

Environmental public goods provision through agriculture

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High Nature Value Farming

The study explored how promoting various traditional agricultural practices and/or products in High Nature Value (HNV) areas aimed at nature protection and biodiversity conservation may lead to sustainable regional development of agriculture and rural areas. HNV farming is viewed as an environmental solution but also as having a broader impact on the economic and social sustainability of agriculture and rural development.

The Bulgarian initiative started in 2008, in a Natura 2000 protected zone which aimed to implement traditional extensive land management practices that preserve and maintain the existing biodiversity and habitats throughout the Besaparski Hills.



Landscapes from Besaparski Hills. Photographs by Y. Kazakova.

The Portuguese initiative focuses on Valuing the Mediterranean Wild Resources across three municipalities - Mértola, Barrancos and Almodôvar - covering several protected areas. It is a 2009 PROVERE project, a collective efficiency strategy to stimulate territorial competitiveness in low density rural areas of Alentejo region, valuing endogenous natural resources, heritage and traditional knowledge for sustainability.



Montado in Mértola, Portugal. Photographs by F. Barroso.

The goal of the French case in Ballons des Vosges is the conservation of agro-pastoral areas and landscape through re-opening/ opening mountainous wastelands which will lead to the revitalization of agriculture and sustainability of the region's rural areas.

Innovation in the HNV study

The innovation in the HNV study combines traditional products and/or extensive farming practices with modern visions for the natural environment, so that HNV areas are preserved and reproduced in their natural form. In addition, the initiatives represent multifunctional agriculture within the diversity of rural areas such as: traditional local food production, tourism activities development, local networks and public-private partnership establishment and regional/local heritage promotion.

The key issue is the implementation of the agro-environmental measures: a policy instrument introducing a top-down approach for the protection of HNV areas, which encouraged bottom-up farming initiatives in the three cases regardless of the differences in their design and impacts on the regional and local level.

Lannion Bay has unsuccessfully implemented many government supported plans to reduce green tides. Since 2011, a proposal has been accepted to move towards grassland fodder systems and to reduce extra-territorial inputs to solve the algae problems, but it has faced a lot of challenges.

In the Mangfall Valley the initiative has proved attractive due to financial incentives but it is also a good alternative to the 'intensify or abandon' dilemma created by the global intensification trend. Since 1992, when the initiative started, organic farming has been mainstream the area. In Imathia, transition is characterised by the strengthening of collaborative action and collective institutions. The initiative addressed an important deficiency of the previous production system: the failure to ensure an acceptable (by market standards) level of pesticide residues.

Reducing environmental impacts

Since the 1970's, the 'green tides' in an environmentally sensitive area, have been a major problem in Lannion Bay, France. There have been significant negative consequences for tourism and the region's image as a result of intensive livestock production and long supply chains.

One case study was an organic farming support programme in the Mangfall Valley (Germany), which gave contracts to farmers providing good quality water. Agricultural production has been facing the challenges and opportunities of less-favoured but scenic areas close to large urban centres. Extensive (and mostly part-time) dairy farmers, had to decide whether to further intensify their farms or abandon agriculture altogether.

In the Imathia region, Greece, Integrated Farming Standards were implemented by large fruit growers' cooperatives. The main aim was to refocus their strategy away from overexploiting their land to produce the largest quantities possible and focus instead on quality. The new objectives have been to gain competitiveness in international markets by producing a high quality product through an environmentally sound process.



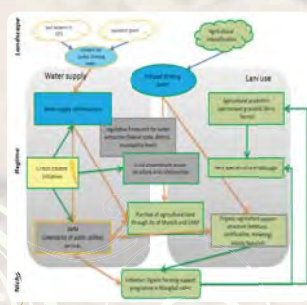
Key lessons learned

- Globally, the main drivers have been increasing concerns about the environmental sustainability of farming land use and practices, especially for a heavily subsidized EU agriculture, and growing consumers' concern about food safety.
- Most of these initiatives were initiated 'top-down', reflecting the importance of the economic and social pressures already exerted on farmers. Hence, the need for an external initiative.
- HNV farming challenges the trend/aspiration for modern, competitive and high-profit agriculture in a globalized world, and in the context of potential food insecurity.
- The involvement of various actors and stakeholders from both local and regional levels embedded in formal, informal organizations and/or other bodies and networks, especially early adoption of the initiatives, has been a key element of the successful transition.
- Young farmers and new entrants are important actors in the implementation of these initiatives. They are more attracted to innovative proposals, adaptive to changes and are often more willing to undertake new initiatives and risks.
- To strengthen and make farming sustainable in the long run, implementation and coordination of the policies and measures need to be more consistent at all levels. The state institutions, as promoters of the EU policy, and NGOs, are important for raising awareness, supplying information, knowledge and services of how to carry out for sustainable farming and why it is necessary to be implemented, so it is not perceived as a restrictive regime, especially in protected areas.

For further information see: www.farmpath.eu



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