

FRANCE

Environment & climate action

Location

Normandie, Bretagne, Pays de Loire. LAG Pays du Bocage.

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 439 631

EAFRD 178 459

National/Regional 130 610

Private 130 561

Project duration

2017 – 2020

Project promoters

SCIC Bocagénese

LTC BV Vallée du Léguer

SCIC Mayenne Bois Energie

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Website

afac-agroforesteries.fr/une-labellisation-nationale

An inter-territorial cooperation project to support the development of a system for verifying the traceability and the sustainable management of wood from hedgerows.

Summary

Hedgerows are a valuable source of wood, while the demand for renewable energy, especially biomass, is on the rise. This increased demand for wood can jeopardise the sustainable management of hedgerows as there is no framework for it.



Three cooperatives from different French regions decided to respond to this situation by developing a participatory certification system for wood produced through sustainable hedgerow management. The system is co-designed by farmers and traders and has explicit specifications for both sides. It will include a tool to geolocate the origin of every certified lot of wood and there will also be a tool that supports hedgerow management actions on the ground. In addition to the three cooperatives, the project is promoted by one association of municipalities.

Results

The new system ensures the sustainable management of hedgerows and enables improved economic performance.

Farmers can have a new sustainable source of income.

Two project manager jobs were created, while more jobs will be created to support the development of the label.

The certification will promote the protection of hedgerows, increase biodiversity, reduce the use of pesticides and reduce the risk of erosion, etc.

Lessons & Recommendations

- The project had a positive experience of cooperating with diverse actors in the region (producer, re-sellers, public authorities, etc) finding it easier to achieve a collaboration within the framework of an EU-funded project.
- The use of public support has proven vital.
- The project ensures that this renewable energy developed are transferable to any rural territory.
- Due to the difficulties of coordinating the actions and the necessary changes in practices, no hedge wood producer will tap the potential of the wood as an income source if the re-sellers can't get an adequate resale price. It is therefore a real work of partnership and good will.
- The creation of a document of good practices for the management of hedge wood is highly necessary. It allows to indicate the good actions to be implemented by the producer to earning an additional income while preserving the biodiversity.

Context

Today, there are nearly 600 000 km of hedgerows in agricultural areas in France, representing on average 93m³ of wood per km, or nearly 65 million m³ of wood in total. At the same time the use of renewable energy is increasing and biomass boilers are becoming increasingly popular. This attracts new companies to the market who offer to cut down trees, shred and remove the wood at competitive rates. However, this often results in an overuse of the resource as farm managers do not have the necessary tools to ensure its sustainable management. This is harmful for the environment and biodiversity.

Currently there is no system in place to ensure the sustainable management of hedgerows in agroforestry. This creates a major issue for farm managers responding to public tenders for supplying wood, as they cannot provide the necessary certificates to prove the sustainable management of the wood resources on their land. For example in Lower Normandy, trees outside forests represent a volume of 22.8 million m³, or 20% of the volume of wood produced in the region. However, it is not possible to certify that all this wood production is the result of sustainable management.

Three cooperatives from Normandie, Bretagne and the Pays de Loire decided to take action against this situation, which risked significant negative consequences resulting in their areas. They decided to develop a label that certifies the quality and traceability of products that come from the sustainable management of hedgerow trees. This joint work took the form of an interterritorial cooperation project.

Objectives

The objective of this project was to support the development of a quality label addressing producers (farmers); dealers and consumers.

Developing this label would create new outlets for wood sales, ensure traceability and transparency in the management and production of wood from hedgerows, meet the concerns of consumers and the also the requirements of public tenders.

Activities

The "Hedge wood sustainably managed" label was created in several steps:

Step 1: drafting specifications for producers & consumers.

The labelling system will be based on the participation of

producers and consumers. It is essential that farmers are willing to adopt the label in large numbers, in all three territories. The commitment of the traders will be necessary in order to provide a guarantee of transparency to the consumer. Thus, the label will be based on specifications that concern both producers *and* traders.

Step 2: design the traceability tool.

To ensure the traceability of the wood, a national computerised cartographic registration system will be created to allow the retailer and the consumer to track its origin and verify its proper production and distribution. The tool will geolocate the hedges from which the wood is grown and give information about them.

