One of the overarching aims of Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform was to make it deliver more for the environment. This factsheet therefore analyses the quality of public spending. It looks at what hides behind the official numbers and what Italian Rural Development (RD) spending in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region means for the environment, specifically for biodiversity.

**STATE OF PLAY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT:**

Some of the major challenges for the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region identified by the Rural Development Programme (RDP) are: increasing knowledge of producers through knowledge transfer and information actions, improving the present status of advisory service to farmers, creating a network of identified advisors, preserving mountain areas, forest ecosystems and environmentally fragile areas, preserving and restoring biodiversity and natural habitats through conservation measures (High Nature Value farmland and Natura 2000 areas), encouraging innovative agronomic approaches with respect to environmental value, organic farming and sustainable forest management and improving the management of soil and its organic carbon.

However, other environmental issues also urgently need to be tackled, such as finding solutions to minimise the conflict between livestock husbandry and large carnivores.

**FARMLAND BIRD INDEX:**

Farmland Birds have decreased by 7.69% in Friuli-Venezia Giulia between 2000 and 2014. At national level, the Farmland Bird Index for mountain grassland birds (FBIpm), mainly influenced by alpine birds, has decreased by 37% between 2000-2014.

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**Priority 4: RURAL DEVELOPMENT BUDGET FOR ‘ECOSYSTEMS’: reality and practice**

The implementation of EU RD programmes should fulfil a number of set objectives and priorities. While only 30% of the RD money in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region has been allocated to measures that should directly benefit biodiversity, water and soil¹, in addition, not all measures for which this money has been earmarked have high environmental value. These measures may, at best, benefit nature indirectly, such as payments for farming in Areas with Natural Constraints (ANC), but they are not tied to concrete environmental targets and benefits. Indeed, in the Italian Friuli-Venezia Giulia region the largest share of money and almost half of the budget under this

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¹ Priority 4, as foreseen by the Rural Development Regulation, Art. 5
priority (45%) will go to ANC farmers, although the measure is not linked to any environmental objectives or prescriptions.

Some RDP investment measures include actions that risk harming the environment and biodiversity, especially in Natura 2000. For example, forest investment measures, such as the planting of intensive poplar plantations and the associated use of pesticides, are prioritised for farms within Natura 2000 sites.

**AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SPENDING: past vs. future**

In the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region a mere 9% of RD money will be spent on Agri-Environment measures (AEC) – this is amongst the lowest levels in Italy and the EU and is even a cut (6%) compared to the previous spending period despite the fact that Member States were required to maintain AEC funding levels and to spend a minimum of 30% of their budget on AEC measures and environmental issues\(^2\).

20% of the AEC budget will be spent on schemes targeted directly at specific species, habitats or biodiversity problems\(^3\), i.e. that are ‘dark green’ and are really tackling the issues at stake. The only scheme which fits these criteria in the current period in the region is support to the ‘Conservation of biodiversity of meadows and permanent meadows’. Some of the AEC budget will continue to go to measures that are not that effective in the delivery of environmental or biodiversity objectives such as support to ‘Conservation Agriculture’.

**FARM BIODIVERSITY CONTRACTS INSUFFICIENT TO REACH EU BIODIVERSITY STRATEGY OBJECTIVES**

The EU’s Biodiversity Strategy clearly states that by 2020 the area of farmland covered by biodiversity-related measures must be maximised in order achieve a measurable improvement of species dependent

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\(^2\) Rural Development Regulation, Recital 22.

\(^3\) No evaluation of the evolution of spending on dark green schemes can be made in comparison to the previous programming period as there is no information on budgets for specific schemes during 2007-2013.
on or affected by agriculture.

The Friuli-Venezia Giulia region claims that 11.24% of farmland in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region will be covered under voluntary contracts for biodiversity protection, but schemes under the new RDP which could be genuinely beneficial for biodiversity are only applicable to 1.9% of farmland.

