



1st Thematic Group meeting on Landscape Features & Biodiversity

Highlights report

This was the first meeting of the Thematic Group (TG) on Landscape Features & Biodiversity, whose aim is to bring Member State (MS) representatives and stakeholders together to discuss how to encourage improved diversity, coverage, connectivity and condition of landscape features within the farmed environment.

The objectives of the meeting were to share examples between MSs on how they plan to or have structured different interventions (conditionality, eco-schemes, rural development) under their CAP Strategic Plans (CSP) to support the maintenance, restoration and creation of landscape features.

Event Information

Date: 13 October 2022

Location: Virtual meeting

Organisers: CAP Implementation Contact Point

Participants: 36 TG members from 20 EU Member States, including representatives of Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, environmental NGOs, agricultural and forestry organisations, farm advisers, researchers and the European Commission

Outcomes: Awareness raising and capacity building on measures and approaches to support the maintenance, restoration and creation of landscape features

Web page: [1st TG meeting on Landscape Features & Biodiversity](#)

Promoting landscape features at EU and MS level – Context and examples

The opening plenary session provided an overview of the importance of landscape features and how to promote them. [Gregorio Davila Diaz \(DG AGRI\)](#) highlighted the role of the CAP in promoting landscape features and biodiversity. He stressed the requirement for MSs' CSPs to be aligned with existing legislation to protect biodiversity and highlighted the relevant impact and result indicators to be used to assess progress against the objectives. He illustrated the potential practices that could be supported for landscape features under different CAP funded interventions and provided some concrete examples of approaches formulated by MSs within their CSPs. He also provided a short introduction to the Nature Restoration Law and the proposed targets, including a specific one for increasing the share of agricultural land with high-diversity landscape features.



[Balint Czúcz](#) (JRC) then shared insights on the coverage of landscape features across the EU, based on the analyses of data collected at MS and EU level in the 2014-2020 CAP programming period. Landscape features are defined as small fragments of non-productive permanent vegetation in agricultural land which provide ecosystem services. He described the two types of datasets that had been used – Copernicus for mapping and the LUCAS statistical module. Graphs were shown to illustrate the increases in biodiversity related to landscape features in different types of farming systems, e.g. extensive grassland to intensive cropland.



[Jure Čuš](#) (Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry and Food, Slovenia) outlined the approach being taken in the Slovenian CSP. Landscape features were identified as a need to be addressed by the Slovenian CSP in the SWOT analysis, so the definition of permanent grassland and eligible hectares were changed to include landscape features, and the CSP includes a number of interventions under Pillar 2 to support landscape features as well as under conditionality (GAEC 8). To enable this to happen, a detailed inventory of landscape features has been created using remote sensing of hedgerows, solitary trees and bushes, groups of trees and bushes, woody riparian buffer strips and scrub, since more detailed data were required than were available via Copernicus to generate data on and target intensively managed small parcels. Dry stone walls were also inventoried, allowing 11,000 km to be included under GAEC 8.



[Maria Ladinig](#) (Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Regions and Water Management, Austria) followed with a presentation about the Austrian CSP, highlighting their approach to enhance structural diversity as a means to meet the Biodiversity Strategy target for 10% of agricultural area to be under high-diversity landscape features. This includes the use of GAEC 8 to require fallow areas, combined with agri-environment-climate (AEC) interventions to support biodiversity areas on arable and grassland, create flowering areas and maintain landscape features as well as organic farming. The main aims of the Austrian Managing Authority are: biodiverse areas should increase from 5% to 7%; management-free periods should be lengthened; and training for fertiliser management will become mandatory.



Finally, [Pamela Boyle](#) (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Ireland) presented the Irish CSP approach for promoting landscape features by implementing the green architecture through different interventions. Similar to Slovenia, Ireland has changed the definition of eligible hectares to include landscape features to avoid any perverse incentive to remove them. She highlighted that support for landscape features was provided both through eco-schemes as well as the general and priority agri-environmental options under the Agri-Climate Rural Environment Scheme (ACRES), with some requiring cooperation amongst farmers. The Biodiversity Regeneration In a Dairying Environment (BRIDE) project was presented as an example of a results-based initiative that saw significant uptake by intensive dairy farms, who were each required to create a biodiversity map of the number and quality of habitats on their farms, including landscape features. These habitats and landscape features have increased as farmers have seen the economic benefits of managing their land for biodiversity. During the plenary discussion, TG members highlighted the importance of looking at the whole package of interventions to understand how MSs are using their CSPs to achieve landscape features targets. A key issue raised was the need for clarity about the definition of non-productive areas under GAEC 8, as well as which types of landscape features could be included within the associated result and impact indicators (R.34 and I.21).

Breakout Group Discussions

After the plenary session, TG members were allocated to three different breakout groups to discuss two questions:

- 1) How to increase the coverage and condition of landscape features?
- 2) How to overcome any challenges encountered and make best use of the CAP to deliver landscape features and biodiversity benefits?



Key points from the discussions were captured on [Miro boards](#) and consolidated into the following list:

- Prioritise the maintenance of landscape features that already exist in the EU.
- Focus attention and action at the landscape scale and to do so, focus on cooperation and bottom-up approaches to knowledge sharing, project design, etc.
- Provide greater clarity on the definition of landscape features to make sure it is clear what types of landscape features are eligible for different aspects of CAP support (particularly conditionality standards).
- Ideally, landscape features should be included within the eligible hectares for CAP funding so there is not an incentive to remove them, although this requires them to be mapped.
- Improve the accuracy of mapping of landscape features as this was identified as a key challenge for monitoring coverage of landscape features.
- Provide training and advice tailored to different farm contexts for better uptake of landscape features.
- Provide training for advisors on how to identify and provide management advice on landscape features.
- Emphasise the economic benefits to farmers of landscape features to help avoid the risk they will be removed to increase production area.
- Ensure flexibility in management commitments to support landscape features so that they are tailored to the farm context as well as regional and local specificities.
- Incentivise uptake through different approaches to scheme design, including long-term schemes and results-based schemes rewarding the quality not just the quantity of landscape features. There may be value in investigating options to pay for the value of the ecosystem services provided rather than income foregone and additional costs, something that is possible through the eco-schemes.
- Improve communication between actors at all levels.
- Ensure synergies between different policies.

Next Steps

Following this first meeting of the TG, an informal discussion will be held during November focussing on the economic benefits of landscape features and good practice examples will be collected. Based on the discussion and examples, the focus of the 2nd meeting on 15 December will be developed.