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Editorial: A new newsletter for a new CAP!

Policy Perspectives



- **What are public goods?**
- **Avoiding a counterproductive "rush to produce"**

A Healthier CAP?



- **Could do Better - How is EU Rural Development Policy delivering for biodiversity?**
- **CAP Health Check implementation**
- **Cross compliance – a solid base line or a green fig leaf?**

The Science view

- **Lowland farmland birds: the latest science, research and policy developments**



Editorial: A new Newsletter for a new CAP!

Dear reader,

While summer is approaching, bringing Brussels a little sunshine and a newly elected European Parliament, we have decided to restyle our Agricultural Newsletter, with a new design and a new format.

As the 2010 landmark approaches, the need for a real reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is ever clearer. The European Commission has officially admitted that we failed to achieve the EU objective of halting biodiversity loss by 2010. Recent reports from the European Environment Agency have once again confirmed that species depending on farmland and habitats are the ones faring worst. It is clear that the current CAP is not delivering for biodiversity. At the end of this year, the EU will (hopefully) be leading the way on efforts to finally stand up to the climate change challenge in Copenhagen and it is ever clearer that there can be no solution without profound changes to the way we use land. Again, it is difficult to see how the current CAP can deliver the deep transformations to farming and land management that will be needed for climate mitigation and adaptation.

Finally, the belated release of CAP beneficiaries' data has fully exposed the distorted and indefensible distribution of current "income support" direct payments. As these failings become more and more obvious, and with public budgets getting more and more under pressure, the view that the CAP should be radically slashed from 2014 is gathering momentum. Unless the Commission and Member States' farm ministers can come up with a new credible and coherent vision of a useful CAP in the coming year or so, the EU may well lose what is potentially one of its most effective tools for dealing with both the biodiversity and the climate crises.

Encouragingly, in a recent speech, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Mariann Fischer-Boel seemed to embrace the concept of reshaping the CAP around rewarding farmers for the delivery of public goods. This idea, promoted for years by BirdLife and other organisations, is finally making inroads into governments and even the farming sector. We remain convinced that there is a strong case to support farmers and other land managers for providing public goods such as biodiversity for a rapid transition of European farming towards a more sustainable, carbon-light and less resource hungry model.

However, if the CAP is to survive this round of debates, and deliver what we expect and need from it, reform proposals must be thorough, honest and far-reaching. An attempt to simply greenwash the current failing system, relabeling untargeted income support as "public goods payments" would sap away the credibility of the "public goods agenda" and would bring huge harm, not only to Europe's beleaguered wildlife and to the world's overheating atmosphere, but to the European farming community as well.

With very best wishes,

Ariel Brunner
Senior EU Agriculture Policy Officer
BirdLife International European Division

[-> Top](#)

What are public goods?



BirdLife has been advocating for a long time for a radical reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) under the banner "Public money for Public goods". The public goods concept has been steadily gaining ground in the EU and has recently been taken on board by many that are engaged in the post 2013 CAP debate. But what is it all about? Is anything a "public good"?

Public goods are goods or services that are non-rivalrous - when someone uses or benefits from the good, this doesn't reduce its availability to others - and non-excludable - it isn't possible to exclude someone from enjoying the good.

Because of these qualities, producers can't easily charge for public good provision - it's too easy for people to use the good or service without paying when you can't tell if they've used it or not, or exclude them from its use.

Because producers aren't paid to provide public goods, generally they don't supply them at the socially desirable level. The government can step in on behalf of the public and correct the market failure by regulating them (making people provide it), or by paying for the supply to be increased (e.g. agri-environment schemes).

BirdLife sees biodiversity as a key public good, as it is intrinsically non rivalrous and non excludable (with the exception of limited harvestable resources such as edible fish, for example).

The term should not be confused with "good for the public", as there are many things that are good for the public that don't require government intervention. Goods like food are bought and sold in the market and because there is an incentive to supply it, there is generally no need for the government to intervene to make sure it is supplied. Moreover, public goods can also be negative, like air pollution for instance, which is both non-rivalrous and non-excludable.

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[-> Top](#)

Avoiding a counterproductive "rush to produce"



EU must avoid counterproductive "rush to produce" and focus on long term sustainability of its food system.

On 17 April 2009, on the occasion of the G8 meeting of the Agricultural Ministers in Treviso (Italy), BirdLife International and its Partner in Italy, LIPU, launched a paper reviewing the issue of food production in relation to the current biodiversity collapse and looming climate crisis.

The document dispels many myths spread in the wake of last year's 'food crisis', arguing that there is no case for the EU to rush towards further increases in agricultural production in ways that would exacerbate the ongoing environmental crisis.

