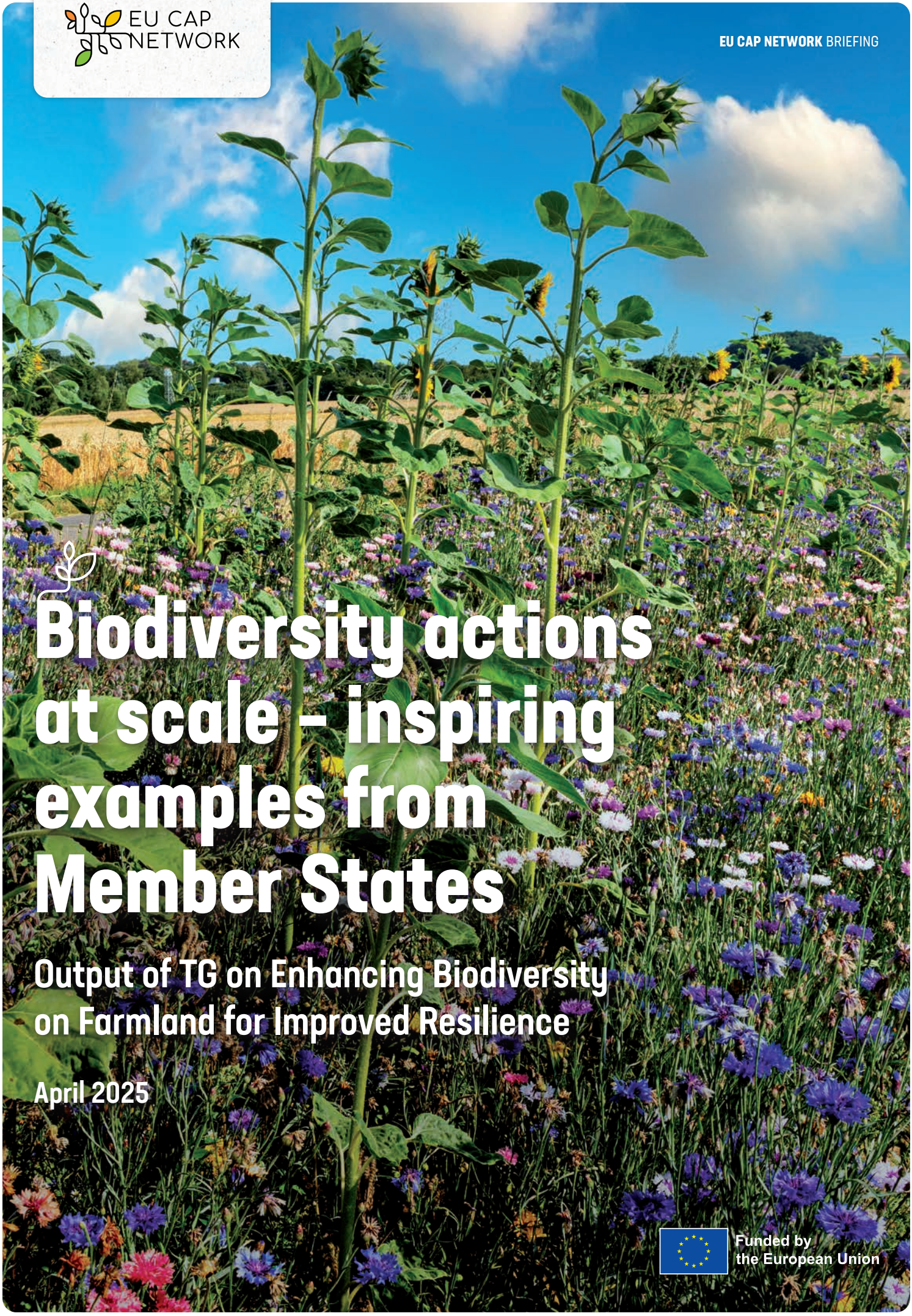
EU CAP NETWORK



Biodiversity actions at scale – inspiring examples from Member States

Output of TG on Enhancing Biodiversity on Farmland for Improved Resilience

April 2025

Funded by the European Union

Table of Contents

1. Introduction

This briefing presents a selection of examples of initiatives that promote collaborative biodiversity action on farmland beyond the single farm. These initiatives have been shared by members of the EU CAP Networks' Thematic Group on Enhancing Biodiversity on Farmland for Improved Resilience. These initiatives are funded from a range of sources, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), but also other EU funds (e.g. LIFE, Interreg, Horizon Europe) as well as funding sources such as foundations and national funding. The majority of the examples are from initiatives that support the management of farmland for biodiversity purposes. However, at the end of the document, a small number of other examples are included of initiatives exploring other means of stimulating biodiversity action at scale, such as via market signals or the use of biodiversity credits. The purpose of this briefing is to give a flavour of the range of initiatives that are happening in different parts of the EU to provide inspiration to others – it is by no means a comprehensive list.

The overall aim of the Thematic Group (TG) was to examine how to encourage greater uptake and spatial coordination of biodiversity practices on farmland to improve the sustainability of farming practices, the restoration and establishment of habitats and the resilience of farming systems. The meetings provided TG members with opportunities to share experiences and examples, and identify barriers and opportunities relating to scheme design, implementation and monitoring with a particular focus on the benefits of working collaboratively with other farmers to achieve impact at the landscape scale. The TG comprised 40 members representing Managing Authorities (MAs), Paying Agencies (PAs), National Networks (NNs), farmers and farming organisations, environmental NGOs, European and national/regional stakeholder organisations and farm advisers.

The TG also formulated a number of policy recommendations, reflecting TG members' practical experience and the lessons learnt during the work of the TG. These are summarised below.

Scheme design:

- Funding for biodiversity needs to be increased, particularly for collective action (Action for EC/MS).
- The creation and use of private sources of funding to complement CAP funding should be investigated, without creating issues of double funding (Action for EC/MS).
- Piloting new approaches for delivering landscape-scale action before they are rolled out should become the norm, using opportunities available under the CAP's cooperation intervention and involving farmers in scheme design (Action for MS).
- Change the narrative behind the CAP to one where funding is used to provide real incentives for multiple purposes, with a focus on the provision of ecosystem services across the whole farm, using different approaches (mandatory/voluntary) to achieve different outcomes (Action for EC/MS).
- Consider the monitoring requirements, including the indicators to be used and their measurability, when designing schemes (Action for MS).
- Design low threshold results-based schemes to generate high uptake as part of a learning process for farmers, advisers and scheme administrators – thresholds can be increased over time (Action for MS).

Scheme implementation & monitoring:

- Greater investment in collective action should be prioritised (Action for EC/MS).
- Improvements in monitoring are required to streamline what is monitored, who is monitored and how monitoring is done, e.g. use of citizen tools and farmer inputs, alongside other tools (Action for EC/MS).
- All reporting to the EC should be harmonised (across all DGs and regulations) and adequate funds should be made available for this purpose (Action for EC).
- Reduce the complexity of rules and requirements relating to scheme implementation to allow more flexibility for farmers e.g. through increased use of results-based schemes (Action for EU/MSs).
- Give farmers the option to test result-based schemes first without formally committing to a multi-year contract to reduce the risk to farmers (Action for MS).

Communication and capacity building:

- Peer-to-peer learning should be put in place, not just between farmers but also policymakers, implementation bodies and other stakeholders, both within and between Member States, in order to share experiences and increase understanding of what works (Action for MS).
- Explain to farmers the reasons for managing their land for biodiversity, including the economic and social benefits so that the added value is clear (Action for EC/MS).
- Consider new ways of communicating research findings and monitoring results to farmers, e.g. through focus groups, podcasts, exhibitions etc. (Action for EC/MS).
- Invest in training for Paying Agencies so they are aware of the latest data and monitoring technology to avoid good measures being rejected because PAs cannot monitor them with existing tools (Action for EC).
- There should be greater cooperation between stakeholders with regard to monitoring and advisory services, e.g. AKIS stakeholders, CAP Networks, agricultural chambers and environmental experts (Action for EC/MS).
- Continued investment in research and innovation on biodiversity and agriculture is essential to improve the achievement of results on the ground (Action for EC/MS).
- Engage consumers more directly in appreciating the value of products from farms with enhanced biodiversity via a range of routes, also involving food and retail organisations (Action for MS).

2. On farm initiatives and examples

2.1 Austria

2.1.1 ÖPUL connects / ÖPUL verbindet

ÖPUL verbindet website

Date: Planning phase: 2020 - 2023; Implementation phase 2023 - ongoing

Funding: CAP funding (50% EU share), Rural Development Programme (Studies and investments to preserve, restore and improve the natural heritage (7.6.1.), total budget: EUR 289,999.51; project duration: 1.11.2022-31.3.2025

Project description: "ÖPUL verbindet" is a rural development project where farmers and biodiversity experts from three Austrian regions have joined forces to implement biodiversity measures within the agri-environmental programme (ÖPUL) together.

A condition for farmers to participate in the ÖPUL programme's environmentally friendly and biodiversity-promoting management measure (UBB) is to create biodiversity areas on at least 7% of arable land and grassland. To increase impact, the aim of the project "ÖPUL verbindet" was to create biodiversity areas to form connecting habitats in three pilot regions.

The three Austrian regions are Probstdorf in the southern Marchfeld (intensive arable farming area), Jaidhof in the Waldviertel (arable and grassland area) and the Höhere Bundeslehranstalt für Landwirtschaft (HBLA) Ursprung in Salzburg's Flachgau region (grassland area).

The project is managed by the Austrian Council for Agricultural Engineering and Rural Development (ÖKL), with the landscape planning office LACON providing technical support.

This initiative started under the Austrian Rural Development Programme 2014 - 2020 and is now supported via the cooperation intervention of the Austrian CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027.

High biodiversity area on grassland in Hausruckviertel, Austria (Thomas Neudorfer)

Main activities: To achieve optimum benefits for biodiversity in the cultivated landscape, many farms in the three regions were encouraged to participate in relevant measures so that individual actions at farm level were embedded at landscape scale. Farmers and biodiversity experts worked together to plan and create connecting habitats.

In addition to the creation of as many biodiversity areas as possible within the regions, the project also sought to integrate newly created flowering areas and existing fallow fields into a habitat network.

