La Cañada

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HNV farmland in Romania.

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CAP reform 2013 – EC Communication raises hopes for a more balanced policy that could help low-intensity farming

A draft of the much awaited Commission Communication on the future of the CAP was leaked in October, a month before it was due to be released. The improved final version was launched on 18th November.

From the environmental and HNV farming perspectives the document is disappointing overall. Nevertheless, it includes some important opportunities for significant changes to the CAP which might bring benefits for HNV farming, depending on how the proposals develop in 2011.

Perhaps the most disappointing aspect of the Communication is the unconvincing analysis of the 'food, natural resources and territorial challenges of the future' – the core subject of the document. Some analysis of the actual challenges might be expected, before going into policy responses. Yet the natural resource challenges concerning water, soil, air quality, habitats and biodiversity are dealt with in **two sentences** (out of 14 pages). Climate change gets a further two sentences.

Light greening of the CAP

Can this really be the same European Commission that is responsible for ensuring delivery of new and ambitious biodiversity targets by 2020, as well as effective implementation of Natura 2000, the Water Framework Directive and Soil Strategy? Are these not some very real and obvious natural resource and territorial challenges, all of which require major new support from the EU budget for Natural Resources (basically the CAP) to have any chance of success? Is some re-balancing and 'greening' of CAP direct payments a sufficient response?

The lack of joined up thinking shown by the Communication in not discussing these challenges in the opening sections is surprising. There is a complete failure to grasp the scale and range of natural resource and territorial challenges, as well as social and cultural ones in Europe's rural areas. The picture presented bears little relation to the situation as understood by Europe's environmental and rural experts, presumably including the Commission's own DG Environment. An air of complacency pervades, together with a lack of ambition.

In fact, the analysis and thinking seems to be dominated by yet another new argument dreamed up by the agri-food industry to defend its €45 billion annual handout, as in all CAP reforms. This time the argument is 'food security'. Of course, this is a lot of nonsense and totally at odds with the central theme of CAP reform this century – decoupling and increased market orientation.

How do decoupled, non-targeted, blanket handouts to farmers, with no obligation to produce food or anything else, ensure European food security? Nobody

has explained this yet. Ironically, the Commission's own website proudly boasts that since the last CAP reforms 'farmers are now free to produce what consumers want in a truly competitive market'.

Another major worry for DG AGRI, apparently, is 'farm income', which has been falling since 2009. This is referred to in the singular, as if there were just one level of EU farm income. To be fair, there are mentions in the document of differences in farm incomes, so perhaps the Commission, with its team of agricultural and economic experts, could do some analysis of which farm types and areas face the main income challenges? Then the problem can be dealt with in a targeted and efficient way, as the Communication proposes. EFNCP has been asking the Commission for this sort of analysis for the olive sector in the Olives Advisory Group on the CAP for several years, but nothing has been forthcoming.

Simplistic analysis

The introductory 'analysis' continues with the remark that 'any significant cutback in EU farming activity' will probably result in more rural depopulation and will have social and environmental consequences. Are these simplistic assertions how the EU goes about its policy analysis and decision-making for the spending of □50 billion per year? Surely the social and environmental consequences depend on how support is targeted, to which farms and in which areas, more than on the overall level of 'EU farming activity'?

In the leaked October draft, the Communication warned against a radical approach focusing entirely on environmental and climate-change objectives. This option supposedly would lead to significant reduction in farm income (in the singular again), cause land abandonment in some areas and intensification in others, with serious potential environmental and social consequences. Oh really? We would expect this reform option to result in **improved** incomes for farm types that deliver most environmental benefits, consequent **reduced** risk of land abandonment in the areas most threatened, and environmental and social **benefits** in these same areas. Happily, these attempts to steer the reader away from radical reform have been dropped from the final version. Perhaps the Commission realised that there would be calls for them to publish the details of their analysis.

To conclude the analytical part of the Communication, the Commission states confidently that the 'main contribution of the CAP today is a territorially and environmentally balanced EU agriculture', which is certainly at odds with what many of us see on the ground.

Objectives

By the time the reader comes to the actual objectives and reform options, expectations are at a low point. As a result (perhaps this is intentional), some aspects are a pleasant surprise. Even some references to Natura 2000, the Water Framework Directive and HNV have crept into the final version.

The proposed objectives are under three headings:

- viable food production;
- sustainable management of natural resources;
- balanced territorial development.

The first objective is used to justify continued support for farm incomes, but also includes compensating production difficulties in regions with specific natural constraints where there is an increased risk of land abandonment. This is an objective we agree with. However, it is worrying to see it justified on the grounds of 'viable food production'. This is a step backwards from the historic and current justification of LFA-Natural Handicap support – this has always had an environmental focus, which the Commission now seems to want to drop, just when we hoped something useful could be made out of it.

The second objective includes securing provision of environmental public goods, which is clearly a positive aim, although the document does not discuss what these goods consist of, what condition they are in, or what needs to be done to secure their provision.

The third objective (balanced territorial development) can be interpreted in many different ways, but we are pleased to note a reference to improving the conditions of small farms and developing local markets, which are potentially positive initiatives for small-scale HNV farming.

Reforms

Introducing the reform ideas, there are some encouraging words about changes needed to Pillar 1 direct payments, involving redistribution, redesign and better targeting of support. Criteria for these changes should be economic, the document says, in order to fulfil the basic income function of direct payments, and environmental, so as to support the provision of basic public goods. **These crucial phrases sound very positive to EFNCP ears.**

The suggestions are for **basic income support**, with possibly an upper ceiling per farm, and a minimum level of direct payment for small farms – both positive proposals. The assumption is that the 'historic basis' for direct payments is dead, as Commissioner Cioloş announced in the Brussels CAP conference of 19th-20th July. But quite how the new basic income support would be calculated is not clear – a flat-rate payment across the EU is not realistic, and the Communication talks of mechanisms to avoid major redistributions, especially between Member States. The devil will be in the detail of the decisions taken before 2013, but **in principle a move away from the historic system to a more balanced system of direct payments as applied already in England and Germany is very significant and to be welcomed. The potential shift of support in favour of low-intensity farming on poorer land is very considerable, and this is a move we strongly support.**

Greening of direct payments

The next critical element is the proposal for mandatory 'greening' of direct payments across the EU, in the form of simple, annual agri-environmental actions from farmers. This is what we wanted (see following article), but the examples of actions to be supported are not very encouraging (permanent grassland, crop rotation, green cover, and ecological set-aside). Presumably these would be rewarded with a higher direct payment, although this is not stated. Enhancing certain elements of General Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) is also mentioned as an option to be explored. Depending on the details of what is proposed in 2011, these ideas could be converted into measures of significant environmental benefit.

Of particular interest for EFNCP is the possible support for permanent pasture. Permanent pasture as defined currently under the CAP is not necessarily a land use of environmental value, as it only has to be more than five years old. To produce significant environmental benefit, support should be targeted on permanent pasture that is not reseeded for longer periods (e.g. 20 years), and that is farmed below a regionally-appropriate livestock density threshold (LU/ha is applied as a criterion under the French Prime Herbagère on over 3 million ha of farmland, so it can and does work).

Otherwise, there is little of biodiversity interest in the proposed 'greening' options. It is a missed opportunity to introduce a direct payment 'bonus' for the area of biodiversity features on a farm (such as large hedges, traditional orchards, semi-natural grassland). Some features are theoretically protected under cross-compliance, but EFNCP believes that farms of which a large proportion is under semi-natural features should be rewarded through a higher direct payment. Perhaps the Commission's proposed 'ecological set-aside' can be extended to include this approach.

Important changes to the LFA scheme are on the cards, with a possible Pillar 1 payment to all farmers in areas with

specific natural constraints. In principle this is sensible, as the current LFA scheme is a mess, and some countries exclude a majority of LFA farms (e.g. part-time farms) from receiving support. However, some farm-level criteria should be applied in order to target farms that are best able to conserve the fragile LFA environment, especially low-intensity farms.

The Communication contemplates the continuation of coupled payments in situations where particular types of farming are considered particularly important for economic or social reasons. **It is a mystery why environmental reasons are not included here, as such a measure could be very relevant for supporting some HNV farming situations.**

Gwyn Jones

The isolated mountain village of Lukomir in Bosnia & Herzegovina.

Pillar 2 payments

For Pillar 2, the picture seems to be a continuation of the current mixed aims. Some parts of the text give more emphasis to competitiveness and harnessing production potential, especially in New Member States, while others stress the environment. However, overall it is stated that **environment, climate change and innovation** should be guiding themes.

The importance of effective delivery mechanisms is stressed, which we agree with. There is mention of strengthening the strategic approach to Pillar 2 programming, with quantified targets at EU and programme levels. In principle, these are positive ideas that indicate a shift towards programmes that deliver EU priorities. With this in mind, the Common Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) indicators, of which changes in HNV farming is one, are flagged up for simplification and improvement.

The document encourages more innovative policy approaches under Pillar 2, such as creating packages of measures to address the needs of specific groups or areas (e.g. small farmers, mountain areas), or using preferential rates of aid as a targeting instrument. These are sensible proposals.