The paper, aiming to serve as a guide to EU Policy makers, explains why policies aiming at boosting EU food production would not help solve the world's famine and malnutrition problems but could increase the long term threats to food security.

The intensive farm lobby has been painting a picture of a world facing imminent food shortage where the EU has a "moral obligation" to step up production and where environmental concerns have to take a back seat. In its report, BirdLife uses scientific and economic evidence to explain why there is currently no overall shortage of food in the world, why the real "food security" issue is one of conserving our fast dwindling natural resources.

Key recommendations are offered as a way forward for the EU:

- Whilst Europe should remain one of the world's major food producers, it urgently needs to support developing countries in increasing their agricultural productivity in a sustainable way, particularly that of smallholders and the poorest farmers;
- Within Europe, long-term sustainable food production must be guaranteed by urgently addressing the environmental problems (degradation of soils, biodiversity loss, water over-abstraction and pollution, contribution to climate change) caused by current unsustainable agriculture production methods;
- Climate change is the biggest risk for global food production and must urgently be addressed, including by reducing the substantial emissions produced by farming;
- Ways have to be found to bring meat and dairy consumption patterns to sustainable levels in order to reduce their climate change impacts and wider environmental effects. Extensive grazing systems, and their multiple benefits, should be promoted as the optimum model in Europe instead of intensive, cereal-feed based systems;
- Finally, the stability and resilience of EU ecosystems must be improved so that they have a better chance of adapting to climate change and can keep delivering the essential services on which our societies depend. The conservation of soil, water and biodiversity resources and the maintenance of healthy agro-ecosystems is key to maintaining EU agricultural productivity and long-term food security.

The full document in English is available at <http://www.birdlife.org/eu/pdfs/Food%20Security.pdf>

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[-> Top](#)

Could do Better - How is EU Rural Development Policy delivering for biodiversity?



On 7 May 2009, in Brussels, BirdLife International and the RSPB (BirdLife Partner in the UK) launched their evaluation of the EU Rural Development Programmes' potential for biodiversity. The presentation was followed by a panel debate, which included representatives from DG Agriculture, the European Court of Auditors and the French Ministry of Agriculture.

The new BirdLife report shows that, although Rural Development has the potential to tackle the decline of biodiversity, only a tiny proportion of this budget is currently benefiting wildlife, while many potentially harmful investments (e.g. irrigation expansion, drainage, forest roads) are still funded without appropriate safeguards. Encouragingly, almost all Rural Development Programmes now include some effective agri-environment schemes, but funding is still systematically biased in favour of weak schemes that essentially provide hidden income support without any clear environmental value.

Download the full report here, and see BirdLife news story at www.birdlife.org/news/news/2009/05/capstudy.html

The study comes at a crucial moment for the revision of Rural Development Programmes following the so called CAP 'Health Check', and at the beginning of the debate on the future of EU agricultural policy after 2013. As a next step of its campaign, BirdLife and the RSPB will undertake an analyse of what cross-compliance is delivering for biodiversity.

For more information contact Luigi Boccaccio, Coordinator of the BirdLife Agriculture Task Force at Luigi.Boccaccio@rspb.org.uk

-> [Top](#)

CAP Health Check implementation: need for win-win solutions for biodiversity and other 'New Challenges'



The 'CAP Health Check' has brought only cosmetic improvements to the CAP's outdated framework. Nevertheless, some modified financial arrangements will enable a slightly higher availability of funding to address the environmental challenges of the 21st century.

In particular, 3.24 billion Euros will be transferred from the untargeted and wasteful Single Farm Payment (Pillar 1 of the CAP) to Rural Development policy (Pillar 2), the best designed component of the CAP. According to the amended EU Rural Development Regulation (EC 1698/2005), these funds should be used to address 'new challenges', i.e. climate change, water, renewable energies and biodiversity,

as well as the restructuring needs of dairy producers. In addition, 1.02 billion Euros will be made available by the European economic recovery package, to be spent on broadband connections in rural areas and on the 'new challenges'. Member States are required to submit their revised Rural Development Programmes (RDPs) to the Commission by 15 July 2009.

BirdLife believes additional funds should be used in a strategic way, supporting multi-purpose measures that can effectively deliver for more than one challenge at the same time. For example, the restoration of species-rich permanent grassland on arable land represents a win-win solution for biodiversity, water management and carbon sequestration, while helping dairy farms to reduce their reliance on costly and unsustainable feed supplies. Organic conversion can provide a similar wide range of benefits, while boosting farm economy thanks to a well-recognised certification. Agro-forestry systems, if not created at the expense of valuable habitats and if based on the use of a diverse mix of native species, are a powerful tool to preserve water quality, increase carbon sequestration, help biodiversity, generate energy from a renewable source, while diversifying and stabilising farm income.