Other important activities include establishing biodiversity as a positive topic among the farming community, as well as greater networking and stakeholder involvement at regional level. At social events in the field or in the pub, farmers and biodiversity experts co-created the local action plan and developed a joint positive narrative for biodiversity action.

Monitoring activities are also carried out to evaluate the environmental impact of the biodiversity measures. Selected bird and insect species are used as indicators for assessing species and habitat diversity. The final results of the monitoring will be available at the end of the project.

Results: A total of over 37 ha of biodiversity areas were implemented in the three regions. Some of the management on fallow land and meadows was switched from chopping to mowing.

The three regions cover a wide range of land use intensities in Austria, allowing the insights gained from the project and the effects achieved by the respective habitat networks to be implemented on a larger landscape scale beyond the pilot regions in the future.

A key outcome of the bottom-up approach was that it encouraged a positive mindset amongst farmers and a practical approach to promote biodiversity beyond perceived obligations and restrictions. This positive impact of networking and stakeholder involvement at regional level for biodiversity is an important lesson from the project.

Read more on the EU CAP Network Good practice database:

https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/good-practice/biodiversity-based-payments-cap-benefit-farmers-austria_en

2.1.2 Top-up for "regional nature conservation plan" for AECM measure "nature conservation" / Zuschlag für den „Regionalen Naturschutzplan“

Regionaler Naturschutzplan - im ÖPUL

Date: CAP period 2023-2027

Funding: CAP funding (EAFRD, 45% EU, 55% national funding), AECM (Article 70)

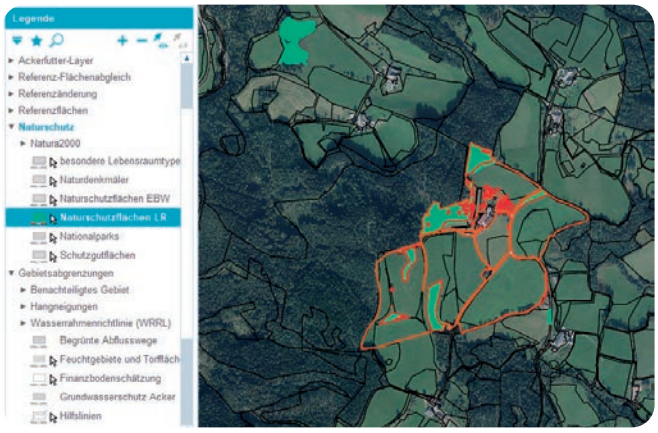
Project description: Within the Austrian agri-environmental programme ÖPUL, there is a voluntary top-up measure called the "regional nature conservation plan" which is available for farmers who are participating in the “nature conservation” measure. Within this measure, areas of high ecological value are managed in a tailor-made way. Ecologists work together with farmers to create specific management concepts for particularly valuable areas. Typical nature conservation areas are biotope types of species-rich grassland, such as dry or wetland meadows, highly diverse hay meadows or arable biodiversity areas. With the involvement of more than 20,000 farms managing around 85,000 ha of ecologically-valuable agricultural areas, the “nature conservation measure” is popular with farmers (status 2023).

The regional nature conservation plan top-up sets objectives for specific areas aimed at preserving and enhancing biodiversity in these regions. Participatory processes were used during the planning of the top-up to develop targets and packages of measures to achieve them.

Each year, farmers who participate in the “regional conservation plan” receive an area-based payment per hectare as part of the “nature conservation measure”, plus a premium of EUR 270 for attending a compulsory educational event.

The ‘Nature conservation’ measure and the ‘Regional nature conservation plan’ top-up support the preservation of species-rich grassland sites (Joachim Mandl)

Main activities: For the "regional nature conservation plan", each federal state in Austria identified specific regions (e.g., Natura 2000 sites, parts of protected areas) where conservation goals could be achieved. In the first step, valuable areas in the selected regions were determined, and their protection needs outlined through joint planning, workshops, and site visits carried out by representatives of the nature conservation authorities, together with ecologists, and farmers in the respective regions.



The nature conservation areas are shown as a separate map layer for interested farmers in the geodata-based application (Joachim Mandl)

For each identified region, certain packages of management requirements were defined and can be implemented with the support of local farmers. In order to participate in the “regional nature conservation plan”, farmers select a package of “management requirements” and implement tailor-made biodiversity focused measures on their ecologically-valuable meadows, pastures or arable land in order to receiver funding for contributing to the overarching aims of the region defined by the federal state. The conditions required to achieve the regional objectives are set out in the project agreement each farmer receives when participating in this top-up and must be fulfilled on the relevant areas.

In addition to the tailor-made land management actions, annual events are offered to support the achievement of the regional nature conservation plan’s objectives. Participation in these events is obligatory to receive the payment.

Participating farmers need to commit to the AECM nature conservation measure (min 4-year commitment) in order to be eligible for the top-up. Commitments for the top-up are on an annual basis and extended automatically if the farmer does not unsubscribe.

Results: Results are pending, as 2024 is only the second year of implementation. For the year 2024, throughout Austria, 894 agricultural holdings applied for the top-up payment.

Read more on the EU CAP Network Good practice database:

https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/good-practice/cap-supports-tailor-made-nature-management-concepts-developed-farmers-and-supported_en

2.2 Belgium (Flanders)

Boerennatuur Flanders farmer groups

Boerennatuur Vlaanderen website

Date: Since 2008 – ongoing

Funding: Figures not available

Project description: In Flanders (Belgium), since 2008, 34 farmer groups have been formed in which farmers cooperate on agri-environmental measures (biodiversity, landscape, soil, water). The AECM contracts between the government administration and farmers are still on an individual basis, but farmers cooperate on the coordination of measures and operational management to increase farmers' participation and environmental impact. As there is no dedicated fund for the facilitation of groups, the coordination of their activities is mainly funded through projects, initiated by the umbrella organisation Boerennatuur Flanders.

The initiative started from a project "ECO2", which was an initiative of the farmers' union Boerenbond, with support from the Flemish Land Agency (VLM) and the Agency of Nature and Forestry (ANB), in cooperation with the Werkers organisation. Originating from this initiative, Boerennatuur Vlaanderen was formally established as a non-profit organization in 2012.

Main activities:

Over the years there have been several farmer groups with different activities. The structure is mainly as follows:

- The farmer group is a non-profit and receives support from Boerennatuur Vlaanderen for the contracts and coordination.
- Farmers managing the land where the AECM are implemented have individual contracts with the government (VLM).
- However, the farmer groups coordinate the management of the AECM amongst themselves, so that some farmers do all the work for the farmers in the group.
- The farmers who do the work are contracted by Werkers. Werkers provides farmers with the opportunities to offer their services to other farmers or even other organisations.

The farmers that have the AECM contracts therefore pay the farmers who do the work through Werkers, mostly with the compensation they receive for the AECM.

Results: Over the years, there has been an increase in participation in agri-environment schemes, with a growing number of Flemish farmers adopting agri-environmental practices, contributing to the preservation of local ecosystems. This has led to an improvement in ecosystem services (soil and water conservation, natural pest control, pollination, etc.) and biodiversity on participating farms. As well as empowering farmers to become active stewards of the environment while maintaining the profitability of their agricultural businesses, it has also strengthened the networks between the groups.

Local farmer group working on landscape management (Boerennatuur Vlaanderen)

2.3 EU (+UK)

FABulous Farmers – Farmers increase the efficiency of farm and natural resources by using Functional Agro-Biodiversity

Fabulous Farmers website

Countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, United Kingdom

Date: 2019 - 2023

Funding: Interreg. Total budget: EUR 7.41 million. Interreg North-West Europe funding: EUR 4.45 million.

Project description: The FABulous Farmers project aims to reduce the reliance on external inputs by encouraging the use of methods and interventions that increase Functional AgroBiodiversity (FAB) on farms. The project identified 10 FAB measures, including crop rotation, mixed crops, field margin and hedgerow management, agroforestry, modifying manure quality, organic matter input, cover crops, non-inversion tillage and crop protection. The project works together with farmers implementing these FAB measures, and goes beyond a single-farm approach in order to support FAB at a landscape level. The project works on the basis that to effectively reinforce agrobiodiversity, a landscape approach is needed, focusing on both ecological and social dimensions.

Main activities: In 14 pilot areas in six countries (Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, United Kingdom) the project cooperates with FABulous farmers who experiment with and implement the FAB measures on their farms. To successfully increase impact, farmers implementing FAB measures work together with other stakeholders, e.g. businesses, NGOs and municipalities, to come to an integrated FAB-landscape-integration plan – a plan that lists complementary actions for different stakeholders to reinforce the FAB measures of the farmers in the pilot regions.

As the farm-level measures are not at a sufficient scale to achieve biodiversity benefits at the regional level, the project developed an approach to identify relevant FAB stakeholders in the pilot regions and involve them in discussions on their possible contribution to FAB. Networking meetings and farmers/citizens events were organised to discuss plans and create mutual positive understanding. Each plan describes actions to lift barriers to implement FAB measures on farmland and actions to strengthen opportunities to implement FAB measures at a landscape level, specifying the necessary resources, stakeholders and priorities for the identified barriers and opportunities. Testing, implementing, evaluating and demonstrating FAB measures in the field together with local farmers in pilot areas were the core activities of the project.

Since biodiversity is not limited to the farm, on-farm FAB measures can also be supported by actions taken in areas neighbouring agricultural land, for example by planting hedges, alternative management of roadsides etc.

Results: Alongside supporting biodiversity conservation, the implementation of FAB measures has provided tangible benefits to farmers, for instance through improved pollination, natural pest control and enhanced soil quality, by providing vital resources and reducing the need for external inputs such as plant protection products. During the project period 447 farmers were supported and FAB measures were implemented on an area of 22,678 ha.

Piloting with functional flower strips in FABulous Farmers project (Boerennatuur Vlaanderen)

2.4 Estonia

2.4.1 LIFE ConnectingMeadows – Restoring and connecting semi-natural meadow habitats on Muhu island, Estonia (LIFE19 NAT/EE/001006)

ConnectingMeadows website

LIFE ConnectingMeadows on LIFE Public Database

Date: December 2020 – December 2025

Funding: LIFE. Total budget: EUR 1 373 000; EU contribution: EUR 1 029 750

Project description: The project, located on the island called Muhu in Western Estonia, aims to create and improve conditions for the sustainable management of semi-natural grasslands. The project connects fragmented pieces of semi-natural habitats, thereby providing enhanced opportunities for species to retain their genetic diversity. At the same time, it brings together conservationists, farmers and other stakeholders to help preserve diverse landscapes and species diversity. This is a unique area with a high concentration of priority semi-natural grassland habitat types and a relatively preserved traditional lifestyle.