A new phrase was added since the October draft, saying that Pillar 2 environmental measures should be more closely tailored to the specific needs of regions and '**even local areas such as Natura 2000 and HNV areas**'. Obviously, we welcome the confirmation that HNV farming is to remain a priority for rural development policy, although the reference to HNV 'areas' is in danger of encouraging 'mapping' as the only way to identify HNV farming on the ground.

This suggests that DG AGRI have got their wires crossed. Methods and systems for monitoring change in HNV farming are not the same as mechanisms for targeting payments. EEA and several Member States have been developing maps of HNV farmland as a potential monitoring tool, not for targeting payments. For the latter, we have always proposed farm-level criteria (see following article).

What *is* true, though, is that over the past few years several Member States have invested considerable effort in developing their CMEF indicators for HNV farming, and some are now making good progress. It is important to build on this work over the coming years.

HNV farming has gradually come into EU policy following many years of work towards greater integration of environmental concerns in the CAP. HNV farming has been flagged up repeatedly as a priority under the EU Biodiversity Strategy, and by the Council of Europe and UNEP. The EEA and DG AGRI have continued to develop the concept. Nobody denies that HNV farming indicators present operational challenges, but they are the only integrated and strategic way of monitoring the biodiversity value of European farming. Sound objectives cannot be dropped just because they look too difficult. However, some improvements are needed in the wording and coherence of the CMEF indicators, including the HNV indicators.

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EFNCP calls for simple support for semi-natural grasslands

The Forum has, in collaboration with BirdLife International, Butterfly Conservation Europe and WWF, produced a new policy document on the future of High Nature Value (HNV) farming under the CAP post-2013 (see www.efncp.org/high-nature-value-farmland/cap-reform-2013/). The launch took place at our September conference in Sibiu.

This new policy document builds on the joint NGO proposals for CAP reform published in March 2010 (see www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/Proposal_for_a_new_common_agricultural_policy_FINAL_100302.pdf). These joint proposals included a logical system of payments to promote a more environmentally and economically sustainable model of farming for Europe, consisting of:

- **Basic Farm Sustainability Scheme** – for all farmers complying with basic environmental conditions.
- **HNV System Support Scheme** – a targeted direct payment as developed in the new HNV policy document.
- **Organic System Support Scheme** – a targeted direct payment running parallel to the HNV support scheme.
- **Targeted Agri-Environment Scheme** – developing the existing measures to pursue clear environmental objectives.
- **Natura 2000 and WFD Compensation Scheme** – for specific situations where EU legislation imposes significant restrictions on farmers.

So what is the logic of a scheme to support HNV farming and what should it look like?

Targeted payments

Environment Commissioner Potočnik pointed out in his video message to the Sibiu conference that HNV farmers need to make a living but cannot compete with other more lucrative types of farming. As a result, low-intensity farming systems all over Europe face abandonment or intensification. Our new paper illustrates this basic income problem for a range of HNV farming types, and proposes the introduction of a new targeted direct payment to fill the income gap.

Currently, the CAP spends around €45 billion per year on direct payments to support farm incomes across the EU, but these payments are based on obsolete and often absurd criteria. Billions of Euros are wasted on very high payments to the most intensive and competitive farms, while the system does relatively little to support the viability of Europe's low-intensity farms that are of the highest inherent environmental value. Measures that aim to conserve biodiversity on farmland, such as Agri-environment and Natura 2000 compensation payments 'are simply not sufficient when it comes to very extensive and remote farming areas', to quote the words of the Commissioner.

There are vast areas of HNV farmland across the EU where these measures are not applied, and major inconsistencies in the use of measures between regions and Member States. Besides, the fundamental socio-economic challenges faced by HNV farming are not addressed effectively by compensation payments, and the 'income foregone' approach to payment calculation. Hence the clear need to re-allocate a proportion of direct payments specifically to HNV farming.

The HNV farming payment that we propose is based on the French *Prime Herbagère Agroenvironnementale* (PHAE). This scheme uses farm-level criteria such as proportion of grassland, proportion of biodiversity elements (essentially semi-natural farmland features), plus basic conditions on practices such as livestock densities and input use.

Eligibility criteria

The eligibility criteria and thresholds of the PHAE scheme are not exactly as EFNCP would propose for targeting HNV farming, but the basic approach is highly appropriate and easily adapted to target low-intensity livestock farms. The same approach can also be applied, with adaptations, to provide targeted support to HNV farms with an arable and/or permanent crop orientation.

Thus the PHAE shows the way forward for a pan-EU support scheme for HNV farming. Although an agri-environment scheme, there is no practical reason why it should not operate as a targeted direct payment.

Payment schemes to support HNV farming cannot succeed by themselves. In more marginal situations in particular, local projects that work pro-actively with HNV farmers are essential, and we propose that these should be mainstreamed into rural development policy, for example as a special type of LEADER project for HNV farmers. Local actions should address socio-economic and conservation issues, leading to greater social recognition and motivation of HNV farmers, and ensuring a critical mass of activity and farmer succession.

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Endemics in European grasslands

A very interesting short paper by Ines Bruchmann (ines.bruchmann@uni-flensburg.de) and Carsten Hobohm of the University of Flensburg in Volume 15 of *Grassland Science in Europe*, published this year, asks the question 'What European habitats are important for endemics?'

The authors point out that, although Europe has a special duty under the Convention for Biological Diversity to protect the approximately 6,200 vascular plants found only within the Continent's boundaries, little is known about their distribution patterns and, in particular, the habitats in which they are found, making this duty rather difficult to carry out effectively.

They undertook a literature search and assigned as many of the plants as possible to a small number of broad habitat classes.

The top habitat for endemics is rocky areas, with at least 2,772 species – a not unexpected result since mountain tops form natural islands. These endemics are often found in only one country and so find their way into Red Data Books, and their habitat is often protected or outside the range of many of the most pervasive human threats.

The second and third, however, are grasslands (1,320 species) and shrub and heath habitats (1,125) – mostly semi-natural habitats which are under severe threat, as the Forum has been preaching for years.

Grassland, occupying only 10% of Europe's land surface, has almost twice the number of higher plant endemics compared to forests (776), for example.

The countries with the highest numbers of European grassland endemics are Italy (537), countries of former Yugoslavia (516), France (503), Austria (428), Spain (376), Switzerland (358), Germany (320), Romania (309), Czech Republic and Slovakia (292) and Bulgaria (269).

However, grassland endemics do not generally find their way into Red Data Books. One of the reasons is that they are often found in more than one country (median:3), so that the global importance of European grasslands (and shrub and heath habitats) is undervalued.

The authors point out that grassland biotopes listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive are almost all in unfavourable status throughout almost all their range, according to the European Commission. This suggests that the fate of European grassland endemics is pretty dire.

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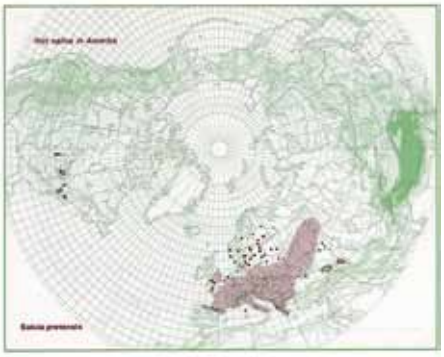
Meadow Clary *Salvia pratensis* (right) and its global distribution (below).



Bob Gibbons

Public goods as a vehicle for integrating biodiversity into agricultural (and other) policies: opportunities and risks

Defending the cause of biodiversity in agricultural policies is not an easy job. Anyone playing this card in the policy game has experienced difficulties and noted that the debate is conducted in an air of conflict. In the case of HNV farming, as in others, the preferred outcomes of the dominant parties are frequently the opposite of those who defend the idea of preserving low-input farms.

The conflicts associated with nature conservation in the 1970s and 1980s led conservationists to look for other strategies, and to abandon the 'narrow' vision (according to their accusers) of wrapping nature of cotton wool. The embracing of the biodiversity concept can be understood as a way of widening the vision, both from a natural perspective (going beyond strict species lists and considering the whole ecosystem and its relationship, which was another way to speak about ecology) and from a social perspective – a reminder that Man is part of ecosystems.

Despite the progress on the conceptual side, biodiversity has made little progress in the last two decades. The 2010 targets were not met. In fact, using 'biodiversity' did not lead to less conflict, except when it came to watering down the species and habitats issues. At a recent meeting in the French Ministry of Environment someone said, '*Biodiversity has nothing to do with nature!*', everybody nodded!

Biodiversity and policy

In most cases, biodiversity is still quite unpopular in the policy arena. The criticism frequently made of HNV farming is that it is too green and too extensive. Fundamentally, HNV farming – and biodiversity – is not generating enough cash, which seems to be urgently needed in the present context, politicians say. It sticks out like a sore thumb. Just like Natura 2000, in fact – remember the struggle to get that policy properly implemented and financed?

In this context, it is tempting to try to find another strategy to defend biodiversity. That is how we should understand the rising profiles of the phrases 'ecosystem services' and 'public goods' in the policy arena in the last 30 years, and especially the roles they have assumed as lifelines in the present policy debates.

