptées à la constitution de grands troupeaux gardés par des clôtures, alors que la production déclinait dans les autres pays d'Europe, au profit d'autres productions dans les zones favorables (élevage bovin ou céréales) ou dans une dynamique d'abandon des terres.

Des changements politiques importants introduits en 1991-1992 (prime au monde rural, introduction de quotas individuels et régionalisés,…) ont stabilisé les tendances « macro » par rapport à la période précédente, la production décroissant faiblement dans chaque pays entre 1992 et 2001. Mais cette stabilité au niveau des États Membres n'a pas empêchée des mouvements de restructuration entre producteurs et régions d'un même espace national, parfois accélérée par des critères environnementaux comme le *destocking scheme* du Royaume-Uni (mais il est remarquable que la baisse de 18% des brebis entre 1992 et 2001 dans ce pays fut contemporaine d'une hausse de la production de 1%, traduisant l'intensification par animal notée plus haut).

Le principal changement introduit en 2001 dans le règlement n° 2529/2001 porte le passage d'une prime unique au niveau européen (21 €/brebis viande, 16,8 €/brebis laitière et chèvre), complétée par une prime supplémentaire de 7 € dans les zones défavorisées, suite de la prime au monde rural. Le signal était d'introduire un niveau de découplage entre rendement et paiement, comparable à ce qui s'était opéré dans les céréales lors de la réforme de Mc Sharry de 1992. Le choix de maintenir un paiement à l'animal (et non à l'hectare par exemple), apparaît justifié au regard de la difficulté à mettre en œuvre la seconde option dans les systèmes de terres collectives.

Le règlement n° 2529/2001 n'a pas eu le temps de révéler ses intentions du fait du contexte épidémiologique (fièvre aphteuse au Royaume-Uni conduisant à une perte de cheptel de 4,7 millions de têtes entre 2001 et 2002), économique (le fait précédent conduisant à une hausse des prix européens durable) et politique (réforme de la PAC de 2003).

Concernant ce dernier registre, le découplage des aides a rendu caduc le principe du règlement n°2529/2001 : la spécificité des aides ovines et caprines et leur lien à la production étant perdus dans le principe du paiement unique (au moins pour les pays ayant adopté un découplage total : R.U., Irlande, Italie et sous certaines conditions Grèce).

La politique actuelle : insuffisante au regard des enjeux environnementaux

La justification environnementale du découplage est connue : en brisant le lien entre le paiement et l'acte de production, le découplage total est pensé comme un moyen d'éviter l'usage de sols inappropriés et qui se maintenaient uniquement du fait des aides. Ce raisonnement est valable dans certaines situations (par exemple l'irrigation), mais il ne s'impose pas dans le secteur de l'élevage ovin et caprin. En ne considérant que le secteur viande – la production laitière étant globalement peu dépendante des aides, le signal économique associé aux aides PAC n'a qu'un rôle secondaire –, le caractère « usage de terres marginales » encore largement associé aux systèmes ovins/caprins les rend à la fois peu productifs et très dépendants des aides, ces dernières excédant en 2003 le revenu disponible des éleveurs viande dans les zones défavorisées françaises et britanniques. Une conséquence prévisible en l'absence d'alternative crédible est alors la suivante : il sera plus profitable d'abandonner la production ovine ou caprine, en gérant un entretien minimal des terres.

Mais sans aller jusqu'à ce scénario catastrophe – considérant les garde-fou que sont les règles d'entretien minimal des terres de la conditionnalité, le découplage partiel dans certains pays, les paiements compensatoires des zones défavorisées encore liés à la présence d'animaux, voire la hausse des prix en cas de baisse notable de la production – le système politique en place n'est pas à même de conserver les bénéfices environnementaux du secteur. Plus précisément, en mettant l'accent sur « plus de marché » moyennant des conditions générales environnementales (conditionnalité), le système d'aides oriente toujours vers la recherche de productivité par unité de main d'œuvre, sans privilégier les HVN. Le processus de restructuration des exploitations et la concurrence entre régions et exploitants n'est fondamentalement pas remis en cause par le nouveau cadre politique du règlement 1782/2003, au contraire. Les systèmes pastoraux gardés par des bergers n'ont aujourd'hui aucun avantage compétitif face aux systèmes clôturés et/ou recourrant à des aliments achetés de moins en moins coûteux. Face à ces tendances lourdes, la force d'orientation des aides du deuxième pilier, que l'on considère les mesures agri-environnementales ou les paiements compensatoires reste marginale, d'autant si l'on considère les coupes budgétaires dans ce domaine.

Un enjeu politique pour demain : orienter les moyens vers des systèmes HVN

Malgré sa place économique marginale dans l'économie agricole européenne, le secteur ovin et caprin a un rôle central dans l'objectif de maintien de la biodiversité européenne, au regard de son importante emprise géographique. Sa contribution essentielle et irremplaçable au maintien de zones HVN dans de nombreuses zones difficiles doit être au cœur de l'agenda politique communautaire, national, régional et local. Le changement à opérer porte alors fondamentalement sur un changement d'objectifs : on ne peut plus se contenter d'un lien de principe général, assimilant la présence de brebis ou de chèvres à des bénéfices environnementaux – ce qui sera vrai ou faux pour des raisons qui ne dépendent pas en premier lieu du signal politique. Il faut préciser les systèmes de productions souhaités : ceux qui, à travers des pratiques de gestion et des modes de conduite adaptés mises en place par des bergers ou des éleveurs, maintiennent ou développent des habitats semi-naturels.

Les orientations politiques qui découlent de cet objectif central se déclinent à différents niveaux d'intervention qui doivent être conçus et articulés de front :

- « macro », assurant une distribution de la production dans l'ensemble des grandes zones, y compris les marginales (et non une production se concentrant dans les aires les plus productives) ;
- régional, assurant une allocation des moyens de développement et d'accompagnement (formation, évaluation) vers les producteurs et les filières compatibles avec le maintien des espaces HVN ;
- local et individuel, garantissant les pratiques « fines » dans la conduite du troupeau qui, de manière essentielle dans le cas des ovins et caprins exploitant des milieux fragiles, déterminera la qualité biologique finale des habitats semi-naturels exploités.

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Summary of main findings

During 2006, the Forum undertook a study for DG Agri (European Commission) of the environmental effects of the EU sheep and goat sector, the potential effects of the 2003 CAP reforms and the influence of Regulation 2529/2001 which established the most recent version of the sheep and goat premium.

