

AUSTRIA

Restoring, preserving and enhancing biodiversity

Location

Nation wide

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P4 – Restoring, Preserving
and Enhancing Ecosystems

Measure

M07 – Basic services &
village renewal

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 349 975
EAFRD 176 032
National/Regional 173 943

Project duration

2015 – 2017

Project promoter

Naturschutzbund Österreich

Contact

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Website

www.naturverbindet.at

‘Nature Connects’ is a campaign to raise and generate awareness on the importance of biodiversity in rural landscapes by bringing together land owners, experts and the broader public.

Summary

Nature protection is not very popular amongst farmers in Austria. Farmers tend to consider it as an obligation or a commitment without realising the importance of preserving nature and biodiversity. To address this situation project holders launched a campaign build around an online platform to promote and preserve the rich diversity in fauna and flora in rural landscapes in Austria.

Activities supported included the development and maintenance of the online platform; cooperation with stakeholders like the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture and identification of new partners; production of information papers and brochures, Public Relations, campaigning, holding events, workshops and awards, producing of signs to indicate outstanding areas, etc.



Results

52 million m² of agricultural land registered with Nature Connects by 2017 (10 m expected)

221 articles published in press and media (200)

1 000 registered “reporters” of indicated areas

10 big events organised

10 000 visitors on the webpage

50 best practice projects

10 awarded focus areas and projects

500 mounted outdoor signs

Lessons & Recommendations

- The wording used may often affect farmers choice on whether to participate or no in an initiative. In this case farmers were not asked to “register areas” but they were invited to “add square meters”.
- One very effective method to create interest is through competitions.
- It was also surprising to see the high turnout of people interested in the “hands-on days” organised.

Context

Nature protection is not very popular amongst farmers in Austria. Farmers are experiencing it sometimes as a kind of pressure from the EU or national authorities. Land owners needed to be persuaded to keep their fertile land and to cultivate it in a sustainable way. They should also be convinced to try to enhance the natural quality of gardens and public areas. In this context project initiators considered the need for a campaign to promote and preserve the rich diversity in fauna and flora in rural landscapes in Austria.

Objectives

The main objective of the project 'Nature Connects' is to promote the sustainable management of rural landscapes and to establish and increase an understanding for the importance of these areas.

Some specific objectives are:

- to raise awareness about nature protection and agriculture through positive cooperation and promotion;
- to engage and involve land owners and cooperation partners;
- to educate farmers, the wider public and policy makers about how to create and maintain 'good and fertile' areas;
- to present and publish good examples of sustainable land management.

Activities

'Nature Connects' is a long-term campaign supporting a range of activities to promote practices that enhance biodiversity. The campaign's website is a core tool in this process and serves as a platform to exchange knowledge and information. Furthermore, it offers a map of Austria, showing the progress in increasing the amount of land committed to participate to this campaign.

The first activity was to launch a public campaign inviting land owners and cultivators to join the initiative. Stakeholders were invited to create new areas and to register online. Actions realized include:

Development and maintenance of the online platform – which is the core of this project. There one can find all information, register for participation or register areas with a very high value.

Setting up activities in cooperation with stakeholders like



the Austrian Chamber of Agriculture and getting new partners - It was very important to get farmers on board from the very first minute onwards. Luckily the Chamber of Agriculture with its Secretary General, Mr. Josef Plank, was very satisfied with the "Nature Connects" project and all regional organizations have supported its objectives. Thus it was easy to get access to the farmers' minds and change the image of nature protection measures for the better.

Creating documents for consultation and services (information papers, brochures) - Even today campaigning needs more than online services. It was clear from the beginning that only with good and professional prints all the important information could get spread widely.

Public Relations, campaigning, newsletters - Building awareness involves, of course, public relations. This was the most important aspect in the implementation of the webpage. Finally, 221 articles were published on the website. This was a turning point and increased the platform's visibility steadily. It was also one of the main reasons to get this huge amount of registered square meters and so many participants in the process (see "results")

Events, Workshops and Awards - After 10 big events, some workshops and giving awards to the best areas, it was realized that the project was on its way to become a great success. The event "Day of Nature" in 2015 with the main topic "Nature Connects" was one of the highlights of the project.

Production of signs to indicate outstanding areas – It was realised that citizens are reacting quite positively to signposts informing about outstanding natural areas. People have become hungry for more information about all things happenings in prospering meadows in their surroundings. Having realized this trend the project produced more than 500 signs for its partners who mounted them at their meadows and fields.

Quality assurance, showing the others how it works - Good project management needs good quality assurance. The project was committed to deliver high quality services and this paid off as evidenced by the results.

Main Results

- 52 million m² of agricultural land registered with Nature Connects by 2017 (10 m expected)
- 221 articles published in press and media
- 1 000 registered “reporters” of indicated areas
- 10 big events organised
- 10 000 visitors on the webpage
- 50 best practice projects
- 10 awarded focus areas and projects
- 6 newsletters
- 20 information sheets on different topics
- 500 mounted outdoor signs
- 40 groups and partners as supporters of the campaign

“Many farmers are making a great contribution towards protecting the environment. They know, that good agriculture needs a nature in a good health. This project integrates the owners and cultivators of the land and is searching for dialog. That’s the reason why we are partner of it.”

Mr. Schultes, president of the chamber of agriculture

Key lessons

Farmers are skeptical about projects which focus mainly on nature protection. In the light of the present discussions about “Natura 2000” it became evident that it’s quite often only the wording which can convince them or make them reject a proposal. This was the reason why farmers were not asked to “register areas”. Instead they were invited to “add square meters” while in parallel explaining the objectives, the vision and aim to gather more than 10 000 000 m².

One very positive method to stimulate interest is through competitions. Competitions were given the creative name “Bunte Säume.Lebensräume” which means, “Pollinator Strips. Rooms for Life”.

It was also surprising to see the high turnout of people interested in the “hands-on days” organised.



Additional sources of information

n/a