The principle is apparently strong: policy makers can be convinced to act for biodiversity only when they recognise its value. Through several more or less explicit shifts, 'value' means 'economic value' and thus 'monetary value'. Put money and trade in the debate, and it will ease things. Past policies have failed, economists say, because of this lack of argumentation.

The important thing is that it offers the chance to avoid policy conflicts – the market implies an *agreement* between suppliers and consumers. While in the past nature conservation meant political choices and conflicts, markets would ease things by making such choices more objective.

Of course, in order to address the specific issues of nature, such markets need to be adapted to its 'public' dimension (not tradable, not excludable), but fundamentally the idea is to create a market for nature conservation. Advantages are foreseen: as public money is getting scarce, we might look for private money, as, for example, in habitat banking.

Public goods

This approach has been taken up by many academics in the field of economics, environmental and management sciences. Major NGOs and environmental ministries have been adopting this vehicle to defend their ideas, and particularly in the debate on the reform of the CAP, under the umbrella concept of 'public goods'. Indeed, in the mind of conservationists 'public goods', means 'environmental public goods', which means 'extensive pastures, hedges, semi-natural vegetation', which in turn means 'biodiversity and nature'.

All this has a value, and led to the slogan, 'public money for public goods'. The word shift does not matter, so long as they refer to the same ideas in the minds of conservationists. You may say 'I want to conserve these public goods in the landscape,' while in your mind you are thinking of a hedge and an extensive permanent pasture next to it, hoping that the policy maker you are addressing is not clever enough to see also that 'hedge and a pasture'!

The idea is not bad in itself, but it is perhaps a little naïve to base too many hopes on it for a number of reasons.

A fuzzy concept

The most basic problem is that for other people 'public goods' means 'employment', 'food security', 'hope for further GDP', which in a way are neither tradable nor excludable, nor socially valued. 'Public goods' sound like things which are of benefit to the public – it is the technical meaning which is obscure! It is not surprising that there are misunderstandings when the concept is used in its widest sense. Policy makers have cunningly noticed that the word has different meanings, and use it in the broadest possible (and most natural?) way. The environmentalist should never forget to label the public goods he or she thinks about as *environmental* public goods, in order to avoid the risk of being trapped in a long discussion on theoretical principles.

Virtual or actual money?

More fundamentally, there is an important ambiguity which is not fully recognised. When The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity assess the economic value of services rendered by forests for greenhouse emissions as being 3.7 trillion US dollars for this sector only (100,000 times the *world* GDP), it is clear that we are not speaking of the same dollars; some are real, in a bank account, while others are virtual. When the figure is used for policy awareness purposes, that's fair enough, but when it comes to allocating actual cash payments, say for foresters (or farmers, in our case), there is clearly a shift that needs to be recognised.

What is the actors' game?

This ambiguous use of 'value' implies that the hand behind the environmental market, whether public or private, is still 'invisible'. The 'true value' is only revealed – the market only works – under conditions with complete information.

In reality, what counts is not the value of environmental 'goods' or assets but the actors using them. While a HNV farmer might be sitting on a (virtual) gold mine whose value to the public is estimated at say □100,000, it is still economically rational for him to plough his permanent grassland, generating say □10,000 of cash for the tractor and seed retailer, □10,000 of cash for the water treatment company, □5,000 for the bank which funds the investments and then gets □20,000 himself from agri-environment for 'reinstating' the pastures. What should be compared are the people who benefit from the virtual □100,000 with the ones that benefit from the actual □45,000 (□20,000 to destroy HNV habitats, □5,000 for the bank and □20,000 to reinstate them). There is no need ever to pay the □100,000, and no means by which to do so.

One might argue that this example illustrates precisely why things should change. Economic valuation of public goods and environmental services certainly allows for a better understanding of what is at stake. But one must also be aware that in order to make the market change from a public perspective (i.e. a different distribution of payments which should grant public goods) or a private one (i.e. an efficient habitat bank system), you cannot count on the invisible hand. Making the market work for nature requires a lot of public effort in setting the value of assets, in controlling, in punishing those who do not respect their contract, and so on.

If you look to private money for funding, you will have to argue why involving a private company in a habitat banking scheme should be more effective than a tax used for environmental policy. It needs to be quite clear what you want to defend in order to value extensive farming as much as intensive farming. It is anything but easy to defend in a proper way, despite the hope that dealing with economy and markets involves less conflict than dealing with policy! In fact, it requires the same kind of energy as was needed for 'nature conservation' in the old days, because the actors who are against an efficient public goods policy are the same as the ones that were against nature conservation.

Economic versus the ethical

Those of us who are interested in conserving biodiversity must ask whether using the public goods concept is the best strategy to achieve our goals in a world dominated by short-term economic thinking.

Might we not argue a contrary position? Isn't the strongest point of nature conservation the fact that it is *above* economy for many actors, including some policy makers. Patrick Blandin, a French researcher working on nature conservation, reminds us that in 1923 the first International Congress for Nature Protection (the ancestor of IUCN) already illustrated the two lines of argumentation – the economic versus the ethical – asserting that nature value was not comparable with economy.

Nearly a century later, the two streams are still present and have led to different approaches, with variable success for each camp (from protected areas to agri-environmental measures). However, this historical view is useful in order to stand back from an over-optimistic belief in economically-based lines of argumentation for nature conservation, which at the present time take the form of public goods and ecosystem services. It is probably a convincing tool for raising awareness, but when it comes to practical options, it can lead to counter-productive approaches if it fails to recognise that a nature market needs a strong nature policy.

Nature conservationists will still have to fight. If they choose to make war on the economic battlefield, they still need to be conservationists. To paraphrase Clemenceau: 'Ecology is much too serious a matter to be left to economists'…alone.

As Redford & Adams (2009) rightly point out, 'Conservation has a history of placing great faith in new ideas and approaches that appear to offer dramatic solutions to humanity's chronic disregard for nature (...) only to become disillusioned with them a few years later. The payment for ecosystem services framework fits this model disturbingly well.'

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European grassland birds in a global context

Grey Partridge. Richard Revels

Farmland: a major bird habitat

While working on our book *Farmland Birds across the World* (see the review opposite), BirdLife International provided us with their statistical database categorising birds according to their most important habitats.

To our astonishment, more than one third of the world's bird species (3,600 out of 10,000) were classified as farmland birds. Farmland is the third most important terrestrial bird habitat after forest and scrubland. For some species, farmland is their primary habitat, while for many others farmland is a surrogate for their lost, more natural habitats. Nevertheless, this status calls for targeted stewardship.

With 331 farmland species, Europe (excluding Russia) holds a relatively small share (9%) of the world's farmland birds. The first explanation lies in its modest territorial area. Europe has only 3% (89 million ha, excluding Russia) of the world's grasslands. Within the EU, permanent grasslands cover 55 million ha, corresponding to 13% of its territory and 30% of its farmland.

The second reason is Europe's high proportion of forest cover (45%). If we compare Europe to Africa (see table below), the differences become clear. In fact, when applied to every continent, the negative relation between the number of farmland birds and the forest cover was found to be rather linear.

	Europe	Africa
No. of farmland species	331	1,136
Farmland area (millions ha)	474	1,157
% of farmland species	21	49
% of forest area	45	21

Special position of grasslands

Compared with other farmland habitats, grasslands have a special position for two reasons. First, they include a wide range of types, from entirely natural to intensively cultivated. Although the same might be true for natural wetlands and rice paddies, for example, there are a number of bird species that have truly co-evolved with grasslands. Despite the limited area

of Europe's grassland, the degree of overlap with Europe's estimated 75 million ha of High Nature Value farmland area (75 million ha) is uncertain.

Secondly, and seemingly in contrast, grasslands are not particularly species-rich. Although farmed grasslands cover two-thirds of the world's farmland, they host hardly one-third (1,100) of all farmland species. Interestingly, however, they contain relatively large numbers of individuals. One example is the famous Great Plains in the US, representing one of the world's largest (150 million ha) grassland areas. The Plains' 39 true grasslands breeders (including greater and lesser prairie-chickens, grasshopper sparrow, ferruginous hawk, lark bunting, eastern meadowlark, burrowing owl and long-billed curlew) represent a total estimated population of 750 million birds (20 million per species).

At the other end of the scale, some South African grasslands can support an amazing density of 170 species per 100ha.

Although about 1,100 species use grasslands as their primary habitat, only some 100 of these are entirely confined to grasslands. These include ostriches, nandus and bustards (all 'Old World' species!), seedsnipes, coursers, pratincoles, plovers, sandgrouse and larks.

Decline: a global phenomenon

The alarming BirdLife figures on the decline of Europe's farmland bird numbers are well-known: between 1980 and 2005 they fell by more than 40% in the old Member States, and by over 25% in the new ones. One cause is the rapid loss of grassland and grazers. The EU grassland area is declining by tens of thousands of hectares per year, due to urban development, conversion to other (e.g. energy) crops and desertification (fuelled by climate change).