The situation pre-CAP reform

Although sheep and goat (S&G) farming is of relatively small economic importance for the EU as a whole, it is a predominant land use over very large areas, especially in the more marginal regions of the Atlantic and Mediterranean zones, where it is associated with landscape quality, biodiversity, soil, fire and continued human presence in remote areas.

S&G production is particularly important for its potentially beneficial effect over large areas on land that is mostly composed of long-established semi-natural vegetation. On the other hand, S&G farming is also associated with some negative effects, such as overgrazing and water pollution. These result from excessive stocking levels or localised concentration of animals.

The Forum study indicates that the CAP S&G regime has played a significant role in increasing stock numbers since the 1980s in parts of England and Wales, Ireland, Extremadura in Spain and Sardinia in Italy. While not laying the blame exclusively at the door of the CAP regime, the policy did initially reward high stocking levels and subsequently acted as a buffer against any downward change that might have resulted from market signals. Without this distorting factor, environmental effects related to overstocking would certainly have been less of an issue. But what is often overlooked is that the CAP premium system has been instrumental in maintaining S&G farming activity in the most marginal farming areas, with resulting benefits to the plant communities, animals and habitats associated with these open landscapes. Also, Member States that chose to 'ring-fence' the premium on a regional basis from 1992 slowed the process of concentration of production on better land.

It is quite clear that S&G farming systems have not evolved merely in response to the premium system. For, although the premium has helped the economic viability of S&G farms, the trends in farm management systems probably have been influenced more by the market, technology and socio-economics than by policy. These include the decline of shepherding (high labour costs, poor labour conditions, low social standing) and increase in the use of fencing, the decline of transhumance in the Mediterranean zone (for similar socio-economic reasons) and the increased use of concentrates and other purchased feeds (increased availability, convenience, enables greater control of animal nutrition, e.g. for higher fat content of milk). In combination, these clearly imply a decline of the systems and practices that are associated with environmental benefits.

The decline of shepherded and transhumant systems is a particular environmental concern in the Mediterranean zone. Sheep and goats are increasingly being kept in fenced fields and/or indoors and fed purchased concentrated feeds, resulting in trampled and exhausted pastures in summer, and the abandonment of seasonal upland and mountain grazing.

A notable change has been the steady increase in average flock size, particularly in the UK and Spain, where sheep have become concentrated in very large flocks (over 1,000 or even 2,000 head). In the Mediterranean area

these large flocks are themselves an environmental concern, due to the difficulties in shepherding them and their potential impact on vegetation.

The S&G premium system has not provided any specific mechanisms to direct greater support to the less intensive S&G farming systems, to farmers keeping smaller flocks, or to support such widely beneficial practices as shepherding. Few Member States have taken up the 'national envelope' option, through which this might have been achieved to some degree.

Summary of findings post-CAP reform

In the Atlantic region, some of the more extreme cases of overstocking have been dealt with by policy mechanisms under the LFA and agri-environment schemes, and cross-compliance (e.g. LFA supplements in Wales, Commonage framework plans in Ireland, and the use of the sheep national envelope in parts of England). Less policy action has been taken in the Mediterranean region, but the 2003 CAP reform is predicted to result in some reduction in animal numbers. Unfortunately, farming systems driven solely by the market are unlikely to maintain sheep grazing on semi-natural pastures at appropriate levels, and are more likely to encourage an intensive use of good land and further mechanisation and housing owing to the high cost and low availability of labour.

So, although the problems of overstocking as driven by the premium system seem likely to decline, this does not mean that intensification will cease. In Mediterranean areas, the prediction is for further decline of shepherded grazing systems, more fencing, more purchased fodder and less transhumance.

Perhaps, surprisingly, the greatest environmental concern in all regions was of large-scale abandonment of the production systems that are of most benefit in environmental terms. In fact, there has been a marked swing, especially in the areas of highest nature-conservation value, from over- to under-grazing by sheep. However, identifying, achieving and maintaining an environmentally appropriate level of grazing is not simple. Clearly, a period of reduced of grazing pressure is not always detrimental; for example, in areas of the Mediterranean uplands the decline that has taken place in the past 30 or 40 years has brought beneficial changes, with semi-natural vegetation communities recovering from years of excessive sheep and goat numbers. Yet in these same areas, if grazing ceases completely the long-term loss of open habitats will outweigh the short-term benefits.

The study also revealed under-grazing and abandonment as a major current problem for nature conservation on the remaining areas of open-habitat vegetation in the lowlands of the UK where, in many areas, livestock farming has virtually ceased. Whilst there are many parts of the uplands of the UK and Ireland that will no doubt benefit from a period of grazing cessation, in the long term large areas will require grazing to maintain open habitats and biodiversity. To achieve nature conservation objectives, this grazing would ideally be at levels below the economic optimum, but above the cross-compliance minimum. Left to the market, such systems will not survive. So any future policy needs a mechanism to support S&G farming at a level between the extreme limits of tolerance that cross-compliance might impose.

A common feature of the systems that are most beneficial to the environment is management of stock by shepherds. The increasing difficulties in employing skilled shepherds appear to be common to many of the areas in question. Whilst the value of shepherding is recognised, many environmental experts, policy-makers and agronomists generally regard it as an historic curiosity whose disappearance is inevitable. This is a clear example of how the more traditional production systems based on long-established husbandry techniques (not just in relation to sheep and goats) need to be re-evaluated by policy-makers, and integrated into the broader objectives for agriculture that recent European Commission reforms have introduced.

General policy conclusions

Clear strategic objectives need to be established for S&G farming in Europe that address issues such as wild fires, maintenance of biodiversity and landscapes, soil conservation, as well as a region's social fabric and cultural heritage. These should include the following:

- to maintain a regional distribution of S&G systems across Europe, avoiding excessive concentration;
- to maintain S&G grazing systems on the most marginal land within regions;
- to specifically support sheep farming with environmental benefits, such as appropriate stocking levels and grazing regimes (minimum and maximum densities, seasonal movements of stock where environmentally beneficial);
- to favour shepherding (an integral element of the most environmentally valuable farming systems, and one which is becoming economically unviable);
- to discourage the trend to intensive feeding systems, especially in milk-orientated production but also in meat systems.

Policy mechanisms need to be designed and implemented across the S&G regions in order to pursue these aims, but the reality is that the options are very limited. A fully decoupled premium (as in UK, Ireland and Italy) cannot influence the type and pattern of S&G farming.

