



EDITORIAL

Not always straight ahead

How many times in agricultural policy have we thought we are at a crossroads, only to find that a major CAP reform brought barely perceptible changes to an otherwise straight policy line, rather than a sharp turn? Those of you who are as impatient as me will say 'too many'. But - just maybe - not for much longer.

The last reform of the CAP, broadly welcomed by environmental groups, has started a change of direction. Although important, this reform has been credited with perhaps too much in the way of providing policy solutions to Europe's rural challenges and the pressure for further reform is gathering momentum again. This time, change is being demanded by wider society and political pressures. The farming budget is close to the hungry jaws of ministerial delegations, eager to reduce the cost of running common policies, determined to amend the slicing of the EU's money cake, and questioning if the fattest slice should still go to farming. Financial support is being threatened by the WTO, ready to challenge the legality of the green box; scrutinised by consumers and taxpayers concerned that public money is still channelled to support mainly intensive farmers; chased by development NGOs wielding hard evidence of how EU intensive production impacts the developing world; and of course by us, the environmental movement, witnessing declines of Europe's biodiversity and farmland bird populations.

The CAP's future is not straight on. We are approaching a **T** junction.

Wildlife, landscapes and rural communities are the cornerstones of Europe's rural identity. Their wellbeing and maintenance are core to public interest. They are in fact public goods delivered as by-products, not as a prime objective, of the CAP. The absence of a defined marketplace for them keeps their continued existence in the balance. The CAP should recognise and create such market and "buy" these goods on our behalf. To do this we need a much bigger budget for rural development, to reflect the true needs of the countryside, to provide a range of options for

farmers and the rural community, with clear targets for delivery. The money is there already, in the "untouchable" Pillar I. We need to move it to Pillar II, away from the straight line of direct payments with no clear *raison d'être*. Otherwise, it won't be long before CAP funds are eroded altogether by pressure on the EU budget.

At the T junction we can choose a new direction, where public payments are used to deliver public benefits and where farmers' incomes and wildlife will have a more secure future. Or we could choose a future of declining direct payments, to prop up a lucky few; a system that will be ever more exposed to criticism, fail to attract support and finally be cut.

The loss of wildlife and wild birds in Europe is the biggest negative equity attached to 60+ years of public investment in farming policies. The commitment to reverse this trend by 2010 needs explicit support through policy investments in sustainable land use. Without it, our environmental debt will keep growing.

BirdLife's new *Farming for Life Newsletter* explores the links between agriculture and the environment, discusses policy options and identifies solutions that work for both farmers and biodiversity. To take a turn at the junction, the choice must be informed, because so much of Europe's heritage depends on it.

Happy reading. Happy turning.



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<i>New hopes for further reform of the CAP?</i>	2
<i>A sweeter future for nature: Sugar reform</i>	2
<i>Bioenergy: a promise in need of safeguards</i>	2
<i>The Black-tailed Godwit project in the Netherlands – a successful example of an agri-environment scheme</i>	3
<i>Rural Development Implementing Regulation: an opportunity not to be missed</i>	3
<i>Diary dates</i>	3

FARMING FOR LIFE *NEWSLETTER*

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New hopes for further reform of the CAP?

The future financing of the European Union was thrust into the spotlight after discussions on the EU's budgetary framework 2007-2013 at the Summit in June ended in deadlock. The UK will now take forward negotiations on the EU budget during its Presidency with the hope of securing a political agreement at the European Council in December.

Pressure to squeeze the EU's budget has come from the six biggest net contributors: Germany, Austria, France, The Netherlands, Sweden and the UK. But Member States cannot agree where savings should be made. Among the most contentious issues are spending on the CAP and the UK's annual rebate. Both provoked sharp disagreement between Member States at the European Council in

June, with the UK insisting that it would only agree to review its EUR 4.5 bn annual rebate if other countries gave in to a fundamental review of CAP expenditure.

Such an approach is controversial as in October 2002 European leaders signed up to a deal which fixed farm spending at around one third of the EU's budget until 2013. While the UK, Sweden and the Netherlands have expressed support for re-opening this agreement, other Member States, particularly France and Germany, are adamantly opposed to cutting agricultural subsidies.