Grazing animals are declining even faster: EU cattle numbers have fallen by 10% since 1995, and sheep (more likely to be kept in outdoor systems) by 20%. In addition, well-known factors such as over-extensification (e.g. undergrazing, abandonment), intensification (drainage, overgrazing, earlier, more large-scale and faster mowing), increased predation and flyway problems (e.g. hunting) have taken their toll. The overall result is a smaller area of more monotonous grassland, to the disadvantage of many birds.

These same causes of decline appear to be a worldwide phenomenon, but the mix differs by continent and country. In many Asian grassland areas, overgrazing as a result of population growth is now the dominant factor. The North American prairies suffer mainly from native as well as exotic invasive weeds and trees, enhanced by the suppression of fire and natural grazing (e.g. by prairie dogs). In the South American pampas, grassland conversion to arable land (mainly soybean) and commercial forest is the primary cause of declines, the latter fuelled by tax incentives.

In Europe, the causes of loss of grasslands are getting more diverse as well. In past decades, intensification was supposed to be the major cause in north-west Europe, with over-extensification and abandonment in southern and eastern Europe. Whatever the truth of that, the picture is now much more complex: extensification and abandonment (partly due to the decoupling of farm support) also appear in areas such as the UK's uplands, in parts of Scandinavia and locally even in the Netherlands, while intensification is taking place in the better equipped parts of central and eastern Europe.

With the abolition of dairy quota ahead, the differences between European regions will probably increase. HNV areas will, generally speaking, hardly benefit, as their production costs are relatively high and many farmers and important infrastructures have already disappeared.

EU has key instruments

However, in contrast to many other continents and countries, the EU already has a set of policy instruments to support grassland birds. Worldwide, only the US, Canada, Australia and South Africa have been introducing grassland conservation schemes including financial incentives. Many other countries still offer adverse incentives for grassland conservation. In Europe, targeted market initiatives, such as bird-friendly rice from the Ebro delta, are rare for grassland products.

The first target for grassland birds is to maintain the grassland area, and the second is to get it into or keep it in good condition for birds. Several EU Member States have introduced premia for permanent grassland, and some also for grazing (recoupling support to animals). These are promising initiatives, but still insufficiently targeted to grassland birds.

Agri-environment schemes can provide a valuable addition to these general premia, provided they become better targeted as well. The first challenge is to establish a regional rather than a farm-scale approach, as bird populations are large and mobile. The second challenge is for a better distinction within bird communities of their ecological demands (not every species benefits by late mowing alone, for example), including the relevance of grazing to a substantial number of species. The third challenge lies in making a better distinction between the breeding and feeding function of grasslands, as the second still receives too little attention in the design of agri-environment schemes. The 2013 CAP reform offers excellent opportunities to implement such improvements.

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Farmland Birds across the World

This wonderful book does exactly what its title suggests and covers all the major farmland habitats of the world, from grasslands to rice fields and from arable land to agro-forestry. Although a great deal of information is packed into the 130 pages of the book, this is not some dense scientific tome. On the contrary, the facts and figures are interspersed with a wide array of beautiful photographs and the text is also broken up by more than 50 large and small boxes explaining particular issues.

The editors underline that the intensification of agriculture is a key threat to birdlife in developed countries, while the expansion of agriculture in developing countries is even more destructive (given that such expansion often takes place in natural habitats). But they also highlight two nature conservation paradoxes:

- in some cases, agriculture can provide a surrogate habitat for some birds species and can even be their last resort on the planet
- farmland which is managed to support such species may be less productive, indirectly increasing pressure on natural habitats and associated birdlife elsewhere. Hence, saving farmland birds can be detrimental to the birdlife of natural habitats.

The authors recognise that these can lead to confusion and a potential dilemma among conservationists as to whether it is best to allow the expansion of farming or the intensification of the existing farmland resource. Much of the final chapter is dedicated to this issue. As you may expect, there is no one easy answer, but the book does provide examples of what has worked and what could work. This gem of a book is well designed and well written, and will appeal to a broad audience. I recommend it wholeheartedly. It is also a bargain at €24 (plus shipping costs; ISBN 978-84-96553-63-7). Order from CLM (www.bookfarmlandbirds.com/order_now), or for those outside Europe, go direct to Lynx Edicions (www.lynxeds.com/product/farmland-birds-across-world).

Davy McCracken

Trees on a pasture or pasture in the forest – Do we recognise HNV farmland?

Lea Sepp

Some Hereford cattle from a herd of more than 90 on the alluvial meadows of Metsa Johani farm, on the Estonian island of Saaremaa.

Despite the fact that Estonia is a small country and proud of its relatively well-preserved nature, our society's knowledge and appreciation of the real values of farmland is still sadly lacking. Maybe we are spoilt, used to having lots of 'other' nature around us, such as deep forests and wetlands, which has blinded us to the fragility of farmland communities. Do we actually know where our nature values are, how dependent they are on management, and what is really needed to maintain them in a sustainable way?

One of the peculiarities which arise when describing the land management in Estonia is the absence of a common understanding and definition of farmland. This is reflected even in the statistics. Different data sources offer different figures for Estonian farmland, ranging from around 860,000ha according to the agricultural support system (area under single area payment in 2009) up to 1.7 million ha according to CORINE land cover (share of farmland 19-38%).

To assess the impacts of current policy measures on farmland we need to look at changes in the actual land use. The land-use structure and therefore physical changes and conditions are relatively well known only for those areas which are currently registered under the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) and Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS). However, not all agricultural areas in Estonia are registered in IACS/LPIS. For example, neither land that was not declared in LPIS as agricultural land in 2004 (the reference year for Estonia), nor land which was considered later in the course of inspections to fall below the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) standards, are counted as agricultural land in those databases.

In addition, during the period 2004-2005 'quite a significant share' of wooded pastures and wooded meadows, particularly in western Estonia, were excluded from receiving CAP hectare payments because they did not meet the single area payment (SAPS) requirements related to 'normal' productive land (e.g. they had more than 50 trees/bushes per ha).

This resulted in the exclusion of those areas from support and the land register systems, but not immediately from actual use by farmers. Trees on these areas are not always the evidence of careless management, but have their own purpose. Very many farmers consider these wooded areas as an integral part of their farming systems – systems which have evolved naturally in this particular environment. For example, the trees on the pastures are offering natural animal welfare 'services' such as shelter during hot summer days, and the unique plant composition of these habitats provides a wide range of nutritive feed for the animals.

Traditional farming is not sufficiently valued by different policies. Estonian farmers are confused by EU rules and standards for agricultural areas whose effect is to reject areas of their farmland that are very directly related to the provision of many public goods. After all, species-rich wooded meadows were not historically managed for nature conservation, policy-driven, reasons, but were and are by-products of traditional farming systems. This fact keeps slipping from policy-makers' minds; they don't see the need for supporting 'farming systems' clearly enough.

Surely the CAP should not be simply a policy of giving hectare-based support, but a policy acting in a wider context to support and facilitate development of those areas through a specific and appropriate legal framework, with economic/financial assistance and relevant information and advice.

High Nature Value (HNV) farmland whose value results from a high proportion of semi-natural vegetation is labelled 'Type 1' HNV by Andersen *et al*. (2003). This type has been discussed the most frequently, and the values are increasingly recognised also by the Ministry of Agriculture and the Ministry of Environment in Estonia, although this is only slowly being reflected in policy responses.

In 2008 a special sub-measure for the management of semi-natural habitats in Natura 2000 areas was introduced in the Estonian Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013 as an agri-environment (AE) measure. Under this scheme the '50 tree rule' does not apply, and all semi-natural habitats in Natura 2000 areas are eligible for the support.

But there is also a country-specific 'catch'. By applying for this support, farmers are automatically excluded from receiving any other CAP area-based support for the same land. This seemed like a fair decision in 2007, when the support rate was calculated to attract management of the areas which otherwise would not have been eligible for CAP area payments. Fixed for five years, it was equal to the per-hectare payment those areas would have received from other CAP supports as an average. But as the payment rate for SAPS has increased annually in accordance with the agreed arrangements for the new Member States joining in 2005 and 2007, farmers who are claiming these AE semi-natural habitat management payments are locked in an increasingly unequal situation. This puts these areas of Community Interest back under threat of marginalisation and abandonment.

There are potentially approximately 100,000ha of semi-natural habitats in

Estonia, of which about 73,000ha are covered by the Natura 2000 network, including areas which are SAPS eligible and those which are not. Just 30% of Natura area is managed with the RDP support for the management of semi-natural habitats, and only a small additional area is managed with direct support from the Ministry of Environment.

This begs several questions. What is happening on the rest of the area, and who should be responsible for finding out? Do we need and want these areas to be back in farming, and what exactly is needed to acheive this?

Case study – Metsa Johani farm

These issues can be illustrated through a recent case which received much discussion in the media in Estonia. Our purpose is not to point the finger but to demonstrate how simple rules designed with good intentions do not work in every country in the same way, depending on country-specific ecosystems, and can end up with very complicated and contrary results.

The Metsa Johani farm is situated on Estonia's largest island, Saaremaa. The farm has long farming traditions and the current owner of the farm, Andrus Sepp, manages approximately 270ha of land. In 2009 he received SAPS and AE organic farming support for 123ha of his land, and a special AE support for management of semi-natural habitats for 84ha (that area was excluded from receiving any other CAP hectare support). The remaining 63ha received no CAP support at all.

