

Scientists confirm worst fears: new EU Policy on Agriculture is bad for nature

Title

The EU failed to stand to the promises of greening the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP): these are the conclusions of the academic paper [EU agricultural reform fails on Biodiversity?](#) published in *Science*, authored by leading European scientists, conservation practitioners and agricultural policy experts, among which is BirdLife's Senior EU Agriculture & Bioenergy Policy Officer, Trees Robijns.

Almost 40% of the EU budget, namely €360 Billion, is spent on agriculture, affecting 50% of the EU land. For many years now, scientists and environmental NGOs have been warning EU institutions that intensive agricultural practices were destroying habitats, altering ecosystems and causing large declines in wildlife numbers, ultimately endangering future EU food security and the health of its citizens.

In response to criticism, the EU announced that the environment and climate change would have been core issues in the new CAP, agreed in December 2013. To address this challenge, 30% of direct payments to farmers were made conditional on compliance with three greening measures: creating Ecological Focus Areas (EFA), keeping permanent grasslands, and setting minimum requirements on the number of crops that can be grown on a given area of arable land to avoid conversion into monocultures.

But, following a thorough evaluation of the reformed CAP, the authors of the paper published by *Science* reveal that the broad number of exemptions introduced to the greening measures exempt over 88% of the farmers in the EU, and over 48% of its agricultural land. The measures set thresholds that will allow the ongoing intensification of farming practices under a green label.

BirdLife's Head of EU Policy, Ariel Brunner, commented: "We now have scientific evidence stating that the 'new' rules are almost as bad as the old ones and are dramatically inadequate to save nature. What now?" BirdLife's Brunner added: "We can only hope that Commissioner Ciolo and his successor will not ignore the new evidence. On our side we'll keep campaigning for a review of the new CAP and, at national level, for governments to use the flexibility they're given to stop the destruction of farmland ecosystems."

Faustine Defossez, Senior Policy Officer for Agriculture and Bioenergy at the European

Environmental Bureau (EEB) added: "We already knew that the Common Agricultural Policy was damaging the environment, and now scientists have confirmed this. Yet some European Member States look set to make things even worse as they plan to implement the policy by giving farmers a green label, and hence "green payments", for growing maize monoculture and using pesticides and fertilizers on areas meant to be used for biodiversity protection - a frankly farcical situation."

Commenting on the paper, the environmental reporter Roger Harrabin published an even more critical [article](#) in the BBC concluding: "Greening of CAP Reform "a load of bull "..."

Member States have until the 1st of August to notify the European Commission of their plans.

For more information, read the article ["Farm wildlife protection plan 'fails'?](#), Roger Harrabin, 5 June 2014, BBC News.
