

Less Favoured Areas and High Nature Value farmland

Title



In many areas across Europe, agricultural productivity is geographically and economically marginalised due to natural disadvantages. Such areas are defined as 'areas facing natural or other specific constraints' (ANC). Farmers in ANCs are supported by payments from the EU Rural Development Regulations.

High Nature Value (HNV) farming systems often occur in ANCs, and are characterised by traditional agricultural practices that maintain countryside features and support high levels of biodiversity. There are three types of HNV farming systems in Europe according to Andersen*:

- Farming systems with a high proportion of semi-natural vegetation.
- Farming systems dominated by low intensity agriculture or a mosaic of semi-natural and cultivated land and small-scale features.
- Farming system supporting rare species or a high proportion of European or world populations.

- ## HNV farming crucial to farmland biodiversity

Low intensity farming in HNV farmland is important for wildlife, especially birds, because it creates a varied habitat consisting of a mosaic of small fields of different permanent and non-permanent crops, together with much non-crop and crop edge habitats such as hedges, ponds, ditches, drystone walls and remnant patches of nature vegetation. Pesticide, herbicide and artificial fertiliser use is low and land is regularly left fallow. In such HNV farming system, birds find an abundance of seed and invertebrate food, as well as plenty of shelter and nesting sites.

A system at risk across the EU

Sadly, this type of traditional HNV farming system is at risk across Europe. Intensification and abandonment have caused the disappearance of extensive farming practices, both leading to farmland biodiversity decline and associate environmental concerns.

Previous Less Favoured Area (LFA) payments aimed to address the problem of land abandonment, preserve farmland landscapes as well as supporting the rural community. However, both the previous LFA and the new ANC measures have a number of weaknesses which, as a result, do not differentiate between non-HNV farming systems and HNV farming that delivers public benefits.

A real recognition of HNV systems together with a reform of the ANC payments is necessary so that support could be targeted to farmers practising HNV farming and we could safeguard Europe's biodiversity and cultural heritage in the future.

*Andersen 2003

- ### Agriculture section

- [High Nature Value Farmland in the EU](#)
 - [Public Opinion and High Nature Value Farmland: How Farm Systems Deliver for Biodiversity](#)
 - [Briefings and Position Papers](#)
 - [High Nature Value Farmland in the EU: last chance to stop the decline of Europe's High Nature Value Farmland](#)

Past events

- [Europe's wood pastures: condemned to a slow death by the CAP? \(November 2015\)](#)



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