As the farm is orientated toward mainly Hereford-based beef production, most of the farm is pasture. Andrus has more than 90 organically-managed animals, including 23 suckler cows and 35 heifers. About 90% of the area is in the Natura 2000 network, the habitat types including Nordic alvars, hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities, alluvial meadows and wooded pastures.

Before EU RDP supports were introduced in Estonia in 2004, Metsa Johani farm was receiving national agricultural support (e.g. AE organic farming support) for an area which was marked and declared by the farmer. This same area was digitised into LPIS in 2002 without any additional controls. These boundaries remained the same also for the EU agricultural support (SAPS, AE organic farming support and support for Less Favoured Areas) which the farmer applied for in 2004-2005.

In 2005, the Paying Agency carried out inspections and subsequently disputed the eligibility of areas of wooded pastures as there were more than 50 trees per ha in some parts of the parcel. Since the error

Arvi Kiis

In 2008, while the land eligibility was still in dispute, the Rural Development Foundation chose Andrus Sepp as the best beef breeder in Estonia!

was more than 30%, no support was approved for 2005 and the farmer had to pay back all support previously received for 2004, even for the areas meeting the standards, as defined by the agency.

The farmer appealed the decision in court on the grounds that the land was used for agriculture, i.e. was being grazed with animals. But the use of the land for grazing was never the point of dispute – there were just too many trees.

The 'wood pasture problem' appeared mainly on the islands and mainland of western Estonia, where animals are traditionally grazed on areas with junipers and trees. More than 400 farmers in western Estonia had the same problem as Andrus Sepp with their wooded pastures.

By 2007, Andrus Sepp's case reached the Supreme Court, who found in his favour, obliging the Paying Agency to review the decision again.

By EU regulation EC Reg 796/2004, Art. 8 p1, land with trees is to be considered agricultural for the purpose of eligibility for support if the agricultural production can be carried out in a similar way as on parcels without trees in the same area.

The Court found that the Paying Agency did not employ sound reasoning in its decision-making and had not shown why it was not possible to graze animals on the land in question in the same way as on the other parcels in the same region without trees.

But instead of reversing their decision and reinstating the payments, the Paying Agency interpreted the judgement as meaning that they had to improve their explanation of why the parcels are not eligible.

No document specifies what the phrases used in the Regulation ('similar way' or 'in the same area') mean. The EC working document (AGRI/60363/2005) is more specific: land which has more than 50 trees per ha should not be considered as eligible for support in principle, although exceptions can be made for environmental reasons. The Paying Agency used that as a clarification and the penalties remained in force.

In the summer of 2007 there was political intervention and clarifications and exceptions were made, such that some of the farmers who had grazed their pastures and applied for the agricultural area-based supports did not have to repay supports previously received. Appeal case by appeal case, the decisions were reviewed, but no positive decision was made for Metsa Johani farm.

The way forward

All of this has raised questions: where does agricultural land begin and end? What is agricultural activity? How should the management needs of different habitats be recognised?

The irony is that at the same time the importance of farmers for maintaining semi-natural habitats is highly valued by environmental specialists in Estonia. Tõnu Talvi, a specialist on the Environmental Board, said that while he was director of the Saaremaa Regional Nature Conservation Centre the wooded pastures of Metsa Johani farm were in favourable conservation status and were improving every year, thanks to constant maintenance and grazing. Andrus Sepp is a very good partner to the State in conserving the nature and managing the land!

If the State is interested in maintaining and preserving the semi-natural habitats valuable for the whole Europe, it is clear that it has to find good partners among the farming community, and it should be supporting their farming systems to ensure continuity in their activities. The State cannot afford to lose good land managers. Maintaining semi-natural habitats is labour-intensive and less productive than managing normal agricultural land, and attracting land managers becomes increasingly difficult if there are not enough incentives. The farming community is very sensitive to all kind of changes and needs a consistent policy message. For them to make long-term plans, farmers need some confidence in the definitions and regulations issued by the administration at the very least.

Having said that, although the result of the Metsa Johani case was not wholly favourable to Andrus Sepp, it built bridges between agriculture and environment and resulted in a considerable raising of awareness of semi-natural farmed habitats amongst both officials and the public.

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A UK study tour to northern Spain

Guy Beaufoy

UK common-land group with local farmers and Plan 42 hosts in Burgos.

This article summarises a capacity-building and learning visit to northern Spain by farmers from Cumbria and Dartmoor, in the UK, accompanied by people working on common-land issues, such as community workers and academics. A major purpose of the visit was to promote and foster a sense of community amongst commoners, who tend to be widely dispersed and yet face similar challenges, so that they can take on their responsibilities as a community for advocacy and care of an important approach to landscape and farming.

The trip looked at three topics of interest: a regional government programme in Castilla y León working with livestock farmers using traditional extensive systems to reduce forest fires; research by a regional agricultural research institute in Cantabria into reducing weed infestations of high mountain pastures; and a farmer-led campaign in Asturias for European legalisation that understands and takes into account the practices of extensive livestock rearing.

Communal land is very significant in Spain. Ministry of Agriculture statistics (1996) give the total area of pasture in Spain as 7,006 million ha. But the reality is that around 20 million ha of Spain's 26 million ha of 'monte' (forest with or without trees) are used as non-cultivated forage area, if occasional grazing is counted.

These municipal common lands have survived in Spain for many reasons. Two important ones are, first, the commons are 'public' lands and this, to some extent, served as a break on massive privatisation in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Secondly, in the late 20th century environmental conservation, combined with a new decentralised administrative-political system in the shape of regional governments, have spurred on a policy of common-land acquisition, mainly in the heavily depopulated upland areas of Spain.

Fire prevention: Plan 42 in Castilla y León

The autonomous community of Castilla y León is not only the largest region of Spain, but in all the European Union. Large forest fires are becoming more frequent in this area (and all over Spain) as a result of climatic factors, social factors (including depopulation of rural areas and reduction in numbers of grazing livestock), and economic conditions. These fires are one of the most important causes of environmental alteration and land degradation because of the post-fire exposure of bare soil to rainfall.

The Environment Ministry and Forestry Administration of the autonomous government initiated Plan 42 in 2003 (see www.jcyl.es/web/jcyl/MedioAmbiente/es/Plantilla100/1132926921318/) with the main objective of reducing forest fires. People had started 90% of these fires, so Plan 42 recruited advisers to work in the worst affected areas, the 154 municipalities that suffered 50% of all the fires.

The Plan takes a multi-disciplinary approach and works with all sections of the community, but much of the training, information and communication has been aimed at extensive livestock farmers who, for generations, used fire in traditional pasture management systems on common land to encourage pasture regeneration and to control scrub encroachment.

In recent times, cattle numbers have declined because of the low profitability of the sector and farmers leaving the land. With fewer cattle grazing the common pastures in the mountains, scrub encroachment has rapidly increased, and the remaining livestock farmers continue to use fire as the primary form of scrub clearance. However, with the increased woody matter these fires are now much harder to control.

Plan 42 has, and is, promoting cultural change in pasture management systems on common land. Scrub burning has been banned since 2008 and has been replaced by mechanical scrub clearance. It also supports localised pasture improvement (lime and fertilisers), division of common land and activities to add value to the products from the area, including the promotion of collaboration between farmers, developing/increasing the market share of local products, such as horse meat, and support for co-operative ventures. Much of the work of Plan 42 is paid for through agri-environment measures of the CAP and local community funds administered by the municipalities.

Reducing weed infestation in Natura 2000 pastures in Cantabria

The agricultural use of common land in the high areas of the Cordillera Cantabria has changed considerably over the last half century or so. Past communal land-management systems have given way to more individual systems, as fewer farmers manage the land.

Previously, farmers would keep cattle, sheep, goats and horses on the common land. Nowadays, cattle dominate and horse numbers are increasing as they need very little management, sheep have declined due to a lack of shepherds, and forestry policies have discouraged the keeping of goats.

Farmers have shifted from a subsistence economy to a market-oriented one, which nowadays is heavily dependent on subsidies (making up over 40% of income). These changes in farming practices, coupled with more frequent drier summers, have affected pasture species.

One problem is the invasion of the spurge *Euphorbia polygalifolia*, locally known as *lecherina*, in many of the high mountain communal pastures. It reduces biodiversity and productivity, as cattle and horses will not eat it. Four municipalities and local farmers went to the local regional research organisation, CIFA, and asked if they could find ways to control the spread of this spurge.

CIFA experimented with various control

Example 1: Supporting short-distance transhumance systems

The village of Salce has 3,000ha of common land and small plots (300m^2) of privately owned land. Like many villages in the area the population has declined considerably since the 1960s, with waves of outward migration of former residents. Now, there are only four farmers left and the land is under-grazed, with scrub encroachment and increased risk of fires. The Plan 42 technicians are working with the local farmers, using agri-environmental measures for scrub clearance and maintenance of extensive grazing systems of cattle and horses.