Although cross-compliance should have a role in addressing problems of extreme overstocking, such problems are predicted to decline following decoupling. Minimum stocking levels might be established to introduce an incentive to keep livestock and for land to continue to be used as pasture, but this is not a satisfactory approach, as it is almost impossible to implement on the vast areas of public and common grazing that are under S&G use. Often the individual farmer cannot be held responsible for the condition of vegetation owned, for example, by a local authority or the state. Neither is the obligatory approach a secure option for maintaining farming systems that are inherently non-viable and unattractive in socio-economic terms, especially for young people.

Partially coupled premium (France, Spain, and to some extent Greece) may continue to provide an incentive for meat-orientated S&G farming, but it does not address the problem of competition between the more intensive systems on better land, and the marginal systems that are increasingly non-viable.

A key conclusion of the study is that such general mechanisms alone are insufficient. Cross-compliance can set the extremes of acceptable grazing pressure, but there is a clear need to provide targeted measures in order to promote the most appropriate grazing patterns within these limits. Currently, the only mechanism potentially available for a targeted approach under the S&G regime is Article 69 envelopes. These could be used to provide a higher level of aid to certain farming systems and/or areas, for example, with stocking densities below certain thresholds, using shepherding, or grazing more remote and inaccessible pastures. However, it is not clear that Article 69 envelopes are intended for such specific environmental targeting.

Pillar 2 measures are, of course, more appropriate for a targeted approach. Although not a focus of the present study, it is apparent from the research undertaken that there is considerable work to be done in developing a more effective and well-funded package of Pillar 2 measures in S&G areas.

There is a striking contrast between the relatively more developed policy situation in the Atlantic region (UK and Ireland), where LFA and agri-environment schemes are being used to influence the pattern of livestock farming in sensitive areas; and the situation in the Mediterranean region, where the LFA scheme is far less influential (in spite of the larger proportion of territory included in the designation) and where agri-environment schemes generally have paid less attention to extensive livestock systems.

S&G policy questions are not limited to support payments and control mechanisms. One policy concern that emerged from interviews was the difficulties faced by more marginal S&G farms in receiving grant aid for the improvement of basic farm infrastructure (e.g. sheds, livestock handling facilities). Such aid often depends on the preparation of a full modernisation plan, compliance with economic thresholds and the availability of capital, factors that act as serious barriers to many farms. Concern was also raised about the EU labelling system for 'traditional' products and for 'geographical origin' that do not distinguish between different farming systems (e.g. intensive and extensive).

Recommendations

Two primary aims can be condensed from the objectives proposed above:

- to maintain the basic socio-economic viability of the more environmen-

tally-valuable sheep/goat farming systems in areas where their presence is most environmentally positive;

• to encourage the farming practices that are environmentally most beneficial (e.g. appropriate grazing regimes, shepherding, hay-making), and discourage certain practices that are damaging.

Simple support schemes are needed to keep S&G farming in the remote regions where there are few if any agricultural alternatives. To have such a function, the support provided by the S&G premium system would need to be coupled in some way to the farming activity and targeted in order to provide a higher level of support to the least intensive systems. In the absence of sufficient mechanisms under Pillar 1, the LFA scheme may be the most appropriate for providing basic support.

Long-established S&G management techniques should be valued and supported through policy mechanisms. Certain aspects are fairly universal and environmentally beneficial and could be supported across the EU territory, especially shepherding, the use of sheepdogs and annual grazing regimes within locally appropriate density bands. Bonuses could be paid through the LFA scheme for supporting such practices.

There is a limit to what blanket measures, whether Pillar 1 or Pillar 2 (e.g. LFA), can achieve. There is a need for a much clearer identification of aims at regional-local level, putting S&G farming in the context of territorial objectives (fire control, biodiversity, landscape, social fabric and cultural heritage) with targeted measures to achieve them. Agri-environment schemes are suitable for more detailed targeting (e.g. supporting particular seasonal grazing regimes).

The scope available through Pillar 2 has not been fully utilised. There needs to be a much more balanced policy approach between the Atlantic and Mediterranean regions, much more targeted LFA mechanisms recognising the value of S&G grazing in areas of High Nature Value, and wider development of agri-environment schemes that recognise the value of grazing animals at appropriate stock density over large areas of territory.

Basic mechanisms for income support and incentives for certain practices need to be complemented with simple mechanisms for targeted investment aid, in order to improve the farm infrastructure of holdings that tend to be by-passed by policies focused on competitiveness.

The EU system of product labelling needs to be reformed so that the consumer can distinguish between products of intensive S&G farming systems and those using practices adapted to the local environment (appropriate grazing of local forage, use of locally grown fodder, etc.). This is more important than geographical location, from the point of view both of food quality and the territorial role of the farming system.

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Uist Workshop: Natura 2000 and the new RDPs – yet another opportunity missed?

A MacDonald

Typical machair mosaic, North Uist. The cattle system that underpins this vegetation is massively uneconomic.

How well are the needs of farmed Natura 2000 sites accommodated in the Rural Development Plans (RDPs) for 2007-13? To what extent do those responsible for Natura 2000 sites appreciate the fundamental change in farm economics caused by the decoupling of the 'Pillar 1' subsidies from production?

These questions are among those which inspired the Forum to organise a workshop in the Uist islands of north-west Scotland in the summer of 2006.

Funded by a range of local bodies, the event brought together 40 people from all rungs of the policy ladder. To ensure policy relevance, most of these deal directly with Natura-designated farmland in sheep-managed areas of Spain; the machairs of north-west Ireland, and, of course, the local Uist sites.

Combining field visits and workshop sessions, the event split the complex of issues into two over-arching questions. First, what is the state of the Natura sites, what are the trends in species and habitats on them, and how well understood is the link between these trends and farming?

Second, if the management needs are well understood, to what extent do the Rural Development plans which cover the regions where these sites are located address their requirements?

These questions raise a plethora of issues, from the principles behind the original designation to the politics of inter-departmental communications within government. We came across no examples of a truly integrated policy which fully recognised the socio-economic realities or conservation needs on the Natura sites.

A number of trends and patterns became apparent. Sites were not necessarily at 'favourable conservation status' when designated and even when they were, the details of the link between their state and agricultural management is poorly understood, except in the case of a few species (mostly birds).

