European Network for Rural Development

# Pilot project Result-based Nature conservation Plan (RNP)

EAFRD-funded projects

**Implementing a result-based nature conservation measure for species and habitat protection as to allow more flexibility for farmers in choosing and implementing management activities suitable to their land.**

## AUSTRIA

Restoring, preserving and enhancing biodiversity

**Location**
Utilised agricultural nature conservation areas, such as Natura 2000 areas, biosphere parks and others

**Programming period**
2014 – 2020

**Priority**
P4 Restoring, Preserving and Enhancing Ecosystems

**Measure**
7.6.1.a studies and investments for conservation, restoration and enhancement of the natural heritage – nature conservation

**Funding (EUR)**
Total budget 275 178.94
EAFRD 138 410.82
National/regional 136 768.12

**Project duration**
2015 – 2017

**Project promoter**
Verein thema:natur. Bildung, Vernetzung, Kommunikation

**Contact**
info@themanatur.eu

**Website**
www.themanatur.eu

## Summary

With the pilot project Result-based Nature conservation Plan, a result-based approach has been introduced in the Austrian Agri-environmental programme ÖPUL 2015 to pursue nature conservation objectives. Participation is possible for farmers within the ÖPUL-measure "nature conservation".


© Josef Hinterleitner

Instead of being obliged to comply to pre-defined management activities, the Result-based Nature conservation Plan offers higher flexibility for farmers and more responsibility in implementing management activities. Management activities are decided on parcel level together with the farmer, the ecological expert and the nature conservation department. In doing so, farmers get better informed about the interrelations between management activities and nature conservation development goals and are enabled to develop higher acceptance for nature conservation concerns.

## Results

About 130 farms participate in the Result-based Nature conservation Plan within the AECM "nature conservation" since 2015.

Farmers are able to see, experience and comprehend the results and benefits of the implemented management activities, and thus better understand nature conservation concerns.

## Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ The implementation of the Result-based Nature conservation Plan required a great deal of administrative effort and higher costs for administration.
- ❑ The Result-based Nature conservation Plan is well suitable for AEC measures which are focused and highly training-oriented, but less suitable for broad approaches.
- ❑ The result-based approach is well suitable mainly for agri-environmental measures, in which visual results are achieved on a definable area and can be traced back to specific management activities.

ENRD Contact Point
Rue de la Loi, 38 Boîte n.4 - 1040
Brussels, Belgium
Tel. +32 2 801 38 00
email: info@enrd.eu
website: http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/

Funded by the European Commission

## Context

Contractual nature conservation in Austria is, as in Europe, mainly measures-oriented: the farmer agrees on management activities, for each supported nature conservation area, which are decided by the nature conservation department of the Federal Province. Frequently, this measures-oriented approach resulted in neglecting the debate about the objectives and many farmers are not sufficiently informed about the technical reasons for certain management activities on nature conservation areas. Furthermore, certain management activities, like e.g. fixed regular mowing times or the complete renouncement of fertilisers, sometimes cause a negative attitude towards contractual nature conservation.

The evaluation of the Austrian Agri-environmental Programme ÖPUL 2007 showed that the measures-oriented nature conservation is well suitable for keeping nature conservation areas in their baseline condition, but less for developing and improving habitats. In 2014, a pilot project for training on the Agri-Environmental-Climate Measure (AECM) "nature conservation" started and with the help of several farmers, a concept for implementing a result-based nature conservation approach in Austria was developed. As it turned out in the testing phase, higher flexibility in choosing management activities made the implementation of nature conservation development goals more successful.

This may be due to the fact that by implementing a result-based nature conservation approach, the farmers are provided with more room for manoeuvre for independent action and have more opportunities to adopt the chosen management activities to the farm's situation.

## Objectives

The project focusses on utilised agricultural nature conservation areas in Austria – above all situated in Natura 2000 sites, biosphere parks and other valuable landscape areas, or species listed in Annex IV of the Flora Fauna and Habitats (FFH) Directive. Specific objectives of the project include:

- Implementing a result-based nature conservation measure in agriculture for species and habitat protection by defining specific nature conservation development goals on the area;
- Increasing farmers' understanding for species and habitats which are valuable from a nature conservation perspective by providing them with a certain autonomy and flexibility in choosing the management activities;
- Raising awareness and acceptance of nature conservation measures, the FFH and bird protection Directives, as well as the Natura 2000 network through transparent traceability of the reasons for management activities for farmers;
- Increasing the knowledge of farmers about the habitat needs of the target species and appropriate management activities to maintain species and habitats which are valuable from a nature conservation perspective.