Crucially, these farmers do not have enough animals to control scrub growth, and important areas, such as the species-rich alpine pastures furthest away from the village at heights of 1,700-2,000m are under threat of under-grazing and scrub encroachment. Plan 42 is supporting and encouraging the continuation of short-distance transhumance of flocks of sheep to graze these pastures in the summer months through capital improvements to the tracks, mountain huts and sheep-handling facilities, together with some financial support for the shepherds.

We met two shepherds from the meseta area approximately 50km to the south. One is continuing the transhumance system and the other has given it up, as he has sufficient land and access to land at home and does not need to bring his sheep to the mountains. The shepherd who does practice transhumance says he will continue to do so, as he believes it is important to keep the tradition going and he enjoys going up to the mountain for the summer months. It takes 4-5 days to walk his 400 or so merino sheep to the mountain along drove roads.

He will usually stay up for 7-10 days at a time, and if he can get someone to watch his sheep he will go back home for a couple of days. The sheep and lambs on these pasures fatten quickly, allowing him to take advantage of the better price for summer lambs. He can get a mobile phone signal (which reduces isolation), and has asked for solar panels on the hut for lighting, TV and hot water. From his hut he can see two other huts, and can meet with the other shepherds if they are about. Both the shepherds we met have sons, and both say that it is unlikely that their sons will continue in farming.

Clearly, this system is close to the edge of disappearing, and if it goes so will many valuable public goods such as local traditions, knowledge and skills, culture and heritage and biodiversity, amongst others. We had mixed views among our group as to the attractiveness of the job and whether you could keep the existing shepherds, and bring young shepherds and their flock to the mountains. We came to the conclusion that current economic circumstances demand that many people have to work away from their families during the week, and that perhaps this is no different. To keep shepherds and transhumance systems going, sheep farming will have to provide a reasonable livelihood, based on a mix of income from production and support mechanisms that will motivate the shepherds to continue and help common-land management.

Example 2: Co-operative 'Carne de Vacuno de Calidad Montañas de León'

As part of its multi-disciplinary approach, Plan 42 is supporting the creation of direct marketing co-operatives owned by farmers to sell their produce. We visited a butcher's shop in the town of Villablino owned by a co-operative of nine livestock farmers from the surrounding area. Plan 42 started the idea, based on a feasibility study. They invited local farmers to take part in the project, and after many meetings a core group of nine famers took the initiative forward, with training from Plan 42. They had to borrow €30,000 and opened the butcher's shop in 2009. Sales have gradually increased over time, but they are slowing down now as a result of the current economic downturn. They have created two jobs and slaughter 3-4 steers (bred by the members) per week. They are planning to open another butcher's shop in the larger provincial town of León. One benefit of this system over similar projects in the UK is that the lower-quality cuts can be made into traditional sausages and salami. They suggested that the ingredients for success are:

- Start small, have a viable idea, keep it simple and grow on demand
- Offer quality meat at an affordable price
- Get a brand
- Get the right help and good quality training
- Ensure ownership and commitment of all members and a desire to learn and work co-operatively

methods and found that the most effective control of *lecherina* is regular grazing by sheep. The challenge is how to apply these results over a wider area, as sheep numbers have declined and the traditional system of transhumance – bringing sheep from Extremadura (the region bordering with Portugal) to summer graze these common pastures – is virtually extinct. A more local system of moving sheep from the meseta to the mountain pastures for the summer months is still intact, but there are few shepherds carrying out this practice.

As a group, we were impressed with the practical nature of the research and the fact that the researchers were working directly with farmers to find solutions that would bring commercial as well as environmental gains. However, there were clear difficulties with the introduction of sheep into an area that is traditionally a cattle area and farmers are naturally reluctant to take on sheep as they have neither the necessary knowledge nor the infrastructure. Also, bringing in sheep from outside the area can be a problem for local farmers, as the tradition has virtually died out and some of the old infrastructure has disappeared.

Campaign for specific European legislation for extensive livestock rearing

The group met Xuan Valladares, a farmer with native cattle breeds kept in a traditional extensive transhumance system, who is actively campaigning for the EU to develop legislation specifically for extensive livestock systems that take into account seasonal transhumance activities (see http://foroasturianorural.blogspot.com/ and Example 1 above).

Despite the different climate, topography, livestock and management in the UK and the area of Spain we visited, we found common factors to indicate that active grazing of common land using extensive livestock systems is under threat. Specifically, the number of active graziers is in significant decline, and the economic return from common grazing is insufficient to encourage many young people to continue the practice, whether it is transhumance in Spain, or maintaining hefted flocks in the UK.

As a result, it is likely that the number of active extensive livestock farmers will continue to fall in both countries, leading to a further loss of skills and heritage that cannot be regenerated once lost, and to the undermining of the capacity of common land to provide increasingly important public goods (for example, fire prevention, semi-natural ecosystems, a large diversity of flora and fauna, food, landscape and culture).

However, we did notice an important difference in the attitude of many of the 'experts' in Spain towards farmers employing extensive livestock systems in the mountain areas. For example, Plan 42 has built its programme around the premise that maintaining extensive livestock systems is crucial to reducing forest fires and maintaining the vital public goods and benefits produced by these systems. As a result, relations between farmers and technicians are generally more cordial than those found in the UK.

We were impressed by the way the Plan 42 technicians, the municipalities and staff from the research centre were using multi-disciplinary and participatory approaches. This was demonstrated in the time taken to work with the farmers and to understand the farming systems in order to meet common objectives of reducing forest fires and maintaining an active farming community. In stark contrast,

our experience in the UK is that extensive livestock farmers are often inadequately consulted by the environment and conservation 'experts' when local schemes and strategies are being developed. However, the Spanish experience may give us confidence to aim for more equal partnerships in future.

While the farmers appeared to have good relations with the agencies and officers, there seemed to be less formal communication between the graziers on the commons than there is in the UK. The presence of commoners' associations is a strength for those managing commons in the UK. Perhaps this is something that those from Spain on any return visit might like to comment on.

One unfortunate similarity is that extensive livestock farmers in both countries face the burden of EU regulations that are often difficult and/or expensive to implement, especially with livestock on common land. Building on Xuan Valladares's example, we plan to raise this issue through our local federations, the Foundation for Common Land and with European colleagues. Through this type of collaboration and sharing of experiences, we are more likely to inform and influence decision makers at an early stage.

One difference that we discussed is that of land abandonment. Clearly, in Spain there is a fear of abandonment of people and land, and therefore the system of farming as well. This is unlikely to happen in the UK as there will always be people to buy even common land. The more likely threat is abandonment of the traditional, extensive livestock systems of farming, and it is these that maintain the commons. Therefore the challenge within the UK is to make an effective case to governments and agencies that the farming system and the habitat are closely interlinked and should not be separated. If they are, then there is a danger that neither will be maintained in the longer term.

This visit has improved mutual understanding between farmers with common land in Cumbria and Dartmoor as we had many opportunities to discuss our respective farming systems during the trip, and also between the farmers and the other members of our party. We increased our knowledge and understanding of extensive livestock systems in northern Spain, and would like to extend an invitation to the farmers and technicians to come and visit us in the UK.

Viv Lewis & Dave Smith. Full details of the trip are available at http://www.efncp.org/projects/2010/exchange-visit-spain/

Preventing fires and maintaining 'public goods' – Castilla y León's innovative Plan 42

Guy Beaufoy

Fencing of common pastures is an important activity for Plan 42.

Plan 42 is the forest fire prevention strategy of Castilla y León, in Spain, set up by the regional Ministry of Environment in 2002. The reason for the name Plan 42 is apparently simple – it targets the 42 municipalities with the highest incidence of wildfires.

This fire-prevention strategy is relevant to HNV farming for various reasons. For one thing, much of the extensive, semi-natural grazing land in Spain is, in fact, classed as forest according to forestry statistics, although agricultural statistics do not necessarily agree (see below). And a key part of the Plan 42 strategy is to work pro-actively with pastoralists at the local level, to support their present and future activity, and to nurture their co-operation in preventing fires.

Whereas the Ministry of Agriculture's statistics (1996) give the total pastures area in Spain as just over 7 million ha, the reality is that around 20 million ha are used as forage area, if we include semi-natural meadows and occasional grazing. Of the total 26 million ha of 'monte' (forest with or without trees) in Spain, some 54% is made up of semi-natural meadows, rough grazing, poorer rough grazing and open wood pasture. The rest is officially high forest, but a large proportion of this is also used regularly for grazing.

Thus only 26% of the total area of 'monte' in Spain (as defined by the Forest Law of 1957) are under exclusively 'forest' use, as commonly understood by European civil servants, i.e. with no grazing, while for 74% (19.4 million ha) livestock grazing and browsing are one of the main uses of the land. This is the reality on the ground, and this forest grazing is primarily positive for the environment and for the delivery of 'public goods'.

DG Agri (European Commission) would do well to take account of these facts before excluding all forest land from receiving CAP payments, as their rules currently do. Livestock-raising on forest land is no less farming than the same activity based on grass or maize, and the 'public goods' associated with forest grazing (at sustainable levels) can be especially valuable – biodiversity, open landscape and fire prevention. A CAP that actively discourages grazing of scrub and forest lands makes fires *more*, not less, likely.