Main activities: The aim is to restore 200 ha of EU priority semi-natural grasslands on Muhu, to improve their connectivity and promote species richness. The project creates the conditions for the sustainable management of the areas to be restored. To achieve its goal, various activities are carried out, including communication and dissemination, the acquisition of grazing and mowing equipment, the creation of a label for products from heritage meadows and the training of advisers.

A part of the project is communication activities to introduce the values of well-managed species-rich meadows, ecosystem services and the activities of the project to a wider audience.

An online communication platform for stakeholders (landowners, farmers, conservationists, government officials) has been created to promote communication and information exchange and to further support the preservation of valuable habitats.

Hike on project area on Natura2000 day (Annely Holm)

Grassland resoration work, Muhu Island (Annely Holm)

Results: The project is ongoing until 2025 and the results are pending. Expected results include:

1. 200 ha of priority habitats of EU Habitats Directive restored in the Natura 2000 sites Vike Vin (SPA), Vinamere (SPA), Vinamere (pSCI) , Ranna-Pitse (pSCI), Rannaniidi (SPA), Nmmkla (pSCI) and Oina (pSCI), 55 ha of wooded meadows (6530), 40 ha of coastal meadows (1630) and 115 ha of alvars (6280);
2. Restored habitats equipped with suitable machinery (3 mowers) and grazing infrastructure for continuous management (20 km of fences, 10 electrical generators, gates, 10 cattle grids, 3 all-terrain vehicles, 5 portable animal shelters, 6 freshwater access points, 3 animal collection pens);
3. Increased seed dispersal and number of pollinators;
4. Establishment of dispersal corridors for species;
5. Model for spatial planning of semi-natural grassland restoration and spatial plan for reducing fragmentation of grasslands tested, adjusted and available for restoration planning;
6. Long-term (30 year) tripartite contracts signed with farmers and landowners to bring their cattle/sheep to graze the area annually;
7. Creation of a platform to connect and unite managers and conservationists;
8. 10 meetings with stakeholders and 5 meetings held to introduce the project results;
9. 6 advisers trained to offer an advisory service for semi-natural grassland restoration and management;
10. Newspaper articles, and radio and TV reports on the project, and 5 biodiversity training days held in the local community;
11. Publication and distribution of 4 000 booklets in 4 languages;
12. Hiking trail app for Muhu available for visitors.

2.4.2 WoodmeadowLIFE (LIFE20 NAT/EE/000074)

Estonia Environment Board

Latvia Fund for Nature

Project progress report 2022

WoodmeadowLIFE on LIFE public database

Country: Estonia / Latvia

Date: November 2021 – December 2026

Funding: LIFE. Total budget: EUR 6 697 642, EU contribution: EUR 5 023 229

Project description: The objective of the project is to restore a significant proportion of overgrown wooded meadows in Estonia and Latvia, to establish long-term arrangements and infrastructure on private land for their future management and to highlight their ecosystem services, ecological functions and unique heritage value. The project is expected to achieve an improvement in the population status of species associated with wooded meadows, including *Cypripedium calceoulus* and *Osmoderma eremita.*

Fennoscandian wooded meadows are a highly endangered EU Priority habitat which has an "unfavourable-bad" conservation status throughout its range. These wooded meadows have developed under conditions of traditional agriculture, with diverse management approaches, including sustainable use of timber, collecting branches and hay for winter fodder, providing pastures, using areas for beekeeping, and collecting berries and hazelnuts, amongst others. The diversity of management approaches has provided for an extraordinary species richness – these wooded meadows are the most diverse habitat in the Boreal region and can host up to 76 vascular plant species per square metre. Estonia and Latvia together host 60% of all remaining wooded meadows in the Boreal biogeographical region. However, only some 28% of Estonian wooded meadows and 31% of Latvian wooded meadows are managed.

In 2021, 1 100 ha of wooded meadows were being managed in Estonia, and 343 ha in Latvia, which is not enough to ensure the long-term preservation of these species-rich habitats. The "Action Plan for Semi-Natural Meadows 2021-2027" and the Latvian Natura Financing Action Plan (PAF) set the goal to restore and then maintain 2,000 ha of wooded meadows in Estonia and 992 ha in Latvia by 2027, in order to achieve favourable conservation status by the end of the decade. In Latvia,15 floodplain areas contain half of Latvia's EU priority habitat Fennoscandian wooded meadows, the best quality floodplain meadows in the country, and its highest breeding densities of Corn crake *(Crex crex)* and Lesser Spotted Eagle *(Aquila marine)*.

Wooded meadow (Mati Kose)

Main activities: 33 areas with high restoration potential have been selected in cooperation with experts – 25 project areas in Estonia (Saaremaa, Hiiumaa, Pärnu County, Lääne County, Lääne-Viru County, Rapla County, Tartu, and Valga County) and 8 areas in Latvia.

The restoration of wooded meadows usually takes 1–3 years, and the restoration must be carried out in such a way that it is possible to mow in the future. Restoration activities include the removal of shrubs and the creation of more space between the tree and shrub layers to create a landscape where a sparse tree and shrub strata alternate with open meadow patches and with individual elements beneficial for biodiversity, such as anthills, lying wood, semi-dried or dead standing trees, larger rocks, and stumps. In addition to restoration, it is necessary to install culverts or gravel roads in some project areas to gain access to the area. After restoration, the wooded meadows need to be managed every year by mowing and removing the mown grass.

The involvement of landowners and land managers is essential to the success of the project. The restoration actions are funded by the EAFRD non-productive investment support. Maintenance support payments for wooded meadows are also available (from EUR 600/ha). The restored areas are expected to be eligible to apply for support payments by the end of the project.

Awareness-raising activities are also foreseen, through seminars, study days, and work campaigns on wooded meadows, as well as introducing the project activities and events through social media. Demonstration days on restoration and maintenance equipment are planned.

It is planned to record heritage related to the management of wooded meadows and create a nature education outdoor exhibition, as well as publish a book on the cultural heritage of wooded meadows.

Results: By the end of the first year, the project had signed 20-year agreements with owners to restore and manage wooded meadows on 160 ha (120 ha in EE and 40 ha in LV – a quarter of the total target area of 700 ha). The project team contacted 220 landowners (208 in EE and 14 in LV) who had overgrown wooded meadows in the identified sites. The open call for landowners to apply for restoration was extended to the following spring.

In Estonia, the project found it difficult to get consent from the landowners for restoring their wooded meadows and comit to 20 years post-restoration management. Many landowners are older people who do not have the necessary equipment or think that restoring or managing these areas will not be profitable. As a result, the project considered possible solutions, including to: create an overview of local service providers who would be willing to restore or maintain the areas; review the support scheme, change the support amounts or terms; and change the restoration areas/project sites.

Meadow and forest experts collected field data and prescribed conservation actions for 270ha of habitat to the end of 2022. The project is expected to carry out detailed restoration planning, creating a foundation for science-based restoration activities and knowledge transfer.

The project has also prepared a communication plan for strategic communication about wooded meadows in Estonia and Latvia.

By 2026 the project is expected to:

- restore at least 700 ha of wooded meadows by cutting down trees and shrubs, removing stumps and offshoots;
- improve accessibility to restoration sites, ensuring the possibility of their management;
- improve habitat quality for typical species on at least 150 hectares, for example by seed spreading, removal of invasive species, installation of habitats for bats and beetles.

2.5 Germany

2.5.1 Wildlife habitat advice ('Wildlebensraumberatung')

Wildlife habitat advice in Bavaria – LfL

Region: Bavaria

Date: 2015 – ongoing (started as a project in 7 areas of Bavaria around 2015; continuous advice in all 32 agricultural administrative districts in Bavaria.)

Funding: Regional funding from Bavaria

Project description: In order to meet the goal of promoting biodiversity in the wider landscape, Bavarian farmers, hunters and other stakeholders are given advice on habitat-improving measures. Since the beginning of 2021, advisers on wildlife habitats have been available at each of the 32 Offices for Food, Agriculture and Forestry in Bavaria in order to promote regional implementation of biodiversity measures. They provide information and actively approach farmers to support them in implementing measures for wildlife. In dedicated pilot areas, farmers and advisers work together over a longer period to continuously improve the habitats for animal and plant species. The idea is that a large number of spatially-connected agroecological measures are put in place, so that the landscape changes visibly over time.

Main activities: The pilot areas are used to raise awareness about how to incorporate biodiversity within agriculture systems and showcase how biodiversity can be improved.

The wildlife habitat advisers have selected pilot areas (several km²) based on interest from farmers and other stakeholders (e.g. hunters). They co-develop measures to improve the connectivity and quality of habitats within the pilot area. Participation by farmers, hunters, nature conservationists and other stakeholders is voluntary.

Possible measures implemented include existing CAP interventions, voluntary top-ups (with no funding) to CAP interventions and other voluntary measures. Results are monitored in the pilot regions based on indicators.

The technical and scientific management (including information on habitats and their connectivity, regional mapping), conception and implementation of training and evaluation of wildlife habitat advice is the responsibility of the State Institute for Agriculture (LfL).

In Bavaria, 45 full-time equivalent advisers and 2-3 members of staff for central coordination and scientific support work on the project. The wildlife habitat advisers focus on common agricultural habitats and species. A similar set up of advisers exists with a focus on protected habitats and species, but these are based in the nature conservation administration. Both groups cooperate well.

Results: Priorities, targets and activities are co-created, allowing ownership and acceptance. Trust-building was identified as crucial, and farm-to-farm learning and knowledge exchange has proved to work well and is encouraged. Advisers keep in contact with participating actors, at least annually, although more frequent contact is provided at the beginning.