Conservation authorities seem often to be ignorant of farming, or if not of farming, of the economics of farming. This is particularly significant at this time, when farmers can in theory reduce their (uneconomic) activity considerably and still claim Pillar 1 support. In fact, on most Natura sites the economic incentive is to be as inactive as possible.

Communication between the needs seen on the ground by conservationists and the policies put in place by agricultural ministries (who have most of the money) is poor, but the reasons are not always simple. The difficulty may be the unwillingness of the agriculture ministries to listen, but equally might be due to environment departments not wanting to share 'their baby'. In some cases the difficulties are within conservation agencies, with local staff not allowed

to broadcast the needs of their Natura sites for reasons of political expediency.

Conservationists are apparently poor at adapting their thinking to the five-year cycle which is central to Rural Development policy, often 'missing the boat' and thereby giving agriculture ministries a ready excuse for ignoring Natura 2000 sites.

Farmers are poor at taking command of the agenda on Natura, explaining their needs and working with conservationists. Their organisations are all too ready to hide behind the 'we're all in it together' fig leaf to avoid pressing for special support for designated sites.

The following articles, including 'Hot issues', give a flavour of the proceedings, and in particular of the liveliest debates, but a fuller series of reports is available on www.efncp.org.

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The Uist Workshop: Crofters Union report

The viability of cattle in marginal areas is key to maintaining the favourable conservation status of natural heritage sites of international importance such as the Uist machairs. This was the main conclusion of a two-day seminar organised by the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism that took place in North Uist and Benbecula at the end of June.

The event, attended by delegations of farmers, conservation experts and representatives of local and national government from Scotland, Ireland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Germany and Bulgaria, consisted of site visits to the islands' machairs followed by discussion workshops and presentations from Ireland and Spain.

Complex issues

The site visits and following discussion revealed that the conservation status of the machair is under threat for a complex variety of reasons. Traditional rotational cropping and fallowing is still practiced by crofters, as it has been for hundreds of years. Such management of the land results in a rich variety of bird and plant life, recognised by the various natural heritage designations awarded under the EU Natura 2000 Directive. But for how much longer can these beneficial practices continue when, due to a combination of CAP reform, increasing costs and poor returns in store livestock markets, they are financially loss-making for the crofters involved? Understandably, crofters have in some cases departed from tradition and adopted more modern techniques. Such techniques in themselves may damage the conservation status but are perceived as necessary to increase the crop and reduce costs and labour inputs. These include, for example, the use of fertilizer instead of seaweed; bought-in seed instead of saved seed; undersowing the cereal crop with grass instead of allowing natural regeneration; deeper ploughing with bigger machinery causing loss of soil condition and thus requiring more fertilizer; and putting the crop into big bales instead of sheaves. Then there is the universal crofting problem of fewer, and older, active crofters – it is difficult enough persuading young people into crofting, but if there is no money to be made, what are the prospects?

Cattle and conservation

In Scotland, Uist is well known for the conflict between farming and the increasing resident greylag goose population. The conservation agencies now agree that a drastic reduction in goose numbers is necessary for the survival of traditional machair agriculture. The only question, given the uncooperative position of some of the estates and the degree of legal protection afforded to the birds, is how to achieve such a reduction. When a crofter can lose his crop to geese within a few hours, he will naturally want to get it baled and wrapped at the first opportunity. This has two main knock-on effects. First, without their food source in the stooks, the corn bunting faces extinction. Extinction is also a risk for the islands' native seed varieties. Maria Scholten, a botanist at Birmingham University, says that, with less seed being saved and crops lost to geese, a poor year could result in the loss of the local oats and rye mixture which is well adapted to the climate and soil conditions of the machair.

So what about the cattle that are the sole reason for this regime of land management on the machair? Currently, crofters with cattle are making a loss on every animal they sell. With Single Farm Payment and Agri-environment payments they might, with luck, break even. But if they have Single Farm Payment entitlements, they have the option of doing nothing, except perhaps renting out the grazing or getting the grass cut once a year, and still make a profit. The only duty is to maintain the land in 'Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition'. No one is as yet very clear about what that means, but it is certain to fall far short of maintaining Natura 2000 sites in a 'favorable conservation status'. In these circumstances, the condition of the Uist machairs would certainly dete-

Crofters leaders, Ena McDonald and Norman Leask, expressing their concern about the future of funding for the Natura sites of the Uists.

D Murdie

riorate dramatically. In their presentation on the machairs of County Mayo, our Irish colleagues spoke of fewer farmers and fewer cattle, with the remaining farmers working the land more intensively and less sustainably. This could be the result in Uist, or worse; cropping could end and the sheep could be taken off the hill and put on the machair. Goodbye corncrakes.

What can be done to rebalance the economics of cattle keeping and preserve these internationally valued habitats? Crofters themselves have very little room for manoeuvre. Store cattle from Uist are very highly regarded by mainland buyers, but the price they make in the auction ring is still below production cost. The local market for finished cattle is limited by the small demand of an island population. Any increase in finished stock would have to be marketed off the island. This is not impossible – look at the niche market for organic Shetland lamb – but it would be a huge amount of work. In its favour, Uist is lucky enough to have its own abattoir and hopefully will soon have a cutting and processing facility.

While some crofters might be marginally able to improve returns, the ball needs to go back into the court of the Scottish Executive. By signing up to the Natura 2000 Directive, the Executive and its agencies have undertaken to maintain designated sites in a 'favourable conservation status'. If crofters can no longer afford to do this as a public service, what happens? Farming in-hand by the state or by the conservation agencies? Before heading down that road, what can be done to persuade crofters to carry on their traditional land management practices?

Policy failure

The Uist and Barra machairs Environmentally Sensitive Area scheme was far from perfect but at least it offered prescriptions that were directly relevant to the locality. There were high hopes that Action 35 would produce a Land Management Contract specific to the Western Isles, but Action 35 has withered away, and crofters and their advisers now have to struggle to apply a Scotland-wide, one-size-fits-all policy to their unique circumstances. There is a desperate need for area-specific agri-environment support, just as there is a desperate need for a fair allocation of Less Favoured Area support. LFASS payments per hectare in the parish of South Uist average £12. In a typical parish just outside Inverness the average is £50. It beggars belief that SEERAD continues to attempt to justify this discredited, possibly illegal (as it is based on production), and without doubt self-contradictory scheme. So policy measures that can potentially tip the balance in favour of machair agriculture are within the gift of the Executive and its agencies. So too is influencing (and reducing) the currently crippling cost of transporting feeds and other inputs to the islands.