Other budget lines, such as the rural development programme, which helps boost rural economies and fund environmentally friendly farming schemes, have instead come under fire.

Environmentalists were dismayed to note that the compromise proposals by the Luxembourg Presidency in May and June envisaged cutting this budget line by around one fifth compared to the Commission's proposals.

BirdLife's Victoria Phillips said: "Cuts to the rural development budget would undo many of the recent agricultural reforms, which sought to bring forward a more environmentally- sustainable CAP. Instead of slashing money for rural development, European leaders should take a strategic approach and transfer funds from the CAP market expenditure (Pillar I) to increase funding for Rural Development (Pillar II)".

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A sweeter future for nature: Sugar reform

While the deadlock over the Financial Perspective has forced some serious self reflection within Europe as to what the EU should be spending its money on, debate over sugar reform has continued through the summer. The current sugar regime mounts up to an annual cost of approximately EUR 1.6 bn each year, only a little less than the yearly spend on agri-environment schemes.

BirdLife feels that it is time for Member States to apply the same level of radical introspection to the sugar regime as has been applied to the financial perspectives. The Commission's reform proposal is a bold one: ending export subsidies, reducing production through a voluntary scheme,

and bringing support into the Single Farm Payment (SFP) scheme.

These measures will result in an annual spend of EUR 1.6 bn on direct payments to those who grew sugar in 2000-2005, attached to nothing but the most basic environmental standards. Depending on Member State decisions, this could result in some vastly inflated SFPs. France, for example, allocates its payments on a historic basis and putting the entirety of its share of the sugar budget on direct support will result in an estimated payment of around EUR 700/ha – approximately twice the average SFP for other arable crops. EU citizens value the environment very highly. In a recent Eurobarometer report they

placed protecting the environment third in a list of desired objectives for the CAP. Yet, it doesn't feature in the sugar reform debate. BirdLife is calling on Ministers to cap direct payments for sugar so that it is similar to that paid on other arable farmland. Leftover funds should then be used to support positive environmental management of sugar where it is possible – in the EU and in the developing countries with which we have sugar trade agreements – and to help farmers diversify into alternative sustainable land management where it is not possible.

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Bioenergy: a promise in need of safeguards

Climate change is looming ever larger as the world's number one environmental crisis. Heading off this crisis will require concerted action from all sectors, but agriculture in particular has been identified as having an important role to play. A joint Agriculture and Environment Informal Council was held on September 11th to discuss Agriculture and Climate change.

One of the main issues on the table has been the role Bioenergy can play in replacing fossil fuels. Biofuels and biomass derived from crops, agriculture residues and forestry and municipal waste is a promising source of renewable energy and the Commission is currently working on a Biomass Action Plan to promote their exploitation.

Bioenergy has the potential to make a real contribution to the renewable energy mix which Europe must adopt to reduce global warming. However, to realise this contribution it must be produced sustainably - resulting in real carbon saving and avoiding negative impacts on biodiversity and the wider environment. If environmental safeguards are not built into the system, the spread of energy crops could damage biodiversity through the replacement of high nature value farmland or natural habitats with intensive cultivation. Production subsidies driven biofuels could even miss the emissions reduction aim, if emissions from cultivation, production and transport are not correctly factored in.

To guarantee real environmental benefits a

system of accreditation for bioenergy, which would measure its carbon balance and ensure its production does not result in other negative environmental impacts, is urgently needed. To maximise potential biomass resources national Governments and the EU must take a strategic approach to ensure resources are exploited sustainably and contribute to other policy goals such as the preservation of biodiversity and the Water Framework Directive. Finally, more research is needed to identify the most suitable bioenergy sources, management, processing techniques and end uses.

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Case study: The Black-tailed Godwit project in the Netherlands – a successful example of an agri-environment scheme

A large part of the world population of Black-tailed Godwit breeds in Dutch grasslands but the breeding numbers have dropped by 50% in the last 10 to 15 years. The project 'The Netherlands - country of the Black-tailed Godwit' was run between 2003 and 2005 by Vogelbescherming Nederland (BirdLife NL) and 2 other organisations with financial support from the national lottery. Its aim was to develop pilot agri-environmental measures capable of reversing the decline of the Black-tailed Godwit.