2.5.2 Collective models for the enhancement of biodiversity (Kollektive Modelle zur Förderung der Biodiversität - KOMBI)

KOMBI website

KOMBI at DVL website

KOMBI at BFN website

Date: January 2023 – December 2028

Funding: National and regional funding by: Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Nuclear Safety and Consumer Protection (BMUV); Federal Agency for Nature Conservation (BfN); Baden-Württemberg Ministry for the Environment; Hessian Ministry of Agriculture and Environment, Viticulture, Forestry, Hunting and Homeland (HMLU) and Saxon State Ministry for Energy, Climate Protection, Environment and Agriculture (SMEKUL): EUR 12 900 000

Project description: The KOMBI project is testing a cooperative approach to agri-environmental measures. Farmers and experienced nature conservation advisers are jointly selecting and planning agri-environmental measures suited to their respective regions and implementing them across farms focusing on a landscape approach.

The goal of the collective approach is to make nature conservation and agricultural funding more effective and efficient – both for ecosystems and for farms. The collective approach has been successfully implemented in the Dutch agri-environmental scheme. KOMBI is testing whether elements of this approach are suitable for Germany as well.

KOMBI intends to address the following issues:

- *effectiveness of green measures:* payments focused on single farms do not properly target landscape goals and the biotope network;
- *acceptance of green measures among farmers:* separated green funding programmes (two CAP funds, state programmes) and limited combination options as well as funding bureaucracy including risk of sanctions makes farmers hesitate to apply green measures;
- *efficiency of green measures and bureaucracy:* increasing numbers of legal requirements and single farm applications are not in line with the limited resources of local authorities and funding agencies in Germany.

Main activities: The project is implemented in four German pilot areas: Baden-Württemberg, Brandenburg, Hessen, and Saxony. Project activities in the pilot areas are initiated by Landcare associations (LCAs). LCAs bring together farmers, environmental organisations and local authorities and mediate the interests of agriculture and nature conservation at local level. Due to the involvement of a full range of stakeholders, LCAs have a wide local acceptance.

The local LCA coordinates the activities in the KOMBI pilot area. It provides consultancy, initiates farmer cooperation and supports the groups, from participatory planning, to processing applications for funding and implementation. The measures that are implemented follow mutually-agreed goals at the landscape level and range from agroforestry systems and the creation of a network of small water bodies. The aim is to replace an individual farm-based, or even field-based, focus with a landscape-level approach.

The cross-farm approach is intended to reduce the administrative burden on farms and authorities. During workshops with stakeholders, approaches for new and adjusted collective agri-environmental funding schemes are discussed. The project is searching for administrative solutions to align funding requirements with the needs of a collective approach. The solutions need to be economically and environmentally viable. The experiences gained in the pilot areas are communicated within and beyond the borders of the pilot areas. Political consultancy will advocate to perpetuate the findings of the project.

KOMBI project meeting (DVL, Maria Höhne)

Results: This project helps to ensure that agri-environmental and climate protection measures achieve the respective nature conservation goals more effectively through bottom-up collective action, cross-farm planning and implementation. An evaluation and analysis of the collective planning and implementation models in the model regions will be carried out and their impact on agroecological and economic improvements assessed. Finally, the experience gained in the project will be formulated into policy recommendations for action.

2.5.3 Piloting of nature conservation cooperatives in Germany MoNaKo (Modellhafte Erprobung von Naturschutz-Kooperativen - MoNaKo)

MoNaKo at DBV website

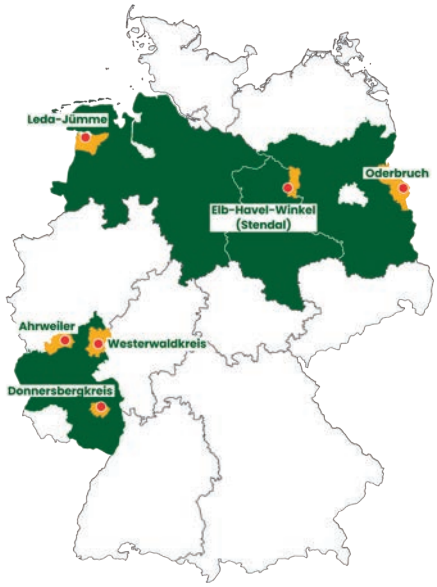
MoNaKo at Thünen Institut website

Date: December 2023 – October 2026

Funding: National funding for the running of the project (funding by the Landwirtschaftlichen Rentenbank for three years), but in parts also EU CAP budget to fund agri-environment climate commitments under Art. 70 (5) of the Strategic Plan Regulation, promoting and supporting collective schemes (figures not available).

Project description: The MoNaKo pilot project is piloting a cooperative approach for implementing nature conservation measures on farmland following the Dutch cooperative approach in four German federal states. The objective is to explore whether cooperative implementation of agri-environmental measures creates added value. The focus is on practical experience, complemented by scientific research. Higher acceptance rates, greater ecological effectiveness of the support programme or reduced administrative costs for the public sector and reduced risk of sanctions are all examples of the intended added value.

Examples of cooperation range from less formalised collaborations to common applications by farmers' groups in line with the EU funding. The project is coordinated by the German Farmers' Association (DBV) and implemented in the pilot regions with the Brandenburg Farmers' Association, the Lower Saxony Cultural Landscape Conservation Foundation and the Saxony-Anhalt and Rhineland-Palatinate Cultural Landscape Foundations. The Thünen Institute of Rural studies is responsible for the accompanying socio-economic research in the project.



Map of MoNaKo project areas 2024 (MoNaKo)

Main activities: Area-based agri-environmental measures are being implemented by farms in selected pilot areas. The pilot areas differ in terms of their natural and ecological conditions, agricultural business structures and production intensities, and implement EU and national funding opportunities in different ways. The funding programme addresses different target species and/or types of landscape. It is intended that agricultural cooperatives will be formed in each pilot area and will be responsible for implementing biodiversity funding coming from the CAP.

Contrary to conservation activities targeted at specific species, MoNaKo focuses on the governance required for a successful implementation of AECMs beyond the level of the single farm. Different forms of cooperation are being tested that enable the effective implementation of area-based biodiversity measures in accordance with the requirements of EU funding. In this context, factors that both support and hinder collaboration between farms are being identified.

MoNaKo pilot area (Stiftung Kulturlandschaft Sachsen-Anhalt, Schneider)

The identification of suitable contract areas, voluntary land swaps, and individual contract design are just three approaches that can be used to facilitate the creation of high nature-value areas that serve as "stepping stones" for species and promote the ecological connectivity of habitats. Long-term biodiversity effects are to be achieved through the joint planning and implementation of AECMs within the cooperatives. As part of the MoNaKo project, various activities are being carried out to increase farmers' acceptance of cooperative approaches designed to promote biodiversity.

The exact role and tasks of the agricultural cooperatives varies and may include the design of measures, approaching farmers and coordinating their actions, and setting payment levels, as well as distributing payments and assistance during IACS on-the-spot controls. They will not replace the paying agencies but could take on some of their roles.

The cooperatives will ensure that actions are taken at the most appropriate locations, are adapted to the specific needs of the species and sites (e.g. that fallow on wet spots in arable land managed for the lapwing are at least grubbed up prior to the end of March) and that synergies with other measures are created (e.g. targeting particular resources, such as the provision of foraging, nesting and winter habitats for birds).

Results: No results are available yet. But the involvement of a range of local stakeholders and, in particular representatives from the farming community, alongside the administration at all levels from national to local, is to be seen as a promising indicator that the approach has potential.

2.5.4 Facilitating insects in agricultural landscapes through integrated farming systems with renewable raw materials FInAL (Förderung von Insekten in Agrarlandschaften durch integrierte Anbausysteme mit nachwachsenden Rohstoffen - FInAL)

FInAL website

Date: 2018 – 2025

Funding: National funding, German Federal Ministry for Food and Agriculture (BMEL) funding through the Agency for Renewable Resources (FNR, Fachagentur Nachwachsende Rohstoffe e. V.). Individual funding was granted for the project partners Thünen Institute (TI), Julius Kühn Institute (JKI), Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF), Chamber of Agriculture of Lower Saxony (LWK NI), Bavarian State Research Centre for Agriculture (LfL). Figures not available.

Project description: The aim of FInAL is to transform agricultural landscapes and farming systems to increase insect diversity, and the ecosystem services provided by insects. It aims to provide a long-term economically viable transformation at the landscape scale, addressing diversity of landscape structure and cropping systems to promote insects. This is achieved through the joint development of practical, regionally-adapted solutions and transformation paths in a transdisciplinary co-design process involving both science and practice.

The project uses landscape laboratories in which to develop, test, implement and evaluate innovative and complex insect-friendly measures in the landscape context. The landscape laboratories comprise selected areas of agricultural landscapes that serve as experimental spaces with real-world conditions. They encompass areas with and without agricultural production and focus on renewable raw materials, innovative cropping systems, and integrated pest management approaches.

An extensive monitoring programme has been designed to assess the implementation of measures on insects, but also the effects on the actors involved. The knowledge and experience gained in FInAL will be used to develop recommendations on how such transformation can be effectively implemented in other agricultural areas and at larger scales.

Main activities: Landscape laboratories (3x3 km) and reference landscapes (as a control) were established in three representative agricultural landscapes in Germany (Lower Saxony, Brandenburg, Bavaria). Each has a local landscape coordinator. In total about 70 farmers and other actors responsible for the maintenance of roadside verges and riparian strips joined the project. In contrast to the reference landscapes, where agricultural practices continued as usual, regional transformation paths were developed in the landscape laboratories, including common goals to address landscape structure diversity and cropping systems to provide insects with year-round supply of food, other resources, and a habitat network, but also defining regional specific objectives:

- the Elm region (ELM) focuses on promoting beneficial arthropods such as pollinators and natural pest enemies (predators & parasites);
- Havelländisches Luch (HVL) focuses on promoting pollinators and natural enemies of aphids;
- Rottal (ROT) focuses on the insect-fostering diversification of maize fields and protection from erosion.

The choice of measures implemented in each area, their scale and target area, were co-selected by researchers and farmers to account for farming specificities and the local context. The decisions were guided by the regional transformation path and informed by workshops, site visits, scientific support, and practice reports.

A catalogue of insect-friendly farming practices lists measures appropriate for arable land, grassland, and tracks or roads and other off-farm areas. The changes at landscape level to increase structural heterogeneity and connectivity included, for example, production-integrated measures (e.g. crop diversification, perennial crops, strip cropping, and integrated pest management); and non-productive measures (e.g. increasing semi-natural habitats, hedges, and improving riparian strips by regular cutting). Innovative measures, the effects of which are not yet sufficiently known, are tested in classic field trials at testing sites.