Forest-fire prevention in Spain has been criticised in the past for putting emphasis almost exclusively on 'engineering' solutions – preventive silviculture and the construction of water points and access roads, funded largely by EU Rural Development and Structural Funds respectively. One of the things that makes Plan 42 different, and of particular interest to the Forum, is that from the start it addresses the crucial role of graziers, both in preventing and sometimes causing forest fires.

A key action is the employment in each targeted locality of project officers, who live locally and are tasked with building a constructive relationship with the local population. This pro-active role, played by dynamic, motivated people, is critical to the project. One of the actions is to work with livestock farmers. The aim is to support their farming, while changing their attitude to using fire as a pasture regeneration tool. Importantly, the offic-

ers have a carrot to offer, in the form of an RDP grant for scrub clearance and pasture improvement. But the approach goes much further, and includes helping farmers to tackle a range of issues, from access to land to processing and marketing.

This is, of course, where Plan 42 begins to look, in many ways, like a local HNV farming project. In this case, fire prevention rather than nature conservation is the ultimate goal, but the path to achieving this goal is remarkably similar to projects such as BurrenLIFE: a local office that reaches out to livestock farmers to help solve their issues, as the best way to get the farmers to take up the goals of the project.

In recent decades, the decline of extensive grazing on forest lands led to a severe increase in forest fires. Grazing had acted to reduce the accumulation of dead woody material, and kept forests open, which reduced the incidence of fires. Fires increased dramatically from the 1950s, from less than 2,000 fires a year, destroying 50,000ha per year, to nearly 20,000 fires a year in 2009, destroying around 150,000 ha per year.

Since 2003, Plan 42 has resulted in a 70% decrease in fires in the 42 target municipalities, thus contributing significantly to the maintenance of public goods, as well as contributing to local prosperity. These are very real results, achieved through imaginative policies, at relatively low cost. The emphasis on working locally with farmers to achieve concrete environmental and social results should be emulated by EU rural development policy.

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Plan 42 – the limits of a single-objective strategy?

Having had the privilege of visiting a range of Plan 42 sites in the last year with study groups from Romania and the UK (see page 10), it is hard to disagree with Guy's glowing endorsement of the approach taken.

Here is a strategy which takes a holistic approach to a complex issue involving socio-economically marginal farming and attacks it realistically, pragmatically and efficiently. This is, indeed, a model for Rural Development – one which should raise blushes in agriculture departments across Europe.

The plan administrators, despite not being in the Agriculture Department, have a deep understanding of some of the perversities of the CAP and national rules, making them voices to be taken seriously as new plans are made and schemes and regulations are designed. However, Plan 42 is not a Rural Development plan, and does not claim to be. Its strength is such that its limitations are also exposed.

It is not a plan with multiple objectives which aims at delivering of a whole range of sometimes competing public policy goals. It has integrated delivery, but not integrated objectives. Biodiversity and landscape, rural communities and traditions – these all benefit from the plan, but only when their enhancement is intimately linked to the prevention of wildfires.

So, for example, the plan encourages the use of enclosures on the grazings, to reduce the perceived need for uncontrolled burning for regeneration of the unenclosed mountain pastures. However, the administrators are not at all concerned should the farmers choose to use only their enclosures, so long as fire incidence remains low.

In one area in northern Burgos province we saw a large area of Atlantic heath still subject to deliberately-set wildfires. However, the aspiration of the project staff was that the whole area be taken out of extensive farming altogether and planted to woodland of the type which would have been 'natural', had the Ice Age and man not intervened over the last ten 10,000 years. In response to my comment that this Natura 2000 habitat had been part of the cultural landscape for all those thousands of years and that that also had a value, the answer was simple – we create a new culture!

Our friends in the administration would say that they are just being realistic in their aspirations for 'forest' land, whether wooded or open, and this is a challenge we on the HNV farming side have to take on board. Where are the assessments of what is socially 'doable', and what is economically affordable? In this case, it is not the environment authority's role to make an integrated rural development strategy – that's a job for the agriculture department.

To ensure the sustainability of HNV systems, our challenge is to go beyond even the sterling work of Plan 42. Is it possible to deliver multiple objectives, not just to deliver single objectives through integrated mechanisms? Plan 42 shows that, with a clear focus and a real belief in the objectives, it might just be possible.

Gwyn Jones

Extending HNV farming in Ireland

La Cañada 24 highlighted an innovative Article 68 scheme being rolled out in the Burren, Ireland. The Burren Farming for Conservation Programme (BFCP) is an excellent example of supporting High Nature Value (HNV) farming in practice. The work carried out in the Burren has created a ripple effect within Ireland, with other areas recognising the need for action if successful farming in marginal areas is to continue.

Responding to this demand, the Heritage Council is collaborating with EFNCP (through its DG Environment work programme) to fund a High Nature Value Farming Officer for Ireland.

The initial study areas include the Aran Islands, a limestone extension of the Burren and two upland areas in South Kerry and North Connemara. These areas are all dominated by semi-natural vegetation and have all suffered in recent years through changes in farming systems.

Funding permitting, it is hoped that the scope of the work will be extended to diverse HNV farmland landscapes in the north-west of Ireland.

Target-based schemes

One of the conclusions from a recent report for the Heritage Council in Ireland on HNV farmland in Ireland was the need to implement target-based agri-environment schemes tailored for different HNV areas. These should evolve through greater communication with farmers and encourage their co-operation in the development of suitable schemes.

To achieve this aim, the work will closely follow the successful methodology used in the Burren. The BFCP core principles are the development and implementation of practical, local solutions to management problems.

The programme is at an early stage. The first step is to identify the biodiversity and cultural heritage that make these areas important, to determine the factors that threaten the continuation of the farming systems that preserve these areas, and to come up with practical solutions.

For all these areas, there is a wealth of research work already carried out by the universities of Cork and Galway, the transnational LACOPE project, the Irish Uplands Forum, Teagasc, the National Parks and Wildlife Service and the Heritage Council.

The project will review this work and use case studies in each area as a means to identify threats, opportunities and practical solutions for HNV farmland. This will

involve working closely with interested parties, government bodies, the farming community and local community groups. From this, it will be possible to develop a strategic approach which can be used to assess the needs of and deliver support to HNV farming in Ireland in the Rural Development Programme post-2013.

Aran Islands

To date, the work has concentrated mainly on the Aran Islands. Working alongside the Institute of Technology Sligo and BFCP, the project has investigated the extent to which the work of the BurrenLIFE and BFCP initiatives are transferable to the Aran Islands. Although the areas are geologically similar (karst with extensive limestone pavement), there are some differences in the farming systems, particularly the small field structures of the Aran Islands. Through workshops with farmers on the island, these differences were identified and possible solutions suggested. Meetings were also held on the importance of the Aran Islands for biodiversity, within an Irish and also a European context. The work both encourages and relies on strong farmer participation. A similar approach has started in North Connemara and Kerry, working with the Forum Connemara Ltd and the South Kerry Development Partnership Ltd.

The end result of all this is to find ways to make farming viable in these marginal areas, yet still maintain the systems and practices that are so important for wildlife, the landscape and Ireland's natural heritage. The important work carried out in the Burren is a good model and a showcase for other areas. By applying the same principles to other areas, and with appropriate funding, the project partnership believes it is possible to ensure successful and sustainable HNV farming in Ireland.

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Do SPS rules scrub out valuable habitats?

Patrick McGurn

Wide hedges and areas of scrub, such as here in Ireland, are a feature of many farmed landscapes in western Europe, but some countries subtract them from the land area eligible for receiving Single Farm Payments.

With the abandonment of agricultural fields in some areas, scrub encroachment is becoming a problem on areas of semi-natural vegetation, and in particular on species-rich grasslands. In some countries, this is a major issue, which has been reported on more than one occasion in this magazine.

Cross-compliance rules aim to prevent encroachment of 'unwanted vegetation'. These rules are applied in different ways depending on the Member State, giving rise to a range of issues that deserve their own article in a future *La Cañada*.

On the other hand, existing areas of controlled scrub can be a valuable habitat on many farms. Many agri-environment schemes recognise this, paying farmers to maintain the area of scrub because of its important role for plant, bird and insect life. Indeed, some agri-environment schemes even pay farmers to allow small areas of improved grassland to revert to rough grassland and scrub. They also allow a woodland scrub edge to develop out into adjoining fields. These are very positive steps for biodiversity on more intensive farmland.

In addition to getting a financial incentive to participate in such a scheme, the land is still eligible for claim entitlements under the Single Farm Payment Scheme (SPS). The message farmers are getting is that allowing scrub in the right place can enhance biodiversity.

On many High Nature Value farms the maintenance of small areas of scrub has been common practice for years, offering protection for livestock throughout the year. Grassland areas in and around the scrub were often a bit drier, giving an animal a comfortable place to lie. Hedgerows thicken out, offering some shelter and guaranteeing a stockproof barrier. These thick hedges and small outcrops of scrub on more inaccessible land form part of the system on these more marginal farms. No agri-environment money is needed to recreate them – they are already part of the landscape.

