

Alpine farmers supporting biodiversity recovery

Title

The opportunities that the EU rural development policy offers for biodiversity conservation were discussed at a [recent conference](#) in Turin, Italy. The event, which was organised by BirdLife Europe together with LIPU (BirdLife in Italy) and BirdLife Austria, focused on the Alpine region, which is a good example of an area where farmers can use EU money to bring nature back to farmland.

One part of the EU's rural development policy is designed to create vibrant rural areas for people and the environment and it has the potential to contribute to the protection and recovery of European farmland. Farming is very important for biodiversity in rural areas, but at the same time it is very damaging to the environment because of its contributions to soil erosion and water pollution. Farmland loses natural habitats and biodiversity due to the intensification of farming practices but also because of the abandonment of land. These dynamics lead to deterioration of the beautiful landscapes and ecosystem services that the land provides us with.

On paper, the EU's rural development policy should contribute to make farmers aware and sensitive to these issues and manage land in a way that is respectful of the environment. In Europe's Alpine Regions the policy needs to be implemented in a way that respects its unique and valuable flora and fauna. The conference also showed examples of how this can take place in harmony with both traditional and extensive farming systems.

‘The way farmland is managed can be the difference between survival and extinction for many species.’ said Ariel Brunner, Head of EU Policy at BirdLife Europe.

If the policy is badly implemented in the EU it will become counterproductive and destroy rather than protect and enhance the environment in rural areas. In some EU countries, part of the money was not used at all because of lack of information about its potential and value to individual countries.

The rural development fund is part of the much bigger Common Agriculture Policy (CAP), which was recently renegotiated and unfortunately the new CAP is not necessarily better designed than the old one. It means that if implementation in EU countries fail, the rural development money will not serve its purpose. That is why BirdLife Europe and its national Partners are actively participating in the drafting of the rural development planning at national and local level. These plans will define what priorities the rural development policy will support as well as the criteria required for farmers to receive support. At the same time the BirdLife

Partnership will engage with farmers to advise them on how to use the rural development money, so those who want to do well for the environment will have opportunities to do so.

The Conference in Turin provided a place for over one hundred stakeholders working on agriculture policy to gather and exchange experiences and opinions on how to best implement the rural development policy. Speakers included Iman Boot from the DG Agriculture in the European Commission, Martina Bavec, who used to work in the Slovenian Minister for Agriculture and now works at the University of Maribor, and Secondo Scanavino, Vice President of the CIA (Italian Farmer Confederation). The event was kindly supported by the Italian Piemonte Region and the Mava Foundation.

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