The joint development and implementation of insect-friendly measures by scientists and practitioners in three landscape laboratories is intended to transform the agricultural landscape. The long-term process is accompanied by biodiversity monitoring in the landscape laboratories and their reference landscapes (FInAL)

A key element of FInAL is the monitoring of insect groups and ecosystem services to assess the combined effects of the measures at the landscape level, alongside economic and social aspects, comparing results in the landscape laboratory with those in the reference areas. Baseline monitoring took place in 2020 and 2021. Monitoring encompasses different insect groups such as wild bees, hoverflies, honeybees, ground beetles and semi-aquatic insects, and ecosystem services provided by insects, soil, crop yields, and landscape structure. Sampling covers the whole area of landscape laboratories and reference landscapes.

Results: In all landscape laboratories FInAL measures were put in place on 90-270 ha each year on 13 (ELM), 7 (HVL), and 19 (ROT) farms for 3 years. Both the area and the number of measures with higher ecological value have increased in all landscape laboratories in comparison with the first implementation year 2022. There is a trend towards the uptake of more innovative and perennial or even permanent measures. In many cases, the complexity has also increased, e. g., flower strips laid along the length of the field to divide it and to improve connectivity.

Local landscape coordinators and the trust built among scientists, farmers and other actors were key to implementing certain measures. However, the success of others was hindered by the existing legal framework.

Following the needs raised by farmers, the project looked into options for new market outlets for new crops and intercrops. Some were successful, others less so, and expanding markets for new crops remains a key challenge for farmers.

Due to the time lag in terms of indicator response to demonstrate impact indicators as well as the effects of highly varied environmental conditions. long-term monitoring is needed and planned.

2.5.5 Pilot project "Farmers become bird farmers" carried out in LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats (LIFE19 IPE/DE/000004) – Conservation of grassland breeding bird habitats in the Atlantic Region (Implementation: Federal State of Lower Saxony, represented by the Lower Saxony Ministry for the Environment and Climate Protection)

LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats website

LIFE IP GrassBirdHabitats on LIFE public database

Date: 2025 – 2028 – planned implementation of a pilot project. LIFE IP project duration is 2020 – 2030.

Funding: Pilot phase has an intended budget of EUR 6.5 million for the results-based payments and shall be financed by additional funding, but it is not yet granted. (LIFE IP has a larger budget as it includes other activities.)

The project is managed by the German public authority – the Lower Saxony agency for water, coast and nature protection (NLWKN) (responsible for SPA).

Project description: The pilot aims to restore and manage 2,500 hectares of public wet grasslands in the Natura 2000 site (SPA) Dümmer, Lower Saxony, for six grassland breeding bird species: Black-tailed Godwit, Lapwing, Snipe, Redshank, Curlew, and Ruff through the introduction of a result-based payment model - "farmers become bird farmers" (more meadow birds = more money).

The land was originally owned by 400 farmers but was sold or consolidated through swaps to enable public ownership of the whole area, with former landowners leasing back land for bird-friendly management. This has been happening since the 1980s. A significant increase in bird populations has already been achieved. The current goal is to sustain a 7% annual increase (in 2024 there were 1 800 breeding pairs). Long-term objectives include achieving "Favourable Conservation Status" under the EU Birds Directive.

These birds thrive in wet grasslands with diverse wet and flooded areas. The aim of the pilot is to encourage farmers managing public land in the SPA to optimise habitats for these species by maintaining low-to-moderate soil nutrient levels, mowing and grazing in line with nesting patterns, ensuring farming intensity is sufficient to produce the ideal vegetation mix, and fostering high heterogeneity at both landscape and parcel levels.

However, due to a lack of long-term economic viability, the maintenance of the necessary management is at risk. Previously, farmers relied on CAP payments and tax benefits under German law, however, the current CAP and changes in tax regulations have rendered the management unprofitable. As a result, farmers are either relinquishing land, cancelling leasing contracts or reducing cultivation intensity, leading to habitat quality deterioration for the birds. Wet grasslands are now largely undermanaged, with soft rush *(Juncus effusus)* spreading across the fields.

The result-based payment model was developed in collaboration with farmers, the Chamber of Agriculture, professional farmers' organisations, and agricultural offices. The payment includes real-time labour costs and expenses for creating optimal meadow bird habitats, assuming a reasonable income for required work, minus expected income from hay quality, existing current premiums, and other revenues. The payment model is based on the principle that wetter grasslands attract more meadow birds but are also more costly to manage. Additionally, payment is determined by bird abundance: more meadow birds = more money. Farmers also receive a bird premium for grassland areas that do not host breeding birds but serve as essential foraging or roosting habitats within the meadow bird zone.

Main activities: All field parcels are mapped and measured yearly (breeding population, soft rushes, habitat conditions).

The criteria that must be met on each parcel are to achieve good habitat quality and perfect vegetation structure on the sample day each year (20th Oct), and a threshold of less than 1 000 soft rush clumps per ha (measured by drone images). This rush threshold has been identified as a key factor for sustainable management.

Premium payments are based on breeding bird density (pairs per 10 ha), with higher densities earning higher payments. To ensure fairness, part of the payment is distributed as a joint payment across all parcels, compensating farmers for efforts even if certain parcels are sparsely populated despite optimal management.

Results: The Result-Based Payment Scheme ("farmers become bird farmers") will be implemented, trialled, and evaluated over a 4-year period, starting in 2025. If it is successful, it could be expanded to all public wet grassland areas and eventually to private intensive grasslands.

Optimisation of habitat for wet-grassland breeding birds through appropriate management and maintenance measures: Upper image: unfavourable (high rush distribution), lower picture: optimal habitat quality (Kerrin Obracay)

2.5.6 Community meadow bird protection in Schleswig-Holstein (Gemeinschaftlicher Wiesenvogelschutz Schleswig-Holstein)

Wiesenvögel - Michael-Otto-Institut at NABU website

Wiesenvögel at Runder Tisch Naturschutz Nordfriesland e.V.

Date: 1999 – ongoing (no fixed end date)

Funding: Ministry for Energy Transition, Climate Protection, Environment and Nature (MEKUN), up to EUR 250 000/year

Project description: Since 1999, the scheme has compensated farmers in the Schleswig-Holstein region of Germany for carrying out measures to protect nesting birds in intensively used (conventionally managed) grasslands. It was jointly initiated by farmers and nature conservationists and is scientifically supported by the Michael-Otto-Institut (MOIN) of NABU (Germany's largest Nature-Protection-NGO). The threatened bird populations that are targeted are northern lapwing *(Vanellus vanellus)*, black-tailed godwit *(Limosa limosa)*, Eurasian curlew *(Numenius arquata)*, common redshank *(Tringa totanus)*, Eurasian oystercatcher *(Haematopus ostralegus)*, and also songbirds, ducks and owls which use meadows for breeding. The scheme was developed in the Eider-Treene-Sorge-Niederung, a 20 000 ha lowland and Special Protection Area under the NATURA2000 network. Nowadays, the scheme is carried out over the whole region of the federal estate of Schleswig-Holstein, with more than 170 participating farmers and over 1 400 protected nests (2024).

Protective measures on the field (Michael-Otto-Institut of NABU)

Main activities: The scheme aims to protect the populations of the target species from further decline and hence comply with EU legislation. Most measures take place on conventionally managed grassland (mainly intensive dairy farming with multiple cuts per season), some on arable fields. They aim to reduce egg and chick losses due to farming practices to a minimum.

During the breeding season, volunteers and paid supervisors search for meadow birds and mark their clutches. If a clutch hatches successfully, chicks are followed until they are fully fledged. Whenever nests and/or chicks are present, volunteers/supervisors and farmers jointly agree on protective measures. At the beginning of the breeding season, this includes measures such as restrictions on slurry or rolling. Later in the season it is mostly delays in mowing. On pastures, sensitive areas can be protected by a mobile fence. As soon as the birds leave an area, farming can be resumed in a normal way, after prior approval by the volunteers/supervisors. All agreements can be made at short notice and are only valid for one season, which makes it easier for farmers to participate. Most of the paperwork for compensation is done by the volunteers/supervisors and local associations, making the whole approach easy implementable for involved farmers. Payments are made by MEKUN.

The scheme relies on the close and trusted relationship between farmers, volunteers, supervisors, associations and the nature protection NGO. Because of this trustworthy, long-established relationship it is a very well accepted approach in Schleswig-Holstein. Involved farmers appreciate the flexibility and that the aims and the results are directly visible.

Meadow bird with chick (Michael-Otto-Institut of NABU)

Results: Since the beginning, the Collaborative Meadow Bird Protection scheme has been monitored. In a 431 ha sub-area of Eider-Treene-Sorge-Niederung, the number of lapwing territories showed considerable fluctuations, but remained constant over the years (1999-2023). Populations of curlew and black-tailed godwit have slightly increased. Also, estimated breeding success (fledged chicks per territory) for lapwings and black-tailed godwits varied between the years and averaged 0.5 (lapwing) and 0.6 (godwit) respectively. For lapwings, these values are not considered sustainable due to high levels of nest and chick predation, which was not possible to address through the scheme (yet). For godwits, on the other hand, 0.6 chicks per territory and year is considered a sustainable value.

Even when some years show poor breeding success, the monitoring study showed that the programme can contribute overall to stable meadow bird populations. The scheme can therefore be regarded as a successful approach at the local level, provided that the area is a suitable breeding habitat for the respective bird species.

The close cooperation between volunteers, farmers, associations and NGOs has created mutual trust over the years. The programme is now widely known and accepted in the region and has expanded to other project regions over time.

2.6 Ireland

2.6.1 Illaun Farm-Forest Alliance EIP

Home tree project website

Video on Operational Group: Illaun Farm-Forest Alliance

CAP Network Ireland article

Date: October 2021 – August 2023

Funding: European Innovation Partnership (EIP): EUR 164 215

Project description: The Illaun Farm Forest Alliance EIP has developed an innovative approach to farm forests in Ireland, fostering habitat restoration, improved biodiversity, social engagement and knowledge dissemination. Pioneering a catchment-sensitive farming approach, the project collaborated closely with farmers to enhance forestry management, water quality, biodiversity, and habitat linkages across the landscape.