© E. Nesser

## Activities

In the current period within the measure nature conservation, a sub measure "Result-based Nature Conservation Plan" is provided in the Austrian Agri-environmental Programme ÖPUL. Its implementation is supported by a consulting firm and includes:

- In 2015, in coordination with the nature conservation departments of the Federal Provinces and the Federal Ministry, qualified farms which already participated in the established measure nature conservation and which are interested in deepening their know-how on nature conservation, were elected.
- In parallel, expert teams of vegetation and animal ecologists were put together for clarifying vegetational-ecological and animal-ecological questions and for providing professional advisory for the farms.
- The expert teams and the paying agency received training; workshops were organised to reflect on the project progress; and information was provided periodically to the involved managing authorities.

"I take part in the Result-based Nature conservation Plan, because it enables me to tailor the grazing of the nature conservation areas perfectly to the actual location, weather conditions and climate conditions."

Participating farmer

Funded by the European Commission

- By visiting the farms on-site, transparent and farm-individual nature conservation objectives were defined. Each participating farm was visited. Together with the ecological expert and the farmer and in accordance with the nature conservation department, specific nature conservation objectives, target indicators and control criteria were decided for each parcel and alternative courses of action for optimum farm management for achieving the nature conservation objectives were discussed.
- Qualitative area objectives including qualitative target indicators, quantitative control criteria, appropriate management options and further specific information concerning nature conservation were summarized in a farm-specific logbook and provided to each farmer. The logbook serves as documentation on the farm and needs to be submitted in case of a controlling visit. The control criteria which must be quantitatively verifiable on-site and are the basis for the potential on-the-spot checks for examining the proper implementation of the measures.
- The results of the project (participating farms, experiences, successes and challenges in the implementation) were documented in a final report and reflected together with the participating farms in a final workshop.

## Main results

- About 130 farms participate in the Result-based Nature conservation Plan within the AECM "nature conservation" since 2015 (mainly grassland farms and farms with permanent grassland).
- The Result-based Nature conservation Plan allows pursuing nature conservation objectives for habitats and for endangered species at the same time.
- The Result-based Nature conservation Plan has turned out to be especially well suitable for a number of nature conservation requirements: for combating undesired species and neophytes, for managing very dynamic nature conservation areas like e.g. fallow arable land with many mobile ruderal species, for livestock farming with mowed meadows, pastures, and mowed pastures, for management activities for the regeneration of endangered habitats, for combining two divergent objectives on one area as well as implementing nature conservation objectives also on more intensive farmland due to higher flexibility.
- Farmers are able to see, experience and comprehend the results and benefits of the implemented management activities and thus better understand nature conservation concerns.
- Farmers appreciate the scope of action and the flexibility in choosing and implementing management activities and therefore feel more autonomous in their actions.
- By defining clear biodiversity targets on the area, the acceptance among farmers for specific management activities and their identification with the protected goods are significantly higher.
- Advisory and informing activities are an essential part of result-based approaches. Good working, qualified consultations essentially contribute to training and sensitization: Informed farmers do feel more responsible for nature conservation requirements and do better understand interrelations between management activities and protected goods

## Key lessons

The implementation of the Result-based Nature conservation Plan required a great deal of administrative effort and higher costs for administration. This is on the one hand partly due to the fact that it is a pilot project, and on the other hand partly due to performing a communicative and training-oriented approach, which involves greater efforts for preparing information documents and awareness-raising measures.

The Result-based Nature conservation Plan is well suitable for AEC measures which are focused and highly training-oriented, but less suitable for broad approaches – even if project results may offer helpful contribution also for broad measures or project funding (e.g. training aspects for the agri-environmental measure or techniques for combating neophytes).

The result-based approach is well suitable mainly for agri-environmental measures, in which visual results are achieved on a definable area, which can be traced back to specific management activities and which are thus comprehensible for the farmer and can be identified as success resulting from his/her management activities.

Additional sources of information

www.suske.at/en/projects/all-projects/results-based-nature-conservation-plan

Funded by the European Commission