Another promising tool introduced by the 'Health Check' is article 68 of the new direct payment regulation (EC 73/2009). This instrument allows Member States to use up to 10% of their national single farm payment budget to address a wide range of objectives, including the environment. BirdLife urges Member States to use this flexible tool to support High Nature Value farming systems, such as extensive grazing, traditional hay meadows, wildlife-friendly rice production and the re-integration of fallow land in arable systems. These systems harbour most of farmland biodiversity in Europe and use natural resources sustainably. Yet they are often economically unviable, therefore being at risk of abandonment or harmful intensification.

The implementation of the 'Health Check' represents the last chance to bring significant improvements to the 2007-2013 RDPs, and to use wisely at least a tiny fraction of Pillar 1 funds. This represents an important opportunity to prove that the CAP is well positioned to tackle the massive problems affecting the conservation of biodiversity and natural resources, thus ensuring a future for agriculture in Europe. If our policy makers will fail again, they will face an uphill struggle explaining EU taxpayers the need to maintain a CAP after 2013.

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-> [Top](#)

Cross compliance – a solid base line or a green fig leaf?



Cross-compliance under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the system of rules based on existing legislation and minimal good practices that farmers receiving public payments have to respect. This passport to significant sums of money (direct payments account for €30 bn a year) is failing to ensure citizens do not subsidise environmental harm with their taxes.

The EU Birds and Habitats Directives, the centrepiece of Europe's biodiversity policy, form an important part of cross-compliance. They have not been properly transposed into national law in some Member States, nor have, in many cases, specific requirements for farmers been developed. An adequate protection for semi-natural permanent grassland is also still absent as no distinction is made between intensively managed 'improved' grassland (which has minimal biodiversity benefits) and biodiversity rich grassland. These failings have been underscored by a recent

European Court of Auditors report titled "Is cross compliance an effective policy?", which also identified major shortcomings with controls and sanctions.

The 2008 Health Check of the CAP did not address any of these pressing issues. BirdLife believes the best way to secure environmental delivery from landowners is to move swiftly towards a CAP based on the 'public money for public goods' principle. However, while the current system remains in place, it must be made to work.

New requirements for buffers strips by watercourses and protection for landscape features must be implemented in a way that delivers verifiable environmental benefits. Buffer strips for instance must be of an appropriate width to protect watercourses from polluting run-off and management prescriptions developed if biodiversity benefits are also to be secured. The new optional standard, which allows for the 'establishment and/or retention of habitats' should be utilised as widely as possible to recapture the benefits lost by the abolition of set-aside and restore minimal environmental quality to areas damaged by over intensification.

Download the European Court of Auditor's report at <http://eca.europa.eu/portal/pls/portal/docs/1/1867520.PDF> and see BirdLife news story at www.birdlife.org/news/extra/europe/cross_compliance.html

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[-> Top](#)

Lowland farmland birds: the latest science, research and policy developments



From 31 March to 2 April 2009, the British Ornithologists' Union (BOU) held its conference: *Lowland Farmland Birds III: Delivering solutions in an uncertain world*. The event brought together conservation specialists and policy practitioners from all over Europe to review the pressures facing farmland birds, population trends and existing and emerging conservation solutions.

A range of speakers outlined the steep declines over the last 35 years and the continued precarious state of many farmland bird populations, despite progress in diagnosing causes of declines and designing appropriate solutions. Two up and coming key issues, highlighted as potentially negatively affecting bird populations, were the recent abolition of set-aside and the spread of new bioenergy crops. Organisations such as BTO, GWCT and RSPB (BirdLife in the UK) are currently undertaking further

research on these issues.

Much of the conference focused on practical solutions to tackle farmland bird declines and a wide suite of new research was presented. The important role of fallow land was highlighted along with the need to ensure sufficient heterogeneity of land use and quantity and quality of mitigation measures. The current delivery of agri-environment schemes was sharply critiqued with all related speakers pointing to the need to ensure schemes are well designed and properly implemented.

Papers from all presentations will shortly be available as a supplement to IBIS, BOU's international journal, and online at www.bou.org.uk

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[-> Top](#)



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Credits pictures – Vol 5 Issue 1 January-June 2009

- Policy Perspectives: *by A Brunner*
- A Healthier CAP: *by D Leitao*
- The Science view: *Corn bunting by P Commerville*
- Avoiding a counterproductive "rush to produce": *by C Gomersall (rspb-images.com)*
- Could do better report: *by BirdLife International*
- CAP Health Check: *By S Benko*
- Cross compliance: *by L Boccaccio*
- Lowland farmland birds: *Corncrake by A Hay (rspb-images.com)*