The objective of the project was to increase on-farm biodiversity in the Glendine Valley in west County Clare, by creating, expanding and rehabilitating woodland habitat. This was accomplished through collaboration with 12 local landowners. Woodlands, shelterbelts and riparian tree buffers were planted on participating farms. Farmers were also actively supported to apply for the Native Woodland Scheme, resulting in a broader increase in native trees in the area.

The 6.5 ha Illaun site was integrated into the wider landscape by establishing wildlife corridors, such as linear woodlands, enhanced hedgerows, or wildflower lays. The corridors connect the Illaun site with a species-rich oak woodland site, just over 1km away.

Main activities: The Illaun Farm Forest EIP planted 30 000 native trees on 12 local farms in the Glendine Valley through small-scale plantings. Each farm received a visit from an ecologist, a forester, and a community liaison person. Following a farm walk and discussion with the landowner, a planting plan was mapped out. These plantings took the form of shelterbelts or small woodlands. Shelterbelts were a popular choice for participants on exposed sites.

Farmers were actively supported to apply for the Native Woodland Scheme, resulting in 11 licence applications being made to the forest service totalling over 100 acres (135 000 trees) of native woodland.

Work was also started to convert a spruce plantation into mixed woodland. Biodiversity in the Illaun woodland hub was assessed before and after interventions to establish the changes in the ecological status of these habitats. These actions were documented through digital storytelling across social media sites, national radio stations, and recording high-quality promotional videos for releases.

There was also a significant educational component that involved discussion groups with farmers and demonstration days with experts. Information exchange was promoted within the farming community; this contributed to more positive attitudes towards biodiversity and led to innovative approaches to land management in west Clare.

Results: As preparatory activity, in August 2021, the Woodland Ecological Condition survey was used to assess the health of a 20-year-old spruce plantation, called the Illaun Farm-Forest, providing baseline data, as well as a guide for improving ecosystem health across the site. This report listed seven key recommendations to be completed within a 12-month period. A follow-up survey carried out in July 2022, concluded that four of these were completed, namely, retain a sub-population of existing native and non-native trees, plant a diversity of native broadleaf trees, plant native shrubs (and herbaceous species), and increase deadwood volume. This resulted in an increase of four points on the biodiversity metric. Overall, the score increased from poor (22/39) to moderate (26/39).

This result demonstrates that the short-term conservation objectives of the Illaun Farm-Forest were achieved and made a significant measurable improvement to woodland ecology and biodiversity in a 12-month period. The ecological condition of the forest also improved across three biodiversity indicators, namely, age distribution of trees, number of native tree species, and woodland regeneration. These improvements can all be attributed to planting a diversity of native saplings in the woodland edges and open spaces.

TreePlanting

Significant tangible long-term land use changes occurred as a result of the EIP, and, critically, they happened with the expressed goodwill of the farming community. This was the result of meaningful farmer engagement and was undoubtedly the most significant innovation of the EIP. Currently there is a sense that farmers will not engage with licensed forestry in Ireland. This EIP showed that, with the right approach (adequate information and support are on hand), farmers who were previously uninterested in native woodland creation could be successfully engaged.

Read more on the EU CAP Network Good practice database:

https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/good-practice/cap-fosters-farm-and-forest-habitat-restoration-improved-biodiversity-social_en

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r28UzlMH1wg&t=37s&ab_channel=EUCAPNetwork

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jvo3e2SEceQ&t=5s&ab_channel=EUCAPNetwork

2.6.2 Farming For Nature (including Ambassador Programme)

Our network of Ambassadors - Farming for Nature website

Date: 2018 - ongoing

Funding: National Parks and Wildlife Service: EUR 100 000; Ministry of Agriculture (Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine): EUR 59 000; Life's2good Foundation: EUR 19 000

Project description: The Farming for Nature initiative seeks to support, encourage and inspire farmers who farm, or who wish to farm, in a way that will improve the natural health of the countryside. The vision is that all farmers and landowners of Ireland are informed and supported to increase biodiversity on their land, manage their land/farm in a holistic manner, provide cleaner water, build fertile soils, help mitigate against – and adapt to – climate change, and produce nutrient-dense food that will benefit their community, their economy and their environment.

Central to this initiative is the network of Farming for Nature Ambassadors. These farmers are leading practitioners in sustainable farming, making special efforts to work in favour of biodiversity on their farm while producing high-quality food and running a viable enterprise. The purpose of the Ambassadors is to act as role models and inspire their farming peers to take practical steps towards improving their farm's biodiversity, as farmers are far more receptive to colleagues than to policymakers or scientists.

The aim is that every farmer in Ireland will be able to relate to at least one of the Farming for Nature Ambassadors and admire what they have managed to achieve on their farms and hopefully be encouraged to make similar changes.

For the general public, it is an excellent advertisement that there are farmers who are doing good things for the environment while producing great food.

A networking event for the FFN Ambassadors (Brenda Dunford)

Main activities: The project is building, promoting and supporting an active network of exemplary farmers. These Ambassadors cover all farming systems, land types and counties in Ireland. The Ambassadors engage in a wide range of knowledge-sharing work.

A series of farm walks is organised between May and November every year where other farmers can join the host Ambassador and learn from them. During winter months, Ambassadors host or join in webinars and online Question & Answer sessions, where they talk to other farmers. Through 'The Horse's Mouth' initiative, Ambassadors are paid to visit, advise and encourage other farmers. Networking days, workshops and conferences are held to profile Ambassadors, and in 2024 over 50 Ambassadors contributed content to the Farming for Nature Handbook.

FFN Ambassadors Alan and Alanna Daly in some of the ancient woodland on their farm (Brenda Dunford)

The Ambassador programme includes a well-thought-out system for nominating and pre-assessing candidates, followed by site visits by a judging panel. For each of them, a short film is made where the farmers talk about their farm in their own words. The films are put on a YouTube Channel, with a voting button for each one.

Media activity is carried out demonstrating that there are farmers who are doing great things for nature and the environment and producing good food at the same time. The Ambassadors feature regularly on National and Local media outlets.

Results: Since 2018, a total of 102 Ambassadors have been chosen, representing a wide range of farming systems and natural situations. A European Ambassador Network has been created, with Ambassador programmes established in Austria, Lithuania and Northern Ireland to date.

2.7 Latvia

GrassLIFE (LIFE16 NAT/LV/000262)

GrassLife website

GrassLife on LIFE public database

The work is being continued via Grass LIFE2, which works in different locations building on the innovative approaches and restoration methods designed in GrassLife.

Date: September 2017 – March 2023

Funding: LIFE,
Total budget: EUR 4 374 118.
EU LIFE fund contribution: EUR 3 280 588

Project description: GrassLIFE focused on developing, optimising and improving the conservation status of five EU priority grasslands in Latvia which were in unfavourable and declining conservation status.

These were: xeric and calcareous grasslands; semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates, important orchid sites; species-rich Nardus grasslands, on siliceous substrates; fennoscandian lowland species-rich dry to mesic grasslands; and fennoscandian wooded meadows (habitats 6120*, 6210*, 6230*, 6270* and 6530*).

Main activities: Specific project objectives involved the following activities:

- restoration of the target priority grassland habitats and improvement of their conservation status on 1,320.5ha by applying best-practice and testing pilot and restoration methods;
- establishment of a long-term sustainable management (grazing) system on the restored grassland areas;
- preparation of recommendations for improving their conservation status and grassland connectivity;
- improvements in the economic aspect of sustainable grassland use;
- improvement in knowledge and public awareness about the importance of preservation of priority grasslands in Latvia and the EU.

Grassland and soil experts worked closely with the 12 project partners, farms (including a demonstration farm) and one NGO-managed area. They carried out site inventories to assess restoration needs on each of the sites. A grassland restoration plan was developed for each of the partner farms, including restoration goals, indicators and baselines for the evaluation of restoration success. An evaluation study was produced, identifying the best methods for restoration and recommendations for further management. Economic analyses were also carried out, as well as an economic study focusing on grasslands, biodiversity and business, identifying and promoting business products with high added value.

Results:

1. Restoration measures were applied to 1 391 ha (out of 1 320.5 ha foreseen) of the grassland habitats, 92% of which were EU priority habitats. 1 364 ha (98%) of restored habitats are located in 18 Natura 2000 sites, and 27.3 ha were adjacent to project sites and therefore important to ensure the habitat's connectivity.
2. Long-term sustainable management systems were established on 837 ha of the grassland habitats. Grazing infrastructure was set up on 773 ha, providing significant contribution to the maintenance of the restored grassland habitats. Sustainable management was ensured on about 610 ha, grazed by mobile grazing units.
3. Recommendations for improving the conservation status and grassland connectivity were prepared and submitted to the Nature Conservation Agency. A Proposal for Agri-environmental measures related to the conservation of project target habitats for integration into the 2021- 2027 RDP of Latvia was prepared and submitted to the Ministry of Agriculture.
4. A demonstration farm was established, and 145 different events were held.
5. 127 restoration plans were produced and compiled in 15 farm-level restoration plans. Seven business analyses were carried out, including the budget for a mobile grazing unit. The economic study focusing on grasslands, biodiversity and business, identifying and promoting eight grassland-related business products with high added value, was prepared. Within the framework of the GrassLIFE project, an innovative, comprehensive model of natural grassland connectivity was developed.

The GrassLIFE partnership agreements state that the project results will be maintained for at least 20 years after the project ends. Landowners are responsible for covering the costs of their respective restoration areas. It is assumed that funding via the CAP will be available for ongoing management.

Mobile grazing herd by Kristaps Kalns (Dita Šķēle)

One of the most significant research outcomes was the first grassland connectivity model for Latvia, developed to evaluate the connectivity of Latvian grassland habitats, identify the most critical sites for habitat restoration, and obtain data on the most valuable habitats from a connectivity perspective in areas outside the Natura 2000 network.

During the project the model was used to select the most important sites for habitat restoration with mobile-grazing herds, but also to prepare recommendations for enlarging the Natura 2000 network in Latvia, where most of EU grassland habitats are not sufficiently protected. The methodology for the connectivity model was passed on to two other initiatives:

- the LIFE IP LatViaNature project uses it for developing habitat-specific connectivity models and identifying the most appropriate sites for habitat creation to improve their connectivity;
- the Estonian LIFE Connecting meadows project uses it to develop the model for Estonia.

