

## State of the Environment

Farming relies on natural resources and the environment, yet as a sector it remains one of the main sectors impacting our environment and one of the main threats to biodiversity in the EU – this is an assessment made by the Member States themselves when reporting to the European Commission under the Birds and Habitats Directives (EU’s nature legislation)<sup>1</sup>. This is an assessment made by the Member States themselves when reporting to the European Commission under the Birds and Habitats Directives (EU’s nature legislation) .

According to the European Environment Agency’s State of the Environment Report<sup>2</sup>, over 80% of protected extensive grasslands in Natura 2000 sites are in an unfavourable condition. Europe is not on the right track to achieve its goal of preventing biodiversity loss by 2020 and its natural capital is not being conserved and protected, nor are the goals of the 7th Environment Action Programme being met. 60% of protected species and 77% of habitat types have an unfavourable conservation status and there has been a 57% decrease in farmland birds since 1980<sup>3</sup>. The agricultural sector is the primary source of diffuse pollution which significantly affects 90% of river basin districts, 50% of surface water bodies, and 33% of groundwater bodies throughout the EU<sup>4</sup>. Instead of selecting the most appropriate measures to achieve good water status (real adaptation and changes in farming practices that could secure a sustainable future), many Member States opted to see how the existing measures would meet the Water Framework Directive’s environmental objectives (de facto opting for business as usual).

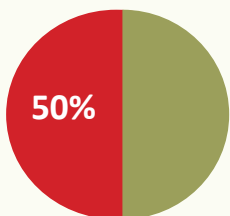
The Institut für Agrarökologie und Biodiversität (IFAB)<sup>5</sup> developed and implemented a method to measure the nature value of different agricultural landscapes in Europe through standardised field-level surveys using a monitoring approach which assesses biodiversity and landscape structure/quality 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). The results are striking: 95% of all investigated arable landscapes had low levels of biodiversity even in regions where it was expected to be high.



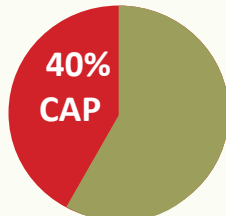
## The Common Agricultural Policy

In Europe, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has played a major role in the development of a socially and environmentally-harmful model of farming. At the outset, this policy was designed to feed Europeans after the Second World War but it quickly turned into a driver for unsustainable intensification of the farming sector. Today it is essentially a subsidies mechanism which hands out 53 billion Euros of European taxpayers’ money every year - almost 40% of the EU budget<sup>6</sup>. Nearly 70% of farm payments still go into the pockets of just 20% of farmers<sup>7</sup>, mostly big cereal farmers.

Total EU land



Total EU budget



As almost 50% of EU land is used for agriculture and almost 40% of the EU budget is used for agriculture, the CAP has a crucial role to play in helping achieve environmental objectives<sup>8</sup> and in particular 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.

As the agricultural sector is also the primary source of diffuse pollution, the CAP clearly should play a role in the sustainable management of water resources.

## Post 2013 Reform

The 2013 CAP reform was meant to make the policy greener and ensure that measures securing the sustainable management of natural resources would receive public money, but unfortunately attempts at real reform were thwarted by the co-decision process that ended up securing business as usual instead of real changes in our fields. We are currently left with a watered-down CAP that is green on paper, but fails to deliver in reality.

In June 2014, Science magazine published an article which stated that EU agricultural reform would fail for biodiversity if Member States did not make the right choices on implementation<sup>9</sup>. Unfortunately, all the follow-up studies on CAP implementation showed that Member States had indeed not been ambitious when it came to implementation<sup>10</sup>.

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), Member States used the flexibility that was afforded to them to systemically choose the least-environmentally ambitious measures instead of securing a sustainable management of natural resources.