We are much indebted to the organisers of this event. As well as highlighting some crucial issues, the seminar was highly enjoyable and informative. Special mention should go to Gwyn Jones and Ena MacDonald for the excellent arrangements, to the Spanish and Irish delegations for their input, and to the singers, dancers and musicians of North Uist for their entertainment at the closing ceilidh.

Uist workshop: 'Hot issues'

The sharing of responsibilities

What is the particular role of conservation agencies in the process of ensuring that Natura sites are positively managed?

Some stakeholders felt that of all the different groups with an interest in High Nature Value (HNV) farming on Natura sites, it is the environmentalists that have the technical knowledge on the conservation value of the site, whether or not it is in a healthy state, and what aspects are deficient.

Without that knowledge being spelled out there is no way to embark on the next steps, of looking at socio-economic or technical issues, working towards changes in management, designing incentives and so on. And of all the various environmental groups, it is only the administrators who have the legal duty to do this.

Some of the conservation administrator stakeholder group felt that they had done their best and that they should not be held responsible for the failings of other parts of the chain, such as agriculture ministries. The farmer group accepted this and stressed that they were not putting the responsibility for the whole process on the conservation administrators, but that nevertheless they had a specific role.

However, other conservation administrators rejected the very idea that they had specific duties which flowed from their specific expertise – they insisted that the basic truth of Natura being 'everyone's responsibility' was fundamental and they had no more duty than anyone else.

The Forum felt that an analogous situation might be a workshop on chronic disease. While all have a shared responsibility for health, it would surely be inconceivable for medical researchers and doctors to use that truism as a reason or excuse for not spelling out clearly what they knew about clinical needs and the causes of disease.

We asked the conservation administrators who would be to blame if they took no action to highlight sites' needs and they were found to have deteriorated at the next stage of monitoring. Some felt that it was 'everyone's fault' or the 'Government's fault'. The Forum therefore call on DG Environment to remind governments of their responsibilities and for ministers to spell out the division of duties between the various agencies in their countries.

Maria Scholten explains that the Uist machair is of European significance for traditional cereal crop varieties.

Natura sites and the wider countryside

What is the ecological and policy context of Natura 2000? There were a number of separate, but to some extent overlapping, concerns:

I That Natura areas are functionally part of the wider countryside in their immediate vicinity. In the Sierra de Gredos, in Spain, a SAC boundary has been set along a particular contour which has no meaning in terms of management by local herders. A SAC for the marsh fritillary (*Euphydryas aurinia*) on the Scottish island of Islay covers only a small portion of the areas known to be used by the local metapopulation. How should policy address ecological realities?

II That at a wider scale, Natura sites are only a sample of the coverage of a habitat or of the range of the species. The management of the wider countryside, even at a considerable distance from the site, remains vital to the ecological health of the species or habitat at a European scale. In the UK, Natura sites for golden eagles or blanket bogs cover only a small proportion of the pairs of birds and area of habitat present respectively. How should policy address this in turn?

III That the selection of Natura sites in most countries involved an element of 'administrative' or 'political filtering' – they are not a purely scientific selection – so that concentrating funding on the designated areas does not necessarily meet the intended targets of the Directive. An apparent example is the unwillingness in Ireland to designate further SPAs for corncrake (*Crex crex*; BirdLife Ireland, pers. comm.). How can we make the failure to designate sites less important for those habitats and species affected?

IV That the countryside is not divided neatly into areas of High Nature Value designated Natura sites and other, low biodiversity, areas. The concept of High Nature Value farmland as something wider than the Natura 2000 sites was meant to encapsulate the wildlife value of at least some undesignated areas. How should policy reconcile the demands of both designated and undesignated sites to achieve the wider goal of halting biodiversity loss by 2010 and of managing a significant proportion of [*all* – Editor's insertion] HNV farmland by 2008?

V That where a Natura site depends on farming as part of the management system, this farming must be socio-economically viable in order to survive in the medium to long term. It is questionable whether farming can be maintained only within Natura 'islands' if the same farming in the surrounding countryside is in terminal decline. If the critical mass of farming in a territory falls below a certain level, people are unlikley to be attracted into the business, and highly subsidised farming 'museums' devoid of any other economic motivation are unlikely to be sustainable.

A MacDonald

Cropped strips on the common machair on Uist add to the biological diversity associated with the natural vegetation.

There was a lively discussion. Point I was, in theory, easily covered. The Directives are clear that any potentially damaging plan or project and any necessary positive mechanism which are relevant to the needs of the designated site fall under the legislation's ambit, whether or not the areas concerned fall within the site boundary. Of course, in practice the question of financing which dogs the whole Natura issue makes this integration difficult.

Eventually we settled on the form of words given, but with the understanding that SEO (BirdLife in Spain) could not agree to it. Their point of view is summarised as follows: *Of course, what [the point] states is true, and could be applied to everything, as we are not isolated systems, persons, things. . . But two clarifications: first, it was not discussed during the seminar. And second, due to the financial constrictions we are living, it is very important to focus our efforts in the main areas. For us, this means Natura 2000. We are advocating proper funding for Natura sites and don't want to offer any confusing messages (or even anything that could be used in that way): SEO/BirdLife support prioritisation of Natura 2000 sites when it comes to spending Rural Development Funds. We think we explained this during the seminar and we would like to stress that we don't support any conclusions where this message is included, above all to avoid misunderstandings.*

The Forum makes the following comments. First, although we feel that it was discussed during the meeting, it is certainly the case that informal exchanges after the plenary session made it clear that the disagreement was not due to a misunderstanding but to a fundamental difference in positions.

Second, the relationships with which we were concerned are not just at the level of general truisms – they are in many cases fundamental to the positive status of the species or habitat in question.

Third, the Natura network is not a wholly objective and completely ecologically meaningful set of sites. For one thing, it is a set of sites which relates to a subjectively selected list of habitats and species – a list which has a much better coverage of some species groups (such as birds) than for others.

Implementation brings yet other influences to bear. Knowledge of distribution and status is patchy for some taxa – for these the network may well be deficient.

Knowledge of ecology is also sometimes lacking – we know of examples where tiny parts of sites used by metapopulations of butterflies have been designated, for example. And lastly, designation is a political act frequently opposed and successfully constrained by landowning or managing interests.

