

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

“The EU failed to stand to the promises of greening the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)”: these are the conclusions of the academic paper published today in Science [1] (EU agricultural reform fails on Biodiversity) authored by leading European scientists, conservation practitioners and agricultural policy experts, among which Birdlife’s Trees Robins.

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

In response to criticism on the CAP, 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: establishing Ecological Focus Areas (EFA), maintaining 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 today 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.

EU Policy Head at Birdlife Europe, 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 Ciolos 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: “While scientists tell us that the supposedly ‘green’ CAP will in fact continue to damage the environment, some Member States are already using the flexibility they were granted to make things even worse. Giving a green label and hence an extra payment to maize monocultures is frankly farcical. The same goes with Member States allowing pesticides and fertilizers to be sprayed on so called Ecological Focus Areas.”

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

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[1] <http://www.sciencemag.org/>

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