The project involved more than 50 model farms with Godwit-friendly grassland management (1500 ha) as well as nature reserves. The pilot farms stimulated interest from other farmers, and raised public support, provided knowledge and demonstrated best practice to policy makers. The solution found was 'mosaic management' where strips of grass or entire parcels of grassland are mown later than the rest (in May and June) so the Black-tailed Godwits can breed and the chicks can get a chance to become fledglings without being disturbed by the silage cutting. Breeding success in areas with and without mosaic man-

agement is being investigated. Results will be presented at the end of 2005.

The method used is innovative because the distribution and density of the Black-tailed Godwit is the basis for the mosaic-management plans in the selected areas. Another innovation is the flexibility of the management agreements. Farmers can shift from parcel to parcel on a yearly basis, following the distribution and density of the Black-tailed Godwits.



Black-tailed Godwit by Chris Gomersall

The Dutch Ministry of Agriculture is working to introduce the mosaic management model into the next generation of agri-environmental schemes so that it can be made available to farmers in the most important breeding areas of the Black-tailed

Godwit. With a cost of just EUR 94/ha more than the existing agri-environment schemes, plus EUR 10/ha for monitoring, and 4500 ha already successfully managed under the experimental project (1500 ha from 2003, plus 3000 ha extra in 2005), this approach seems to hold the key for the future of Godwits and other meadow birds. Its widespread implementation could achieve, over a period of 10 years, the objective of a sustainable population of 50,000 breeding pairs of Black tailed godwit in the Netherlands.

Such an example of innovative, science-based approach to agri-environment holds the promise of turning European farmers into active actors in the conservation of our common natural heritage. BirdLife is actively working to ensure that the opportunity offered by the new 2007-2013 Rural Development policy is not missed.

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Rural Development Implementing Regulation: an opportunity for European forests not to be missed

The Implementing Regulation for the new Rural Development (RD) regulation will soon present the operational details of many new important articles. This is the case for example of the newly instituted forest-environment payments. It is still unclear what these payments could cover and what the baseline for payment will be.

BirdLife believes that forest-environment schemes should have a particular focus on biodiversity conservation and encourage positive management of forests in Natura 2000 sites. This would help reverse the significant decline of woodland species across the EU recorded in the last 20 years.

A 'good forestry practice' baseline for for-

est schemes should include no new drainage, no replacement of native deciduous forest with conifer plantations and limitations on forestry operations in the breeding season. Measures that should be compensated are, for example, limits on felling trees or other activities within a buffer zone around nest sites of important bird species; limited removal of dead/decaying trees and no removal of trees with holes. The schemes could also support the diversification of forests' structure and composition, the plantation of less productive species inside monoculture stands, undergrowth restoration, clearing and forest wetlands creation; they should allow the replacement of alien species with native

ones or forest cover removal for the restoration of open habitats (heath, bog, steppe, etc).

The RD Regulation contains important provisions that can make a real difference for European biodiversity, but only a strong Implementing Regulation that spells clearly the scope and limits of the various measures can ensure that this extraordinary opportunity is not missed across all Member States.

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Diary dates

October 24-25	Agriculture & Fisheries Council, Luxembourg: <i>Exchange of views on sugar; Political agreement on RD guidelines</i>
November 16	STAR committee meeting
November 22-24	Agriculture & Fisheries Council: <i>Political agreement on sugar expected</i>
December 14	STAR committee meeting
December 13-18	WTO Ministerial Conference, Hong Kong: <i>Sugar reform</i>
December 15-16	European Council meeting, Brussels: <i>(possibly) agreement on the Financial Perspective</i>



THE BIRDLIFE EUROPEAN PARTNERSHIP



The BirdLife European Partnership consists of 42 conservation organisations with 1800 staff, 1.7 million members and more than 6,000 reserves (covering over 300,000 hectares). A European Programme to conserve birds is implemented by Partners with coordination provided by the European Division staff in Wageningen (The Netherlands) and Brussels (Belgium) working together with the BirdLife Global Secretariat in Cambridge (UK). While many of these are working on agricultural issues connected to bird conservation, only Partners in EU and Accession countries are active in the BirdLife 'Farming for Life' Campaign.

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