



EKLIPSE

Knowledge & Learning Mechanism
on Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services

Developing a mechanism
for supporting better
decisions on our
environment
based on the best
available knowledge.

Press Release: “Improving uptake of biodiversity-friendly farm subsidies”

The European Union has high ambitions for the conservation of farmland biodiversity. However European farm subsidies are currently paid to maintain ‘business as usual’ farming practices that do little to improve levels of biodiversity, states a new report from a group of European experts. To achieve its objective of supporting farmland biodiversity, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) needs to genuinely encourage the adoption of environmentally-friendly practices by Europe’s farmers. While this is likely to require stricter rules, the report suggests that **building on farmers’ own motivations to improve environmental conditions would have enormous benefits**. Efforts should focus on increasing the transparency, efficiency and social acceptability of ‘green’ farming measures subsidised through the CAP.

The expert group, convened by the European project EKLIPSE, explored several ways in which the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) could be made more effective in halting biodiversity loss, particularly through the implementation of effective biodiversity measures by European farmers. Through literature reviews and interviews in 7 Member States (Czechia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Spain, Sweden), the group analyzed the factors influencing farmer uptake of biodiversity measures, focusing both on the new “greening” policy instrument from the CAP 2014-2020 (the Ecological Focus Areas¹), as well as other conservation incentives, such as agri-environmental measures.

Their findings showed that **the most beneficial conservation measures are only rarely implemented, such as agroforestry, buffer strips, landscape elements (e.g. trees, hedges) and**

allowing land to lie fallow. The most commonly-applied measures - catch crops, green cover or nitrogen-fixing crops - have far fewer proven benefits for biodiversity. Uptake of these less beneficial measures is attractive to the farmers because they can be implemented with little or no change to already-ongoing farm management. In fact, there are often no associated management requirements (for example to limit fertiliser and pesticide use, or extend cropping/cutting periods), effectively allowing farmers to receive extra subsidies for work they are already doing.

The report suggests that the potential for the CAP to deliver substantial benefits for biodiversity as part of the initial proposal for the 2014-2020 CAP regulations was weakened during the EU level negotiation process prior to 2014, and was further watered down during implementation processes in each country. However, the EKLIPSE expert group’s research shows that **the adoption of conservation measures is higher where farmers have more knowledge and experience of their available options, and where they have strong social connections to other farmers and high levels of trust in government institutions**. More work is needed to understand the attitudes of farmers in different parts of Europe, and how those who are reluctant to change their farming practices can be won over. Focusing on these issues would allow subsidies to be tailored to their local contexts, potentially resulting in far greater adoption of green farming across Europe.

More information on the processes and the EKLIPSE project funded by the EU in H2020 is available at www.eclipse-mechanism.eu

More specific information on the report can be found at the dedicated subpage:

http://www.eclipse-mechanism.eu/CAP_activities

We are happy to receive your feedback and comments on these key findings. Please send them via email to secretariat@eclipse-mechanism.eu

¹ Ecological Focus Areas (EFA): One of the three “Greening” measures that condition 30% of Direct Payments to environmental requirements. Farmers with more than 15 ha of farmland have to dedicate 5% of arable land to these areas beneficial for biodiversity