Fourth, the Natura sites which formed the subject of this workshop are not 'wild' areas, but are very dependent on the fate of farming and farming communities. Even though it is sensible to prioritise Natura sites when designing nature-conservation measures, it seems inconceivable to us that conservation administrations will have the funds to make these 'islands' uniquely viable and vibrant in a wider sea of rural decline.

We cannot avoid the conclusion that not only the future of (to us) valuable undesignated HNV farmland but the future of the Natura sites themselves depend on the development of a positive, realistic, forward-thinking agricultural and rural development policy for marginal areas.

Gwyn Jones, EFNCP

HNV farmland in the western Balkans

The requirement to identify and address the management of High Nature Value (HNV) farmland is now firmly fixed in the EU's rural development policy.

It is easy to forget that this commitment was entered into by a wider group of European states, as part of the Environment in Europe process.

What is the progress towards the Madrid targets (see *La Cañada* 19) in those areas of 'pan-Europe' outside the EU?

EFNCP was involved in a seminar covering the largest of these areas – farmland in the so-called EECCA (the former USSR minus the three Baltic States) – in November 2006 (see 'Plivice boost for HNV farmland profile' below).

The remaining region is the so-called western Balkans – the non-EU fragments of former Yugoslavia and Albania. A seminar aimed at raising awareness of HNV farmland in this area was held in February 2006 in Belgrade. Organised by WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme with Forum assistance, funding was provided through PEBLDS by the Swiss and Norwegian governments.

The event was attended by 32 people, 23 from the countries themselves. Five out of the eight entities in the region were represented. NGOs and environment ministries made up most of the participants. There was, I think, agreement that one ecological researcher was not enough to build a meaningful understanding of the processes involved, and that the biggest challenge in the next few months was to involve agricultural ministries and NGOs.

The region's HNV farmland faces challenges unique in Europe. The region's wars may have ended, but their impact lives on, and not only in the form of communities disrupted by ethnic cleansing. For example, Bosnia-Hercegovina has an estimated 30,000 minefields, accounting for some 10% of the land surface of the Bosnian-Croat Federation.

Europe's attention is still on the region, despite distractions from further afield. Croatia and Macedonia are now accepted as EU Candidate States and the importance of promoting stability in the remaining entities remains a high priority.

The challenge for those who care about HNV farmers and HNV farmland is to ensure that at least some of the help being provided reaches the country's most marginal and needy areas.

A full report by WWF-DCP is available on www.efncp.org.

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Plitvice boost for HNV farmland profile

EFNCP was asked to participate in the 4th Intergovernmental Environment in Europe conference, held in snow-bound Plitvice Lakes National Park, Croatia, in February 2006.

This conference, the latest in a sequence starting in Riga, was intended to discuss the priority issues of the Convention on Biological Diversity, signed in Rio. The aim was to shape the positions that will eventually be taken at the Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity in Belgrade in 2007.

One of the subjects for discussion was Agriculture and Biodiversity, and EFNCP shared the platform with five other organisations, under the chairmanship of Ladislav Miko of DG Environment.

The participating Government delegations felt that it was not possible to get very firm commitments into the text without allowing the opportunity to gather facts and garner opinions in the respective Ministries, resulting in a weaker commitment than might have been wished.

However, the conference conclusions still contain some important suggestions for future action:

- Further work on the nature, status and distribution of HNV farmland, especially in the Eastern Europe, Caucasus and Central Asia (EECCA) area.
- Setting up of a monitoring scheme for HNV farmland, ideally incorporating both ecological and socio-economic data.
- The specific inclusion of HNV farmland in the in-depth study of agriculture and biodiversity issues planned for inclusion in the next 'Programme of Work'.

Gwyn Jones (right) of EFNCP on a panel at the 4th Intergovernmental Environment in Europe conference in Croatia 2006.

As part of this process, the Forum participated in a seminar being organised on behalf of UNEP by WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme and the Moldovan NGO, Biotica. This took place in Chişinău in November 2006, and addressed HNV farmland in the so-called EECCA (the former USSR minus the three Baltic States).

This area of course poses several challenges, since it contains extensive areas of naturally-open habitats – deserts, semi-deserts and steppes – where the role of livestock is likely to be somewhat different from that on the semi-natural areas of more northern and western regions.

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2005 Forum conference in Bulgaria on social sustainability of HNV systems

The importance of High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems is becoming more and more accepted from a biodiversity point of view. But since enriched biodiversity is the result of and depends on active farming, the issue of social sustainability among HNV farming systems is a rising topic. Therefore the focus of the 9th biannual conference of the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism was 'Can High Nature Value (HNV) Farming in Europe´s marginal agricultural areas be socially sustainable?'

Almost 100 delegates met in Pamporovo, in the region Smolyan, in the beautiful Rodopi mountains, in the south of Bulgaria during the middle of September 2005 to share experiences and debate policy changes in order to make HNV socially sustainable. The participants came from 16 different countries, mostly European, but also from India and the US, and included scientists, policy-makers, environmental NGOs, farmer organisations and representatives from both national governments and European institutions. This mix of participants enriched the lively discussions throughout the conference.

The conference started with a full day of field visits excellently arranged by the Bulgarian partners, including the Ministry of Agriculture, WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme and the region of Smolyan. Three different groups all got to see active dairy farmers, sheep herders, local small-scale dairy industries and plant producers. The groups were warmly welcomed by the villages' mayors and treated to local folk dances, singing and tasting of local products such as roasted lamb, bean soup and yoghurt with jam.

Agriculture in the region has high natural and cultural values and is dominated by small-scale milk production, based on either cows or sheep. Dense forests on the hilly mountainsides are mixed with steep arable land, permanent pastures and meadows. Bulgaria is rich in wildlife, with, for example, 6,500 vascular plants, 383 bird species and 94 different mammals, and a large proportion of these can be found in the Rodopi mountains.

The ancient system of pastoralism with transhumance is still active in the region but is under severe pressure. Currently, this farming system has no or very limited economic viability. Very few young people are interested in becoming farmers. There is a lack of capital and credit possibilities for investments. The markets for local, high-quality products are still not developed. Many of the farmers are not taking part in EU policy schemes such as the SAPARD. Only a limited amount of national policies are currently oriented towards biodiversity, but there some are being planned that will be implemented shortly.

During the field trip, local entrepreneurs illustrated that it is possible to create successful business opportunities that combine the preservation of biodiversity with economic growth, while also bringing job opportunities to the region. A small-scale dairy has been operating for the past 12 years using milk from a number of small local producers. Their successful production of high-quality cheeses (that are being sold locally as well as in Sofia) has contributed to farmers maintaining milk production. The meadows will continue to be mowed and the butterflies will still have somewhere to find nectar.

