

CAP Greening: A Step Backwards or Forwards for Biodiversity?

Summary:

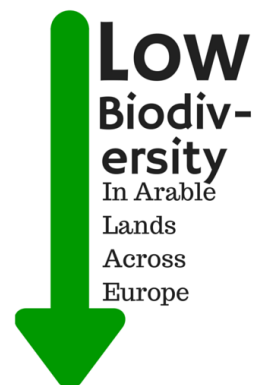
Two new EEB-commissioned studies have highlighted the alarming state of nature on Europe's arable farms and the likelihood that Member States' lack of ambition when putting new Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) greening measures in place will only further exacerbate the problem.

A first study, from the Institut für Agrarökologie und Biodiversität (IFAB), **investigated the state of biodiversity on arable land in ten countries¹ all over Europe** – a unique piece of research which has never been done before. The second piece of research, from the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP), **analysed the flexibility afforded to Member States to put greening measures in place to find out what impact this has had on their environmental ambition.**

The outcomes of both studies are striking. The state of biodiversity on arable land across Europe is very poor, even in regions where it was expected to be high. Yet despite this grave picture of nature on Europe's farmland, Member States are frequently using the flexibility afforded to them to implement CAP greening measures to pick the least environmentally-beneficial elements among the options available.

First CAP greening was diluted at the EU level and now, as this research highlights, its potential is being further watered down by the implementation choices made by Member States and then farmers – as we see already happening in Germany².

The studies only confirm NGOs' worst fears that CAP greening is failing for the environment, for biodiversity, and this is a threat to our long-term food security.



Background:

After lengthy negotiations, implementation of the new CAP began on 1 January 2015. While the original idea behind the reform was to ensure public money was being used to pay for public goods (clean water, healthy soils, and biodiversity), as political negotiations got underway this intention rapidly disappeared, leaving weak basic regulations which Member States are not even using to their full environmental potential. The result is a policy which is only green in name and fails to bring much-needed sustainability to our fields.

Shortly after the new CAP was adopted, Science magazine³ published a provocative article which stated that the new policy would fail to protect biodiversity if Member States did not use the flexibility afforded to them in the right way. As every national government is free to implement greening measures as they see fit, whether the CAP

¹ (FR, CZ, HU, IT, PL, DE, RO, ES, NL, UK)

² First data for certain regions in Germany analyzed here: <https://slakner.wordpress.com/2015/10/07/greening-and-ecological-focus-area-first-data-on-decision-in-germany/>

³ [http://mta.hu/data/cikk/13/44/58/cikk_134458/peer-et_al_2014_Science_06-06-14_\(2\).pdf](http://mta.hu/data/cikk/13/44/58/cikk_134458/peer-et_al_2014_Science_06-06-14_(2).pdf)

delivers for the environment lies first in Member States' and finally in farmers' hands.

As almost 50% of EU land is used for agriculture, the CAP has a crucial role to play in helping achieve the EU Biodiversity Strategy's target of halting biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystem services in the EU by 2020, and restoring them where possible.

Unfortunately, recently-published reports show that the situation is far from rosy: the European Environment Agency's State and Outlook 2015 report⁴ revealed that agricultural ecosystems remain under threat, and the EU Biodiversity Strategy's Mid-term review pointed to a lack of progress on improving the conservation status of species and habitats that depend on or are affected by agriculture.

Is the CAP contributing to protecting the natural resources farming relies upon or is CAP money (almost 40% of the EU budget) being used in the wrong way?

To inform this debate and look into Member States' greening choices, the EEB commissioned the Institut für Agrarökologie und Biodiversität (IFAB) to **investigate the state of biodiversity in arable areas** and the Institute for European Environmental Policy (IEEP) to look into nine Member States' **choices for greening implementation and their potential impacts on the environment**.

Research Findings – In Detail:

Landscapes infrastructure and sustainable agriculture (IFAB)

Agricultural landscapes in Europe are incredibly diverse and include many different types of regions and land-use. The extent to which land-use is nature-friendly or not varies considerably between regions.

Member States in Study	
Czech Republic	France
Germany	Hungary
Italy	Poland
Romania	Spain
The Netherlands	The United Kingdom

The IFAB study developed and implemented a method to measure the nature value of different agricultural landscapes in Europe through standardised field-level surveys using a monitoring approach which assesses biodiversity and landscape structure/quality at the same time. The study was carried out in 10 Member States (Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, The Netherlands, and the United Kingdom) across 39 regions ranging from 500 to 1000 km² in size. From May to July 2014, 22 surveyors investigated about 800 plots, each measuring 25 ha.

This is the first time that detailed and comparable data on the extent and quality of landscape infrastructure (i.e. both landscape elements and extensively-used parts of the landscape) and the sustainability of land use with respect to biodiversity and ecologically sensitive areas has been collected on this scale. **A key aim of the study was to set baselines so that comparisons could be made following roll-out of the greening measures.** The methodology used in this study (the 'LISA approach') proved to be incredibly successful at gathering a huge amount of interesting and comparable data within a short time-frame across Europe.