The system will also be a tool to support the farm managers on the ground. It will allow them to establish farm-wide management plans, to see which interventions are required for each hedgerow, and then to update this information.

Step 3: certification of the labelling protocol.

The Participatory Guarantee System model will be used for establishing the label. This will involve the direct participation of producers as well as private and public consumers.

The label will be nationwide, but will operate locally through a decentralised management structure. In fact, it will be a self-monitoring system in which producers and consumers will manage the operations of the label together. Thus the producer is not controlled by an external certifying body, but by the labelling system as a whole. The benefits of such a participatory certification system include:

- reduced certification costs
- collective improvements in farm management
- participation at local level

Overall, five key principles have been defined as the basis of the label:

1. transparency of the system with clear, common indicators.
2. trust among all actors involved.
3. participation of all members around a common vision (co-certification).
4. Equal participation in decision making between consumers and producers.
5. Include a learning process / evolution of practices.

By meeting all these commitments, the label can claim to be a participatory guarantee system.

Step 4: communication and dissemination of the label at national and European level.

Main Results

Economic benefits:

- Thanks to the label, the sustainable management of hedgerows has been combined with improved economic performance through the increased revenues from being able to participate in public tenders.
- The farmers have a new sustainable source of income.
- Two project manager jobs were created, while more jobs will be created to support the development of the label.

Environmental / Climate action benefits:

The valorisation of wood from hedgerows will allow an integrated approach to fight against climate change. Indeed, the hedge is one of the largest CO2 sensors in Europe. This wood is also a significant source of renewable energy that will make it possible to reach the new energy efficiency targets set for 2030.

The preservation and valuation of hedgerows also benefits the protection of nature and biodiversity. Hedgerows are very important faunistic and floristic reserves that can help to reduce use of pesticides, protect against erosion, retain water, etc.

Social benefits:

This project is built in collaboration with producers and traders. The new methodology will allow for greater involvement from farmers. Today, in Normandy, more and more farmers want to join the label and preserve their hedges.

Networking:

This project was initiated by three cooperatives from different territories in France (Normandie, Bretagne and Pays de Loire), it is coordinated by the AFAC (a French agroforestry association) and supported by the Ministry of Agriculture. The involvement of stakeholders from both local and national levels multiplies the chances of building a viable and transferable tool. Today, more than 200 people are involved in the project including inhabitants of the territories, producers, traders, territorial development agents, etc.

Transferability:

This project is ambitious as it aims to develop and validate a methodology to certify the sustainable management of hedgerow wood and to disseminate it to other French and European territories. The proposed certification system has a high replicability potential.

Synergies with other EU policies:

In addition to being linked to environmental and sustainable development policy, this project is also linked to other European policies:

Energy policy:

The creation of a sustainable hedge wood label will enable to facilitate a long-term hedge wood management plan. It will provide a renewable and efficient energy resource while providing a level playing field for producers / resellers and a tolerable cost for consumers (these objectives are directly related to those of the 2030 energy-climate plan).

Social Policy:

This project is also a proposal against poverty and social exclusion. It will, among other things, provide a new source of income for the smallest farmers who are often the most affected by poverty. The use of hedges can also help us to fight against energy poverty, by facilitating the exchange of best practices, and by developing self-consumption.

Common foreign and security policy:

Demand for energy is steadily increasing and in a world still highly dependent on finite fossil energy sources, future shortages may cause international tensions. The creation of a European Label for sustainably managed hedge wood, could create a stable sector in the internal energy market that would guarantee security of supply and solidarity between the Member States of the European Union.

“Before, I saw hedges as a constraint. Now I understand their importance for my farmland and I know that if I maintain them properly, I will have an additional source of income on top of better-quality production.”

Jordan VACQUEREL
farmer and new producer of sustainably managed hedgerows

Additional sources of information

<https://afac-agroforesteries.fr/referentiel-national-typologie-haies/>

<https://afac-agroforesteries.fr/veille-reglementaire/maec/>

*This project has been categorised under ‘Environment & Climate Action’ by the nominating National Rural Network