Ireland is a good example. Many parts of the country are made up of a unique patchwork of small fields surrounded by hedgerows. Heavy, wet soils mean that hedge-cutting is not a common practice on the internal fields and so some wonderful wide species-rich hedgerows develop, forming a network of mini woodlands.

With the changes in CAP to an area-based payment scheme, these areas have not always been classed as a feature, and they therefore are not eligible to support SPS claims. This interpretation favours the more intensive farming system, with large open fields limited in wildlife. The lack of clarity in the original definition of eligible area meant that many extensive farmers claimed whole fields, including small areas of scrub, and so spread their entitlements over the whole farm. Some farmers (and countries) have been penalised for an over declaration of forage area. The clear message from this policy would seem to be that farmers should remove scrub and reduced the width of field boundaries.

However, the latest EU eligibility rules for the SPS allow Member States to include all landscape features in a farm's eligible area, which opens the way for existing areas of scrub to receive SPS in all countries.

In the Republic of Ireland, hedgerows have now been declared a landscape feature, and therefore the area is eligible to support SPS claims. In Northern Ireland, under UK legislation, they are not classed as a landscape feature, so once an internal hedge exceeds 4m width, the complete area of the hedge is deemed as ineligible. For a small traditional farmer, particularly in the west of the province, this could mean deducting an area out of every field,

or it could lead to a severe penalty both for this year and for previous years.

As a result of this there are two very negative outcomes. First, it sends out a message to the farming community that these areas are not important and not part of their farmed landscape. The second is that it leads to large-scale removal of scrub and decimation of hedgerows, not because the farmer wants to but because they feel they have to so they can claim all their entitlements.

A balance must be reached, where fields of semi-natural grassland do not scrub up but where pockets of existing scrub can be left and treated as part of the farmed area. If it is possible to pay more intensive farmers to create these areas under agri-environment, then less intensive farmers should be able at least to claim their entitlements on existing scrub areas that are part of the farmed area.

If the EU is serious about the CAP supporting 'public goods', then the EU institutions should ensure that the various rules governing SPS favour the maintenance of 'High Nature Value' farmland features, and that all Member States implement them in a coherent way. It makes no sense to depend on under-resourced agri-environment schemes to pay for features and practices that could be favoured by SPS.

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A defence of the HNV concept – reflections on the summer's conferences

As this edition of *La Cañada* goes to press, we hear again siren voices asking why we need to retain the concept of High Nature Value farming as a key feature of our agricultural and environmental policy. I have been asking myself the same question, listening to the debates in Sibiu and Vilm over the summer.

At the outset, I think it is important to underline that HNV farming does not pretend to deliver *every* aspect of *every* European biodiversity goal and policy. Other objectives and mechanisms are still needed, whether looking after the very best sites in the Natura 2000 network or ensuring better delivery of environmental services on intensive farmland. It is very important to link explicitly these different objectives, and to show that they are not competitors, but complement each other. This may seem obvious, but needs repeating again and again.

Having accepted that we need a whole suite of objectives and measures for a range of farmland types, what then are the strengths of the HNV approach? To me, it seems that it has three specific benefits, which none of these other policy frameworks or measures deliver.

Multifunctionality: humans with nature, not against it

HNV is an integrating concept, based on the recognition of the diversity of functions – economic, social and ecological – fulfilled by some farming systems (contrasting both in quality and quantity with delivery from some others).

It aims to go beyond the classic opposition between agricultural production and ecological richness. This distinction dominated the debate on nature conservation for a long time; the preservation of nature meant protected reserves, where people were not allowed to go. Surprisingly, this opposition is still very present in people's minds when talking about agri-environment. However, the aim of sustainable development is not to oppose economic and environmental interests, any more than social and environmental ones.

Moreover, I am not convinced that it is very sensible, strategically to oppose food producers, on the one hand, and 'biodiversity producers', on the other. Food production will probably always trump biodiversity as a priority for most policy-makers, in their deeds if not in their words.

HNV is also a dynamic concept. Today, most conservationists have abandoned an entrenched approach to promote a more integrated one. There is now a recognition that people are part of ecosystems, and that ecosystems are dynamic systems, not fixed pictures of nature.

In most HNV areas, the role of humans has been crucial to the evolution of biodiversity-rich systems. HNV farming systems, by definition, guide the agro-ecosystem in a way that provides several goods and services (food production, biodiversity and landscapes), whereas intensive farming systems pretend to master their environment in order to deliver only one outcome. We can even imagine systems geared to 'biodiversity production' falling into this trap!

The crucial factor is the dynamics, which is why I was pleased when James Moran said, in Vilm, that the sustainability of HNV farming will emerge from a mix of tradition and innovation. HNV farming is much more than just 'traditional farming'.

Large scale

The preservation of biodiversity cannot be achieved by small-scale, targeted actions alone – we are talking about the conservation of functioning ecosystems and ecological continuity.

To reach this objective, it is necessary to preserve semi-natural vegetation. Even in the second type of HNV farmland, a minimum area of semi-natural vegetation is probably needed. This feature becomes a limiting factor for biodiversity under a certain limit (around 20% of UAA, according to French collective expertise). Thus, for example, an area with landscape elements such as hedgerows but with less than 20% of UAA under semi-natural vegetation should not be considered as HNV, even Type 2.

Speaking personally, I even have doubts that a single isolated farmer, implementing HNV farming practices within an intensive area, will allow the maintenance of a rich biodiversity. This highlights the collective dimension of HNV farming and reminds us of an important question – should support for HNV farming address farms, or areas, or farms within specific areas?

During the Vilm conference I felt that the 'blur' (to quote a word people used) between the different levels or concepts – farms, farmland, farming practices, landscapes and so on – stemmed from the absence of a link between HNV farmland identification and HNV farming practices (as criteria to target policies).

Perhaps we should be strong enough to affirm that one isolated farm, even if implementing HNV farming practices, cannot be considered HNV? I can see this farmer being the target of a HNV policy aimed at the *development* of HNV farming, but maybe not one of maintenance (as there is less richness to maintain). But this position does not mean that it should not be supported by another policy scheme. If this isolated farmer conserves a certain habitat and/or species, then of course he might still be the focus of the Natura 2000 approach. It also means that we have to modify any policy which incentivises farmers to implement practices unfavourable to biodiversity.

Another important point, I believe, is, if we wish to 'negotiate' with and convince the Member States which have very little HNV farming left, we must affirm two different objectives: to maintain and to

Delegates at the HNV grasslands conference at Sibiu, Romania, in September 2010. This EFNCP conference drew plaudits from all who attended. Attended by just under 150 people from across Europe, from Azerbaijan to Norway, and Estonia to Spain, we were privileged not only to hear a range of excellent speakers, but received video messages from EU Commissioners Cioloş and Potočnik and Prince Charles. We thank our colleagues in Adept warmly for the partnership and excellent local organisation. Full details are on our websites.

develop HNV farming. It is clear to me that the methods of characterising and monitoring are not the same for the two objectives. For the second, for example, we can imagine a focus on farming practices at farm level, with the objective of spreading their use to a larger number of farms.

Because of the importance of this collective dimension in HNV farming, we could imagine that some public payments would not be made directly to each farm, but used more to promote collective actions (such as structuring a local market, or employing a common shepherd).

What about the link between HNV and Natura 2000? It does not seem very clear to me how Type 3 HNV adds value to Natura 2000 (at least where that implements fully Important Bird Areas on intensive farmland).

It appears that we are not really at ease with Type 3, and that its logic is not the same (both in monitoring and in targeting). It is not high in biodiversity and was apparently introduced under pressure from countries with few extensive systems. I don't know what we can do with it; maybe the distinction between maintenance and development of HNV farming could be part of the solution.

Rich in biodiversity – connected to results

The tendency to subjectivity in measuring 'richness' was very apparent during the Vilm seminar. Where do we draw the line between High and Low Nature Value? (This question was listed during the second workshop, although not addressed!) The difficulty is that we are, at the moment, defining the reference point of HNV farmland that will be used to monitor and assess further policies, but the question itself cannot avoid being a potentially political one.

Should we take the results of these assessments into account when distributing public payments? This was discussed in the third workshop. France and the Netherlands (and maybe some others?) are already implementing some agri-environmental schemes based on an obligation for results on biodiversity (see, in France, Herbe_07 for pastoralism, and Herbe_09 for species-rich grasslands).

It appears to be difficult to base the HNV payments on these ecological results only, largely because of the resilience of ecosystems, and the difficulty of drawing direct links between farming practices and biodiversity, even though strong links exist. So the criteria could combine some ecological results and the maintenance of some farming practices.

What about the delays? Study and act!

Some participants stressed the fact that, if we don't yet know how to characterise HNV farming, we would be better to wait until 2020, rather than 2013, to launch an HNV policy.

But the need to act and preserve biodiversity is becoming increasingly urgent. Experts seem to agree that it should concern both the restoration of ecological continuity and the preservation of areas of large-scale biodiversity. HNV areas identify these areas of biodiversity in the context of farming and can be a way of targeting policy. Of course, it raises methodological and socio-political questions, but the best way to answer them is to start acting, while continuing to study them at the same time.

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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.
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