What do we mean by ‘dark green’ agri-environment measures:

The European Court of Auditors, in its special report from 2011* looking at effectiveness of agri-environment, recommended that agri-environment schemes should be more precisely targeted and there should be a higher rate of EU contribution for sub-measures with a higher environmental potential. In our analysis we have looked at what proportion of agri-environment budget has been allocated to targeted, as we call them ‘dark green’, schemes for biodiversity. As EAFRD and Rural development plans do not recognise such a category, we have worked with regional and national experts to assess measures, using the following principles: The scheme has been considered ‘dark green’ if it is targeted to specific species (group of species), habitats or a specific biodiversity problem (pollinator strips).

* ECA Special report no 7/2011: Is agri-environment support well designed and managed?

INACTION ON NATURA 2000

Rural Development Programmes should include an approach to tackling the specific needs of Natura 2000 areas⁴. Although 10% of Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) in Friuli-Venezia Giulia is part of the Natura 2000 network, Natura 2000 payments will only cover 0.4% of the UAA (or 3.8% of the UAA designated at Natura 2000).

In addition to the abovementioned ‘dark green’ scheme for the conservation of biodiversity in meadows, other RD measures may play a positive role in enhancing biodiversity in Natura 2000 areas. These include non-productive investments related to the environment, maintenance of grass in vineyards and orchards, crop diversification, sustainable management of pastures, protection of semi-natural areas in the farmed landscape, drafting and updating of management plans, and collective approaches to AEC measures.

Most of these schemes target grassland habitats and species, which is a positive aspect, unfortunately other habitats still lack sufficient support and specific schemes.

Overall, our assessment is that the RDP does not sufficiently address the needs of the Natura 2000 network in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region.

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⁴ Rural Development Regulation, Art. 8
EUROPE NEEDS:

1. To ensure that a well-designed greening and reinforced cross compliance represent a firm baseline for Pillar 2 environmental measures. This could help free up money for more efficient and targeted measures that benefit the environment and biodiversity. These baselines should be properly set and checked so as to create an equal level playing field for all farmers in Europe – special attention is needed on issues such as integrated pest management, water and soil. The Commission should urgently start to work on including the Water Framework Directive and Sustainable Use of Pesticides Directive directly into cross compliance so that the uncertainty around what is the baseline and what is not, is removed.

2. To ensure that the CAP is designed in a way which helps reach the EU Biodiversity Strategy goals by 2020. So far evidence shows that the agriculture target is the most problematic. In Pillar 2 this can only be done through proper funding of the Natura 2000 Network and the Priority ‘Habitats and species’ as defined in the Birds and Habitats Directives.

3. To have a genuine system for tracking environmental spending. Only measures with clear environmental objectives and delivery can be included. Areas of Natural Constraints (ANCs) must not be counted as environmentally-beneficial measures as there are no environmental obligations or management requirements attached to the payments. At best, ANC has an indirect positive effect for biodiversity and the environment. However, in the worst case they are just income support which is pushing damaging intensification. The purpose of the ANC payments – to fight against abandonment or compensate farmers to work in more difficult areas – remains difficult to justify when compared to the direct income support of the first pillar. At best it is proof of the duality of the CAP where Pillar 1 is a driver for large and intensified farms and Pillar 2 a way to counter this drive. This duality should be ended and a targeted instrument should be devised which supports extensive farming systems that provide high environmental value but are not economically viable.

4. To ensure proper monitoring of the Rural Development schemes’ delivery. It is not possible to know if investments in rural development are really delivering benefits for biodiversity without this evaluation.

Conclusion: Europe needs to take a proper look at the whole of its agricultural policy and how it is working together or against environmental commitments and priorities. Even if Rural Development can be a large part of the answer and has the potential to play a positive role in many parts of Europe, the figures unfortunately show adjustments are necessary for this policy to truly deliver towards its objectives. It is now clear that this reformed CAP still has a long way to go before it can be called green.

THE ITALIAN FRIULI-VENEZIA GIULIA REGION NEEDS:

1. Simple but well researched prescriptions in the implementation of specific schemes in order to improve their effectiveness.
2. Schemes targeted at minimising the conflict between livestock husbandry and large carnivores.
3. Specific monitoring to measure the effectiveness of schemes to conserve grasslands.
SOURCES

EC factsheets for 2014-2020 Rural development plan for Friuli-Venezia Giulia:

The data in this factsheet is based on the first version of the Rural Development Programme in Friuli Venezia Giulia

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