Meadow Festival by Kaspars Teilāns (Dita Šķēle)

2.8 The Netherlands

Area-oriented cooperation to enhance the management of peat areas and reduce nitrogen deposition in and near nitrogen-sensitive N2000 sites

Samenwerking in veenweidegebieden en Natura 2000-overgangs-gebieden | RVO.nl

Date: 2024 - ongoing

Funding: CAP – EAFRD

Total budget available: Category 1: EUR 1.2 million; Category 2: EUR 55.4 million; Category 3: EUR 160 million

Project description: The Dutch CSP includes a cooperation measure (CSP I.77.7) which is piloting measures for dairy farmers on a number of themes, including the management of peat meadow areas and Natura 2000 transition areas. The application window is now closed.

The intervention funds the set up of partnerships between farmers, the creation of an area management plan and/or the implementation / execution of this plan to:

- reduce ammonia emissions in a nitrogen-sensitive Natura 2000 area or reduce CO2 emissions in a peat meadow area (Category 1 & 2 or 3);
- increase the groundwater level in a peat meadow area and/or keep dairy cattle less intensively (Category 2);
- manage dairy cattle less intensively in order to reduce nitrogen deposition in and around a nitrogen-sensitive Natura 2000 area (Category 3).

Main activities: Category 1: Funding is available for setting up a new partnership and the development of management plans, ensuring that at least 50% of the areas covered by the partnerships are located within a peat meadow area or Natura 2000 transition area. Activities: networking and recruiting participants for the partnership; drawing up a new area plan, if necessary, drawing up a cooperation agreement (in the case of a new partnership); conducting studies, including feasibility studies; project management / project administration.

Category 2&3: Development of the project plan; creating, supervising, implementing and developing business plans; carrying out communication; reporting; purchasing and installing water infiltration systems; purchasing and installing digital groundwater monitoring wells; implementing management measures such as raising the groundwater level; and implementation of the management measures related to farm extensification.

Results: No results yet as implementation is ongoing. In 2024 the following applications were made and contracts issues:

- Category 1: four applications, all of which were given funding and covering 1 179 ha.
- Category 2 (the peat area): 14 applications, of which 9 were granted funding, covering 7 200 ha and involving 193 farmers, 30 of which are organic.
- Category 3 (the Natura 2000 area) 27 applications, of which 13 were granted funding, covering 18 626 ha, involving 168 farmers, of which 91 are organic.

Read more on the EU CAP Network Good practice database:

https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/good-practice/cap-supports-dutch-dairy-farmers-manage-valuable-peatland-meadows-and-natura-2000_en

Peat meadow (Remco Schreuder)

2.9 Portugal

SpongeBoost Project (Azores case study)

SpongeBoost website

Azores partner: SPEA Açores (Portuguese Society for the Study of Birds)

Date: 2024 - 2027

Funding: approximately EUR 1.5 million

European Union: Horizon Europe.

National Funding: from national funds allocated for environmental and agricultural initiatives.

Local Contributions: Additional funding from local stakeholders and community engagement efforts that promote sustainable practices.

Project description: The SpongeBoost project is coordinated by the Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ) and is developed with the active participation of 10 partner institutions from seven countries across Europe. The project is part of the EU mission "Adaptation to Climate Change," which aims to support EU regions, cities, and local authorities in their efforts to build resilience against climate change impacts.

The aim of the Azores case study under the SpongeBoost project is to restore critical peatland ecosystems in the Azores (specifically targeting Sphagnum moss habitats) to enhance biodiversity, water retention, and resilience to climate change (mitigating the effects of droughts and floods), with direct benefits for agriculture. By improving natural water regulation, the project supports both biodiversity and agricultural sustainability. The peatland restoration will be followed by monitoring hydrologic dynamics to assess the impact of the actions undertaken. It is expected that water retention and regulation will be enhanced through ecosystem restoration.

The main objectives are to:

- restore 3 ha of peatland habitats (including two river sections) in Achada stream's headwaters, Graminhais Plateau, to improve their role as natural water reservoirs, ensuring a steady supply of water for agriculture during dry periods and preventing soil erosion during floods;
- support pollinators and other beneficial species (e.g. pest-controlling organisms) through the restoration of native vegetation and improving habitat connectivity;
- improve soil and water quality by enhancing water retention and reducing erosion.
- build climate resilience through the creation of natural water "sponges" to mitigate droughts and floods, and promote sustainable water supplies year-round.

Main activities:

- peatland and waterway restoration, enhancing the natural water retention capacity of these areas, reduce erosion, and create habitat connectivity, benefiting both biodiversity and agricultural productivity;
- reforestation with native species: native trees and shrubs were planted to restore ecosystems, improve soil health, and support pollinators and other species essential for farming;
- nature-based solutions: the project used nature-based solutions, to reduce the risk of floods and droughts affecting agricultural land.

Results:

The field activities started with the control of invasive alien species (IAS), including *Hydrangea macrophylla* and *Gunnera tinctoria*. Hydrological dynamics are monitored using several sensors to assess the peatland's role in retaining water. Nature-based solutions will be installed along the riverbanks to mitigate erosion and on peatland to promote Sphagnum growth and water retention. Replacement of *Cryptomeria japonica* with native species will begin in 2025. The results of the field activities will be documented through hydrological and vegetation monitoring.

Graminhais Peatlands Case Study on São Miguel Island, Azores, Portugal (SPEA)

2.10 Romania

LIFE TransilvaCooperation: Demonstrating a cooperative approach for good management of Natura 2000 grasslands at landscape scale in Transylvania (LIFE19 NAT/RO/000602)

TransilvaCooperation website

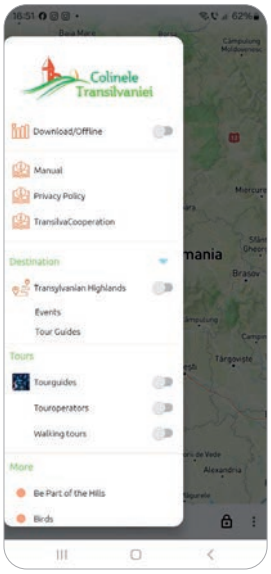
LIFE TransilvaCooperation on LIFE public database

Date: 2020 – 2024

Funding: LIFE. Total budget: EUR 596 275, EU contribution: EUR 299 750

Project description: The project goal was to demonstrate how landscape-scale cooperation could improve the conservation management of Habitats Directive grassland habitats on farmland Natura 2000 sites in Transylvania, and improve the effectiveness of agri-environment measures, halting the loss of species and habitats of European importance.

The following Habitat Directive habitat types were in scope: subcontinental peri-Pannonic scrub (40A0*), semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (6210), sub-Pannonicsteppic grasslands (6240*), and Lowland hay meadows (6510).



Colinele Transilvanieis app (TransilvaCooperation)

Main activities: The project's activities included:

- development of a local management plan for each valley, co-designed with farmers/land managers;
- creation of habitat, species and land use maps for each valley;
- setting up a monitoring methodology for the habitats and carried out annual monitoring;
- arranging courses in biodiversity management of Habitats Directive grasslands for 50 farmers (through local farmer associations / farmer groups);
- establishing a demonstration farm equipped with innovative livestock handling buildings and equipment, grassland management equipment;
- purchasing cattle handling equipment and creating new bore holes to improve water points in each valley, for community use, which will allow better grazing management;
- adapting a smart app for farmers (Haller app) to provide information on farming techniques, how to make nature-friendly farming more profitable, processing and marketing of products, and new ways to increase income at farm and village level by diversification and cooperation. The free app also provides news, information on current problems, and answers to readers' questions;
- developing a smart app - Colinele Transilvaniei - focusing on the project's progress, the area's natural history, and indicator species, also linking ecotourism to nature protection (providing visitors with relevant information on hiking and bike trails, accommodations and places to eat, local producers and connected services). The app will be easily adaptable for other Eco destinations in the country;
- development of business plans for neighbouring farmers that own cattle and/or sheep and intend to produce meat products.

Results: The project co-created local management plans and targets with farmers and set up habitat monitoring to measure progress for the semi-natural grassland and associated landscape features. Eight farmers on about 800 ha in the Angofa valley, and 40-50 farmers on around 1 000 ha in the Viscri Valley are now working together to manage these habitats in cooperation with one another. The project restored 102 ha of hay meadow and 250 ha of pasture, exceeding the project targets. The demonstration farm, courses, infrastructure investments, and farmer app are building knowledge and capacity in grassland management best practices. The farmers are all receiving the HNV payment in the Romanian CAP strategic plan.

Map of intervention area (ADEPT)

2.11 Spain

LIFE IN COMMON LAND - Managing land in common, a sustainable model for conservation and rural development in Special Areas of Conservation (LIFE16 NAT/ES/000707)

LIFE IN COMMON LAND on LIFE public database

Date: 2017 - 2022

Funding: LIFE. Total budget EUR 2 001 469, EU contribution: EUR 1 493 460

Project description: The LIFE IN COMMON LAND project's main objective was to improve the conservation status of three priority habitats listed in Annex I of the Habitats Directive - Atlantic wet heaths, raised bogs and blanket bogs - in the Natura 2000 SAC Serra do Xistral (ES1120015), Galicia.

The traditional livestock farming (cattle and free-roaming ponies) carried out on this site by the common land communities ('Montes Vecinales en Mano Común' – MVMCs) is part of the unique Galician system in which the land is collectively owned, maintaining its ecological value.

Shrub encroachment, mainly by gorse, is an environmental issue when ponies are absent, as gorse is an important part of their diet. Because cattle do not eat gorse, the ponies open up and maintain grassy pasture for the cattle, creating good grazing conditions. At the same time, the ponies are preventing the gorse from smothering the Annex I habitats, notably wet heaths in the lowlands. Scientific surveys have even shown that in these heaths, the highest species diversity and heterogeneity occurs where ponies are present.

Consequently, the LIFE conservation project worked closely with the commoners. Both had an interest in keeping the wild ponies on the land.

Main activities: The project's central purpose was to bring together the common land communities, scientific knowledge and new technologies to develop a management model which supports and enhances the traditional management system.