Presenting the issues

The conference was opened formally by the Ministry of Agriculture of Bulgaria and the Governor of the Smolyan region. The first plenary day focused on the concept of HNV farming, with presentations from different parts of Europe. The present situation in Bulgaria was highlighted. Key issues that were stressed during the day were the following.

HNV farming systems are different throughout Europe, but are mostly characterised by:

- grazing;
- fallow;
- low use of pesticides and fertilisers;
- production is constrained by the natural capacity of land;
- areas of large seasonal forage deficit.

Patterns of land use:

- can be mosaic,
- have a long history of continuity, and
- a low intensity relative to the carrying capacity.

Problems that were touched upon in the presentations ranged from the above mentioned, to a lack of knowledge regarding both the ecological status of HNV and the identification of quality parameters, such as the impact of erosion, degradation of grasslands, and the fact that arable land far away from roads is no longer used.

The third day of the conference focused on the social impact of HNV farmland

Farmland in Bulgaria. The conference highlighted that small-scale farming is important for biodiversity. However, without targeted support the future is bleak for such farming systems and the diverse landscapes they produce.

Davy McCracken

and was initiated by the the Colin Tubbs memorial lecture by Dr Xavier Poux. Dr Poux introduced the concept of *saltus* as a means to describe the highly diverse nature of HNV farming. The Saltus project is proposed as a cross-cutting concept that can embrace in a common framework both the ecological and the agricultural dimensions of HNV (see *La Cañada* 19). The concept has its roots in rural geography and history, whereby three types of European rural landscapes were desbribed. These are: the ager (cultivated areas), the sylva (woodlands) and the saltus (literally, 'the jump' between the two first spaces). The saltus is a mix of non-ploughed areas (grassland and pasture) and man-made and natural features such as hedges, drove roads, stone walls, etc. He summarised the issue of HNV farming systems' social sustainability with the rhetorical question: 'Who wants to marry an HNV farmer?'

During the day different aspects of social sustainability were raised. Real examples from Bulgaria complemented the impressions from the field trips that far-reaching changes are needed to reverse the trend of HNV systems being abandoned. Presently, the policy has inadequate goals. If we only focus on the environmental aspects of HNV we will not create conditions for sustainable solutions. The economy as well as the social situation of the farmers must also be considered. The idea of re-coupling agriculture policy was presented. Subsidies should be earmarked for HNV farming systems and solutions must be separated from those applying to intensive agriculture. Systems combining extensive livestock production with crop production should be promoted. Focus should also be on taking away negative incentives. The positive impact of HNV farming should be rewarded and the hindering policy instruments reduced.

Solutions

The final day of the conference was devoted to solutions. An overall impression is that the way forward is characterised by development. HNV farming systems will only survive if they develop and manage to combine biodiversity preservation with economic growth and increased job opportunities. There is no single policy or market change that resolves the problem of threatened HNV farmland. Changes are needed in many fields. Some of the following were discussed.

- Stable long-term policies. Policies are presently changing too often and quite abruptly. EU needs a strategy for making HNV farming a priority for the CAP at all levels.
- Horizontal policies are needed but they must also allow a fine tuning at local level. This will be a challenge.
- Good examples of HNV farming systems which are socially sustainable need to be promoted.
- Policy and bureaucracy need to be simplified.
- Focus on small-scale farming.
- Demonstration farms are needed regionally.
- Information sharing programmes need to be initiated.
- It is necessary to increase the social status of farming. Educated people should be brought to HNV farms. Social values with biodiversity need to be combined to encourage young people return to the farms.
- Increased marketing of local brands. Milk production in HNV areas should focus on high-quality products linked to their origin, tourism, etc. The gap between the consumer and the producer must be reduced.
- Hygiene rules must allow processing of milk products at the farm level.
- Increase the farm education.
- The increase in land costs and labour must be met.
- Include traditional HNV farming practices, such as hay-making, in the school curriculum.
- An integrated approach which combines farming with tourism is neeeded.
- Increase farming and stock breeding.
- Focus on organic and high-quality products.
- Subsidy for certification.
- Subsidy for natural grasslands should be higher than for any other land.
- Popularise the concept of HNV farming systems.
- Establish support for small cattle herds, especially with breeds suitable for common grazing.
- Establish support for extensive fodder production.
- Problems of local land tenure realities must be solved.
- The income per hour for HNV farming must be comparable to that for skilled manual labour.

The conference was enriched by the presence of WISP, the newly initiated World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism (see opposite). There is great possibility for future collaboration between the Forum and WISP.

Finally, the conference might not have answered the question of who would want to marry a HNV farmer, but it still gave lots of valuable ideas for future work. It might be summed up by the following: the profile of HNV systems needs to be raised at both the national and regional level; more characterisation and understanding of these systems is necessary; and HNV farmland should be a priority for future CAP design and implementation.

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Identification of HNV farmland in Bulgaria and Romania

One of the difficulties facing EU Member States in late 2006 is how to respond to the requirement to address High Nature Value (HNV) farmland issues in their Rural Development Plans (RDPs). This challenge also faces Romania and Bulgaria, who joined the EU in 2007.

In these two countries, as in many of the existing Member States, the concept of HNV farming is still largely abstract theory. Linking this to real farming is a major challenge for governments and NGOs alike. This knowledge gap directly affects policy: how can their RDPs address the problems of a type of farming which has yet to be identified?

The issue of what HNV farmland means in practice at the local scale is being addressed in 2007/8 by EFNCP in partnership with WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme. With funding from the Netherlands Government's BBI Matra programme, the two organisations plan to hold three workshops each in contrasting areas of Romania and Bulgaria. There will then be a final reporting seminar in Brussels.

The workshops will concentrate on teasing out the relationships which make farmland and farming systems of high value to nature in each area. They will also analyse the socio-economic status and needs of the local farmers, as well as make policy recommendations.

While the project is too late to influence the overall structure and content of the RDPs, the hope is that it may still be possible to feed into discussion regarding the detailed measures and to help in the evaluation and improvement of the Plans.

The seminars start in 2007 and will concentrate on the lessons from six areas: the counties of Sibiu, Galaţi and Mehedinţi in Romania and the Strandzha, Western Stara Planina and Rusenski Lom regions of Bulgaria.