⁴ <http://www.eea.europa.eu/soer>

Key Findings:



**of all investigated
arable landscapes
had low levels of
biodiversity**

- > An average of only 0.9 key species was found in all arable regions.
- > There is a severe lack of plant diversity in nearly all arable fields due to **intense levels of spraying and fertiliser use**. Hardly any plants are present in many fields other than the crop species planted.
- > The **pollination potential** of arable fields is **extremely low**.
- > Also in intensive grassland regions, the **number of potential key (flowering) species and of parcels with high flowering density was low or very low**. While in many cases these regions are managed at least as intensively as arable landscapes, pollination and other ecosystem services are not delivered to a considerable extent. However, in comparison to arable land, there are a few grassland regions with a better biodiversity situation of higher nature value.
- > A number of **bad land-use practices** and examples which should not occur any more (e.g. spraying in ditches and hedges, soil erosion, etc.) was also found and photographed for future reference.

Green direct payments: implementation choices of nine Member States and their environmental implications (IEEP)

Member States in Study		
France	Hungary	Italy
Poland	Romania	Spain
Netherlands	United Kingdom	Germany

The IEEP study looked at how nine Member States' (France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Germany) have implemented the three main CAP greening measures: crop diversification; the maintenance of permanent grassland; and ecological focus areas (EFAs). The report assessed the potential these decisions have for delivering improved environmental management on farmland. It also used as much information on cross compliance and rural development as was in the public domain at the time of drafting to complement the assessment of the potential environmental impacts.

Information was gathered via questionnaires to Member State experts during winter 2014 and spring 2015. This was supplemented by data made publicly available by DG Agriculture on its website and literature on the potential environmental implications of the greening measures.

While in light of the poor and rather concerning state of biodiversity on the ground presented in the IFAB study, one would expect that the flexibility given to the Member States for implementing the greening measures would be used to seek to reverse those trends, in reality the opposite appears to be the case.

Key Findings:

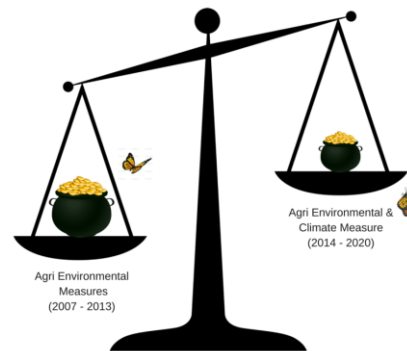
> The options available did not appear to have been used to create a distinctive overall increase in environmental ambition. In the 9 MS analyzed, the trend has been to **offer farmers maximum flexibility** of the options they can use to meet their greening obligations.

> This risks the majority of farmers being able to meet the requirements without having to make any major changes.

> In many cases **the changes required** on farms to implement EFAs are **likely to be minimal**; often crop production and the use of chemical inputs on EFA land is permitted (e.g. permitting N fertiliser and pesticide spraying on N-fixing crops and catch crops, permitting production on strips along forest edges etc.) or landscape features count that are already protected under cross-compliance.

> For the protection of permanent pasture, it is possible that some additional environmental benefits could be achieved, especially through the designation of environmentally sensitive permanent grassland where ploughing is not permitted, but further analysis on the impact in practice will need to be made in this regard.

> Despite the rhetoric that the introduction of greening under Pillar 1 would free up resources to do more for the environment under the agri-environment-climate measure under rural development policy, initial figures suggest that **the budget for this measure** has **decreased significantly** in a number of Member States.



EEB and BirdLife reaction:

This package of new research adds to the mounting body of evidence which highlights the alarming state of our natural resources. And yet despite this dire state of affairs, the research also shows that greening is nothing more than a buzzword that fails to make an impact in our farmed environment. Member States are almost always choosing the worst option for the environment. While some argue that the onus is now on farmers to implement greening on the ground, given the choices made by Member States and the evidence coming through from countries like Germany it is very unlikely that greening will see the light of day on our farms.

These findings show that CAP reform and its greening is nothing more than a smokescreen which hides an unpleasant picture of a policy which remains highly inefficient at delivering on our environmental goals and unable to fulfil one of its main overarching objectives, namely the sustainable management of natural resources.

EEB and BirdLife recommendations for the European Commission:

> The European Commission must **gather comparable data** on the state of Europe's farmland so it can accurately assess whether these 'greening measures' have been effective or not. The European Commission must establish a **sound monitoring system** that takes not just the size of area into account, but also the quality of the measures when compared with a baseline scenario to find out if they have a scientifically-proven environmental benefit – together with an on the ground assessment of the state of biodiversity and ecosystems in our fields.

> The Commission must not **look at the 2017 EFAs' revision** strictly from a quantity perspective⁵ but from a **qualitative perspective too**. Indeed, what is the point of moving from 5% to 7% if all these areas are cultivated and spread with biodiversity-harming pesticides like the rest of the countryside around it?

> The European Commission must clearly demonstrate CAP is value for money by carrying out a proper and **full assessment**. Is it contributing to protecting the natural resources farming relies on or is it being used in the wrong way?

> The European Commission must come up with a **sustainable policy for our farmed environment which is not just green on paper**. For now all evidence suggests that the greening exercise was a complicated way to secure the money for ever more problematic practices that our countryside can no longer afford. A drastic change will be needed as a response to this failure.

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⁵ The Commission will need to analyse in a report by March 2017 whether the EFA measure should be enlarged from 5 to 7%.