Satellite, airborne and drone imagery/LiDAR were used to map 11 500 ha of habitats and evaluate their baseline status. Indicators to assess improvement were then formulated, designed to be easily interpreted in the field by both technicians and livestock owners. For instance, the proportions of grass, heather and gorse, which is easy to assess, even by non-experts, is a good proxy to evaluate the conservation status of the wet heath habitat. Since it matches the criteria that local farmers use to gauge the quality of pasturing land, they also have an agronomic interest to use this indicator.

The synergy between livestock and habitats is reflected in the nature restoration actions. Encroachment by scrub compromises habitat quality and the access of cattle and horses to grazing land, so in such areas clearing was done, and reinforcement of the wild pony population was encouraged. Elsewhere, local overgrazing by cattle might damage sensitive areas such as bog wetlands, so these were temporarily fenced. As well as removing scrub and exotic trees, the project managed cattle livestock density, installed stock management infrastructure and restored any damage caused by livestock.

The active collaboration and participation in the project of the 11 MVMCs in the Serra do Xistral was a key factor in its success. To improve the confidence of the livestock farmers in their ability to adopt best conservation practices and incentivise them to help preserve the wet heath and bog habitats, a Results-Based Payments Scheme for Conservation (the first in Galicia) was launched. Using the baseline surveys and the indicators developed by the project, this financial tool gave payments (totalling almost EUR 300 000) to the MVMCs, proportional to improvements achieved in the extent of Annex I habitats and their conservation status.

Results: The conservation status of 235 ha of wet heathlands, 16 ha of raised bogs and 193 ha of blanket bogs was improved in the SAC Serra do Xistral.

Important lessons learned were that the wider context is crucial:

- political: despite the project team's efforts, the Regional Government of Galicia did not integrate the results-based scheme into its Rural Development Plan (RDP), so it has not been continued;
- administrative: many foals are killed by wolves. After an attack, pony carcasses are hard to find, but without a carcass to show, the farmer does not receive a compensation payment. New regulations require all ponies to be microchipped – an extra burden for farmers. Finally, because shrubland is not considered agricultural land, any shrubs, including the clumps left by pony grazing (and which enhance the structural and biological diversity of the heath habitat), were not included in the ELPIS area eligible for CAP direct income support;
- economic: The incentive to keep ponies is weakening: cattle bring better revenue, the market for equine meat is very small and prices are low. Because ponies are so important for land management, the project promoted the maintenance of the wild ponies with minimum intervention, including pony meat consumption by featuring it at local events;
- project methods are transferable: the remote sensing, management modelling and indicator design; the results-based scheme as a benchmark for others; the importance of including local farmer knowledge in the design of the actions (this boosted the self-perception of the MVMCs and involved them actively, instead of merely passively undergoing 'expert knowledge').

Already the lessons from this project are being transferred through a new project, RURALtXA!, with similar aims to LIFE in Common Land. It continues habitat conservation, restoration and extensive grazing (with wild ponies), but in other areas, both in Galicia, and in the Basque Country.

Restoration work focused on eliminating pine trees planted around 65 years ago (Ramon Diaz Varela)

2.12 Sweden

New flowering areas and other small biotopes

Swedish CSP

Updates on Swedish CSP

Date: 2023 – 2027

Funding: CAP – Cooperation measure

A total of SEK 100 million (approximately 10 million euros), allocated to county administrations.

Project description: This CAP intervention has been designed to encourage collaboration between at least two actors to create habitats and increase green infrastructure in simple agricultural landscapes. The aim is that by creating new small biotopes of varying types, landscape heterogeneity will increase and resources such as pollen, nectar, hibernation and nesting areas for a range of farmland species will be created in landscapes which suffer from poor ecological structure and thereby benefit overall farmland biodiversity.

Main activities: The intervention supports up to 100% of project costs, to introduce new flowering areas and small biotopes to simple agricultural landscapes. Only project applications with collaborations of at least two actors are approved. Priority can be given to collaborative projects that aim to create several new flowering areas or other small biotopes over larger areas of land within a cohesive region, or projects that gather several farmers to gain synergies and positive added value for biodiversity within a landscape.

The actors can be authorities, municipalities, farmers and other companies, associations and other organisations.

Results: There has not yet been an evaluation of the intervention (introduced only in 2023).

Grassland with stone walls as landscape features (Sandra Lindström)

3. Additional examples of initiatives to stimulate biodiversity action

Alongside projects and incentives to encourage biodiversity action on farmland, there are a number of examples of other initiatives that seek to encourage biodiversity action via other routes. These include, for example, ways to improve market access for products farmed in a biodiversity-positive way and finding new sources of private funding to encourage action on the ground.

Some of the examples that were shared by TG members are described below.

Two initiatives were identified in the Tarnava Mare area of Romania where Fundatia Adept (a Romanian NGO) has been exploring ways that motivate local farmers to continue their low-intensity management of the land, by making this type of farming system economically viable. The Tarnava Mare district in Romania is characterised by a mosaic of High Nature Value grasslands which have developed over centuries as the result of low-intensity management of the land by hundreds of small farms (average 3 ha). This landscape has come under pressure from the political and economic changes from the 1990s onwards.

The first initiative is **Operation Wallacea: Biodiversity Credits - a new payment source for high nature-value farmlands?** RePLANET is a company that seeks to drive large-scale ecological restoration and protection through private-sector funding. It is testing two kinds of biodiversity credit as a means of transferring money from corporations and investment funds which are keen to invest in nature protection into hands-on conservation on the ground.

1. The 'uplift credit' where there is an improvement of biodiversity;
2. The 'avoidance of loss credit', where the degradation of a pristine habitat is prevented through time.

A series of five impact indicators have been developed under Operation Wallacea that would be used to reflect the national and local conservation objectives for the habitat in question. For the uplift credit, a 1% improvement per hectare for each of the indicators would need to be demonstrated. For the 'avoidance of loss credit' the indicators are measured at the beginning and compared to the same indicators in a degraded version of the habitat. The difference – which is supposed to remain stable or increase over time, not lessen - yields the biodiversity credit unit.

One of the pilot areas is in Romania (Tarnava Mare), an area rich in semi-natural permanent grasslands, a mosaic of hay meadows and pastures, long maintained by small-scale, extensive farming, but under threat for a number of reasons. These include the payment levels, bureaucracy or eligibility criteria associated with CAP payments, overgrazing by large flocks of sheep owned by non-local Romanian investors, and the temptation to rent land out to corporations who plough the land to plant crops. In this context, 'avoidance of loss' biodiversity credits could provide an alternative income to encourage farmers to maintain the species-rich grassland. Under the pilot, being coordinated by Fundatia Adept and RePlanet, 2 000 ha of grassland has been identified where the risk of ploughing is highest and 'avoidance of loss' makes most sense. Baseline surveys of the grasslands will be carried out and 25-year contracts put in place with individual farmers to maintain species-rich grassland. Finally, packages will be defined which can be sold to investors as credits. If the payment is high enough (above the level of the CAP's agri-environment schemes), this should be very attractive, especially because of the long duration. An 'uplift' clause could be included in the contract, so that if the farmers improve the biodiversity as measured by the impact indicators, they get extra payments.

The second initiative focuses on **encouraging small-farmer cooperation to gain market access for nature-friendly produce.** In this initiative, the main focus is on exploring how small-scale farmers could access the market by creating sufficient scale and quality control. One project involved the creation of a Grazing Association in a local village, which then obtained a joint grazing grant which brings 200 000 EUR/year to the 50 farmers grazing livestock. The farmers doubled their selling price by making their milk organically, which they could not have done without a sufficient volume of production and agreeing to a joint certification process. The milk is bought by processors and sold in Romanian cities, where disposable income is increasing and there is growing interest in traditional products. Fundatia ADEPT, supported by the Grazing Association, is now working with the retail chain Carrefour to open a cheese plant which will raise the milk price yet further.

Every cent added to the selling price due to farmers working together has been a strong incentive towards setting up and joining associations. This in turn has increased not only the number of associations, but also community cooperation. The experience of working together toward a common goal has revived local communities, generating new enterprises and initiatives which keep young people from migrating away.

In **France**, a national association 'Paysans de nature' (nature farmers) works at a national and local scale to bring together farmers who care about biodiversity into a network. The association supports business start-ups for farmers who want to manage their farms for nature, while also producing food in a profitable way. The focus is on nature restoration and collaboration between farmers and other stakeholders to forge cross-disciplinary working between researchers, farmers, biodiversity experts and local people, while also disseminating knowledge about the approaches taken in the surrounding area. The aim is to complement national, regional and local protected areas (reserves and parks, sensitive natural areas, etc.) with a network of farms where biodiversity targets are highly ambitious. These farms can act as corridors between protected areas, or as biodiversity producers for neighbouring degraded areas, and they can also increase the perimeter of influence of protected areas when they are co-managed with network farmers. Funding for the Association comes from a range of private foundations.

One example of where this has successfully been done is in the north-western part of the Vendée, where the association has supported the setting up of more than 35 farmers over 15 years, helping improve the populations of breeding waders and the wet meadow habitats of the marshes. From a single farm, the local group (comprising the farmer, the bird protection society (LPO) and a consumer association) has enabled other farmers to set up in business. The area of protected sites has increased from 150 ha in the early 2000s to 1 500 ha managed by farmers in the "Paysans de nature" network today. The land was previously cropland used

for intensive livestock farming and has been transformed into semi-natural grassland, with significantly lower grazing levels (0.4 to 0.8 livestock units per ha), a reduction in mowing, an increase in the area of grassland flooded in spring, and the use of anti-parasitics has been eliminated. As a result, shorebird populations are doing very well in the area, with Europe's only black-tailed godwit population in good health. This species has extended its range, and, in some areas, breeding numbers have increased 12-fold. This was achieved with the help of nature conservation experts and citizens who mobilised additional financing and took part in farm visits to showcase the work of farmers. The strong social links created between the members of the local groups (farmers among themselves, with nature conservation experts and other local citizens) has also enabled farmers to become more connected, feel less isolated and able to promote their work in related social circles.

EU CAP Network *supported by*
CAP Implementation Contact Point
Rue de la Loi 38 (bte 4)
1040 Brussels, Belgium
+32 (0) 2 801 38 07
implementation@eucapnetwork.eu

Funded by
the European Union