## Member States implementation of greening: Focus on Pillar 1

The Institute for European Environment Policy (IEEP)<sup>11</sup> investigated the choices of nine Member States (France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, Spain, The Netherlands and The UK) and the result is striking, the options available did not appear to have been used to create a distinctive overall increase in environmental ambition, on the contrary:

> In the 9 MS analysed, the trend has been to offer farmers maximum flexibility of the options that they can use to meet their greening obligations. This means there is a risk that the majority of farmers will meet the requirements without having to make any major changes.

> In many cases the changes required on farms to implement Ecological Focus Areas (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.) – this as a result makes that measure ecological in name only.

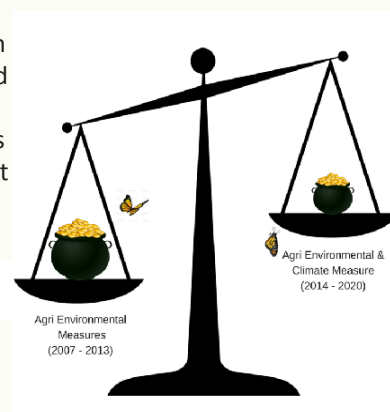


## Truth behind the numbers: Focus on Pillar 2

The EEB and BirdLife Europe produced a set of factsheets<sup>12</sup> for the EU28 and for 19 regions and Member States to find out what EU Rural Development actually means for the environment, specifically for biodiversity. The factsheets analyse how public money is really spent, and what hides behind the official EC and national figures.

The analysis disputes claims by the European Commission that the whole CAP is greener than ever and that Pillar 1 greening has helped raise the level of ambition in Pillar 2. The overall CAP was not made more ambitious through greening, on the contrary we see a one billion Euro decrease in spending for Agri-Environment measures, including organic farming, between the previous and current period at the EU level.

The factsheets also show that the environmental quality of some of these measures is very poor, and in several cases is not properly analysed. Out of the 19 countries and regions analysed, 14 have decreased their spending on environmental measures, and the quality of the measures was overstated in 79% of the cases analysed. The factsheets also revealed that almost 40% of the budget assigned to ecosystems is going to Area of Natural Constraints (ANC) – a measure without clear environmental criteria, and that none of the countries analysed had adequately considered Natura 2000 needs.



## Take Away Message

All this evidence confirms that we are going in the wrong direction when it comes to environmental delivery of the CAP as a whole, and environmental integration in particular. Greening in Pillar 1 has become anything but green and in Pillar 2 not enough money has been allocated for targeted schemes intended to halt more biodiversity loss.

The final step, meaning the implementation of the new policy by the farmers themselves, will tell us whether any hint of green will be left in the policy but early evidence already suggests that choices at farm level are also going in the wrong direction. In Germany, for example, farmers preferred to use options such as catch crops, nitrogen – fixing crops, and fallow land because they offer cost-advantages compared to options that would benefit biodiversity such as landscape elements and buffer strips<sup>14</sup>.

Not only did the policy lose its green colour all the way through the political negotiations, now the worrying warning from Science Magazine is turning into a sad reality: EU agricultural reform is indeed set to fail on biodiversity - and on the environment as a whole.

## For More Information:

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- [1 The State of Nature in the European Union](#)
- [2 EEA State of Environment Report](#)
- [3 Between 1980 and 2013 there is a 57% decrease in common farmland birds in the European Union](#)
- [4 Report: The Water Framework Directive and the Floods Directive: Actions towards the 'good status' of EU water and to reduce flood risks](#)
- [5 Institut für Agrarökologie und Biodiversität](#)
- [6 Why the CAP sits in the budget heading under the title: Sustainable Growth: Natural Resources.](#)
- [7 Study: Implementation of the first pillar of the CAP 2014 - 2020 in the EU Member States](#)
- [8 Treaty obliges integration of environment into CAP](#)
- [9 Science Magazine "EU agricultural reform fails on biodiversity"](#)
- [10 Policy Brief on IEEP Study](#)
- [11 Institute for European Environmental Policy](#)
- [12 BirdLife/ EEB EU Factsheets](#)
- [13 EEB Factsheets Press Release](#)
- [14 Goettingen University 1/ 2](#)