



CASE STUDIES - ESPC Target 4

At least 10% of each of the world's ecological regions effectively conserved.

'High Nature Value Farmland' report

GSPC Target 4 (ESPC targets 1.7, 2.12-2.19)

Project coordinators

EIONET

Partner organisations

Funding mechanisms



Otztal Valley (Austria) by Tom Kelly and Carole Duh. Austrian landscapes by Matt Hintsa and Zakopane (Poland) by closelyobserved.com (Flickr photo sharing)

Description

Traditional agricultural systems have shaped the European landscape and created habitats for a wide range of species, many of which are of particular conservation concern. High nature value farmland comprises hot spots of biodiversity in rural areas and is usually characterised by extensive farming practices. Its conservation value is acknowledged in several EU policy documents such as the EU Regulation on rural development (EC 1257/1999). Distribution and conservation status of high nature value farmland, however, has not yet been assessed at the pan-European level.

In their Kyiv Resolution on Biodiversity, the European environment ministers agreed to complete the identification of all high nature value farmland areas by 2006 and committed themselves to support their economic and ecological viability. The target is to cover 'a substantial proportion' of such areas with rural development and agri-environment measures by 2008. A high nature value farmland indicator is currently under preparation within the framework of IRENA1. This joint report highlights the preliminary results of this indicator and analyses the current targeting of high nature value farmland by policy measures.

According to preliminary estimates, roughly 15–25 % of the European countryside qualifies as high nature value farmland. The largest areas are found in eastern and southern Europe. They consist of habitats such as semi-natural grasslands, *dehesas*, *montados* and steppe areas. High nature value farmland is also relatively abundant in mountainous regions. Examples are grazed uplands in the

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High Nature Value Farmland

Description (II)

United Kingdom and alpine pastures and meadows. Agriculture in these areas is usually extensive and vulnerable to change.

High nature value farmland areas are generally under severe pressure due to a vulnerable economy and depopulation. Predominant agricultural trends are intensification on the one hand and land abandonment on the other. Both are considered detrimental to biodiversity. Information exists on the exact conservation status of high nature value farmland areas, but the overall population trends of characteristic species, such as the great bustard *Otis tarda*, black grouse *Tetrao tetrix* and corncrake *Crex crex* are negative.

Policy responses in the EU include site protection under the habitats and bird directives and environment measures under the common agricultural policy. The Natura 2000 sites, as proposed by the Member States, cover less than one third of high nature value farmland area. Their conservation status is again largely unknown. A monitoring system is under development but not yet operational.

Conservation of high nature value farmland areas relies to a large extent on measures under the so-called 'second pillar' of the common agricultural policy, notably support to less favoured areas and agri-environment schemes. Less favoured areas overlap largely with the high nature value farmland areas, but there is no relation between actual expenditure in the different countries and their share of high nature value farmland. Agri-environment schemes do not appear to be specifically targeted at high nature value farmland either. In countries with a high share of high nature value farmland, especially in southern Europe, agri-environment expenditure is relatively low.

Date of case study

Citations and Publications

1. IRENA: Indicator reporting on the integration of environmental concerns into agriculture policy. Joint project between DG Agriculture, DG JRC, DG Environment, Eurostat and EEA, operationalising the agri-environment indicators mentioned in COM(2000)20 and COM(2001)144.3

'High nature value farmland: Characteristics, trends and policy challenges' European Environmental Agency EEA. Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. Luxembourg. 2004 (23 pp). ISBN 92-9167-664-0

Contacts

Website http://reports.eea.europa.eu/report_2004_1/en/EEA_UNEP_Agriculture_web.pdf