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WISP – the World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism

Mixed herd of 500 horses and sheep descending from summer grazing in the high mountains of Kyrgyzstan, September 2006.

S & J-P Biber

The World Initiative for Sustainable Pastoralism (WISP) (www.iucn.org/wisp) is 'a global initiative that supports the empowerment of pastoralists to sustainably manage drylands resources'. The project was initiated by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) (www.undp.org), is financed to a large extent by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) (www.gefweb.org) and it is run by the Nairobi office of The World Conservation Union (IUCN) (www.iucn.org). The EFNCP has been involved in the setting up of the project from the beginning and now functions as the European partner of WISP.

WISP has the term 'drylands' in its aims. This is, firstly, because the project is closely related to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) (www.unccd.int/convention/menu.php) and, secondly, because a large proportion of the world's pastoralists live in dryland habitats. However, WISP is also concerned with pastoralists in other habitats, such as mountain areas and also the wetter areas we are familiar with in western and northern regions of Europe.

Problems of transhumance

An important issue in WISP is 'mobile pastoralists', because in many countries of the world these have over-riding land-use problems. Mobile pastoralists are on the one hand nomads (in large areas of Africa and Asia), and, on the other hand, transhumant livestock breeders (often in mountainous regions) as in Europe. Of course, European transhumant livestock farmers also have land-use problems. Some of them do not own land at all (landless shepherds) and depend on farmers to make land available to them, most do not have land on the 'summering' areas and also depend on local sedentary farmers and landowners. In addition, those who still practice transhumance by foot depend on ancient herding routes (called 'cañadas' in Spain [where the name of this newsletter comes from], 'drailles' in France, and 'drove roads' in the UK) that today are not always easily accessible (many of these routes have been or are being physically destroyed or have become part of the agricultural land of sedentary farmers).

The problems facing transhumant livestock rearing in European illustrates how similar the problems of pastoral peoples are throughout the world. There are a lot of other examples, such as the marketing of products, low income and social problems. Europeans have been dealing with some of these problems for many years, and have partly also succeeded in making them an issue for the Common Agricultural Policy. Compared to other regions of the world, European pastoralists have made their voices heard by politicians and administrations … even if we know that the response from these is still far from optimal! Pastoralists of other regions are quite keen to know how things work in Europe, and to learn from us. We can also learn from them, by being made aware of the pastoral issues in other regions of the world and by seeing how pastoralists are confronting them.

The EFNCP's involvement

This is why from the inception of WISP we wanted to develop this North-South (East-West) connection It is in this context that the EFNCP may be able to play an important role.

WISP only really started during spring of 2006. And it is a huge and complex apparatus to manage, particularly because the idea is that the pastoralists of the world should be the ones providing the input for the management of the project. On the website of WISP you can find a lot of information about its activities. Many things are already happening, even if Europe is not yet directly part of it.

The EFNCP has so far been involved in the general management of WISP, and has twice-yearly meetings with the coordinator of WISP. We are also a member of the partners coordinating committee (PCC), where we hopefully can give some constructive input.

We have also been part of a small study on the economics of pastoralism. WISP had carried out a global desk review on the economics of pastoralism which highlighted some important similarities in economic valuation. This valuation showed information on the economics of pastoralism typically focused on live animal sales and overlooked many other important values. For example, few efforts had been made to value the subsistence economy of pastoral systems. Even fewer examples have been found of the valuation of environmental services provided by pastoralism.

Economics of pastoralism

To address this important knowledge gap, WISP carried out a small study to evaluate the economics of pastoralism in several regions. This was primarily a knowledge management exercise: gathering information and highlighting gaps, thus enabling wider learning from more localised experiences.

The EFNCP contributed with a small pilot study on the economics of pastoralism in Europe. This study showed mainly that there is considerable subjective information available, but that it is difficult to get hold of concrete data. This study will be continued if we find the necessary funds.

Another contribution the EFNCP is

S & J-P Biber

providing to the WISP project is a 'gathering' of African pastoralists in the South of France to give them an insight on European Mediterranean pastoralism and on the functioning of the EU agricultural policy. This will be organised by ourselves, together with our colleagues from southern France (who collaborated with EFNCP on the Montpellier conference in 2003). It will also be a common project of WISP and the PCI (the UNOCHA Pastoralist Communication Initiative) who organised the first world gathering of pastoralists in Ethiopia in 2005 (see *La Cañada* 19). At that Ethiopian gathering, we had been asked by several African participants whether we could show them pastoralism in Europe – which was basically unknown of by most participants there – about the problems and the ways to solve these. We plan to hold this gathering during the spring or autumn transhumance in 2007.

Nomadic pastoralist dwelling (Yurta) at 3,000m during the autumn transhumance in Kyrgyzstan, central Asia, in late September 2006.

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Noticeboard

Cross Compliance Network Bulletin

A Forum for the Analysis of Environmental Cross Compliance February 2007
The second issue of the Cross Compliance Network Bulletin is available to download from: http://www.ieep.eu/publications/pdfs/crosscompliance/cross_compliance_network_bulletin_feb_2007.pdf. This bulletin summarises the topics discussed at the second seminar held by the Cross Compliance Network research and features a contribution from the European Environment Agency and a farmer's perspective on cross compliance. Research papers on the above topics are also available from the project website at: www.ieep.org.uk/projectMiniSites/crosscompliancenetworkproj/reports.php. The activities of the Network concluded with a seminar held in Brussels in April 2007. The Cross Compliance Network is a Specific Support Action supported by the Community's Sixth Framework Programme.

Conference: Less Favoured Areas for Agriculture and Rural Areas 7-10 November 2007, Jihlava, The Czech Republic

A conference organised by The Research Institute of Agricultural Economics and The Regional Government of VYSOCINA and supported by The National Agency for Agricultural Research and the Ministry of Agriculture of the Czech Republic. Announcement and Call for Papers. Contact: smrzova@vuze.cz

The Grazing Animals Project (GAP)

GAP is a partnership project of representatives from the UK nature conservation, agricultural and livestock sectors. It helps develop local grazing schemes for nature conservation, provides training courses and responds to policy consultations. Services include a website (www.grazinganimalsproject.org), workshops and a quarterly newsletter. Membership is free: details from GAP, The Kiln, Mather Road, Newark, Nottinghamshire NG24 1WT (00 44 1636 670095); enquiries@grazinganimalsproject.info.

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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