



THE HIDDEN TRUTH – Spain – Andalucía

Environmental impact of new Rural Development Programmes – 2014-2020

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 Spanish Rural Development spending means in Andalucía for the environment, specifically for biodiversity.

STATE OF PLAY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT:

Soil erosion, habitat loss, nitrate pollution and over-use of water resources are some of the main pressures on nature and biodiversity in Andalucía that are closely linked to agricultural production. Most of the traditional extensive production systems (for example in mountainous areas, rain-fed crops, extensive livestock) and High Nature Value Farming Systems (which are supposed to extend to around 42% of total Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA)) are being abandoned or intensified.

Near 90% of protected grassland habitats in Andalucía are not in a favourable condition.

FARMLAND BIRD INDEX:

Farmland Birds have decreased by 34% between 1998 and 2014 (more than what is reflected in the Rural Development Programmes (RDP), which referred only to national level for 2008) and although there are signs that threatened species are stabilising, the overall population levels remain low and breeding success difficult.

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 38% of the RD money in Andalucía has been allocated to measures which *should* directly benefit biodiversity, water and soil¹, the reality is that 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. In Andalucía, close to 8% of the budget under this priority will go to ANC farmers. No additional commitments are required from farmers in the eligible areas, payment rates depend on the average profitability, compared to non-constrained areas, but there are no guarantees for delivery on any environmental objectives. Additionally, agri-environment measures (AEC) include several light schemes targeted to intensive crops covering only 5% of UAA but for which high budgets have been allocated at the expense of more environmentally valuable farming systems and schemes.

Some RDP measures also risk harming the environment and biodiversity: Investment measures and most of the measures of the sub-programme for olives could lead to intensification and expansion of this crop. It could entail some improvement in soil cover but with no significant benefits for biodiversity and rather negative impacts when the intensification occurs over old olives or by conversion of rain-fed cereals to new olive groves.

AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SPENDING: past vs. future

In Andalucía 13% of RD money will be spent on agri-environment measures (AEC) – this is a 35% cut compared to the previous spending period despite the fact that Member States were required to maintain AEC funding levels².

¹ Priority 4, as foreseen by the Rural Development Regulation, Art. 5

² Rural Development Regulation, Recital 22.



Only 17% of the AEC budget will be spent on schemes targeted directly at specific species, habitats or biodiversity problems, i.e. that are 'dark green' and are really tackling the issues at stake. A large share of the AEC budget will go to schemes that are not that effective in the delivery of environmental or biodiversity objectives. This is the case in Andalucía with 65% of the AEC budget going to schemes for 'sustainable systems'- integrated pest management – actually providing support for growing certain crops such as sugar beet, cotton, horticulture, irrigated cereals, olives. The allocation of funds to the 'beekeeping' scheme can contribute to the maintenance or even increase of pollination services but it does not address the real causes of biodiversity and pollinator decrease.

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 that 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 (e.g. pollinator strips).

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

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 to achieve a measurable improvement of species dependent on or affected by agriculture.

The region of Andalucía claims that 15.3% of its farmland will be covered under voluntary contracts for biodiversity protection, but measures under the new RDP which could be genuinely beneficial for biodiversity will only be applicable to a small proportion of farmland (2% of total UAA), and even when the indirect benefits from the other schemes are considered it is likely that no more than 10% of the farmed area will deliver for biodiversity protection or improvement.

Such concrete AEC measures generate biodiversity benefits through support to 'grazing systems' (maintenance of extensive grazing and management of flocks to allow pasture and Dehesas recovery) and 'Natura 2000 cereal steppes relevant to wild birds' (proper management and diversification of crops, and creation of refuge areas in SPAs). In order to increase the effectiveness of the latter scheme, since Natura 2000 does not cover a significant surface of this habitat, the regional catalogue for Important Steppe Bird Areas should also be targeted by the scheme in future.



NOT ENOUGH ACTION ON NATURA 2000

Andalucía's RDP does not properly address the needs of the Natura 2000 network in the region as required by the Rural Development Regulation,³ although 12.7% of the UAA is designated as Natura 2000. A few measures are targeted to or specifically include actions on Natura 2000 areas (investments, management planning), but insufficient priority criteria or clearly delimited operations or resources have been set. Some other RD measures can benefit Natura 2000 areas (information, advisory, other investment, organic farming, etc.) but overall the spending and delivery for Natura 2000 will be limited and is not ensured.

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.

³ Rural Development Regulation, Art. 8



THE ANDALUCIA REGION NEEDS:

1. An increase of the budget for 'dark green' measures, if needed at the expense of allocations for intensive crops
2. The inclusion of further prescriptions to ensure biodiversity benefits (for example in measures supporting grazing, sustainable systems, etc.)
3. Enlargement of the 'steppe birds scheme to other important areas beyond Natura 2000 sites, as already identified by the competent administration.
4. To guarantee environmental contents and proper prioritisation of Natura 2000 within advisory and knowledge transfer measures
5. The development of regional values or objectives for common environmental and biodiversity indicators
6. The development of a basic system to monitor the impact of RD schemes on Natura 2000
7. Increased support across all the measures for extensive livestock and transhumance systems.

SOURCES

EC Factsheet on 2014-2020 Rural development programme for the Region of Andalucía:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/rural-development-2014-2020/country-files/es/factsheet-andalucia_en.pdf

The data in this factsheet is based on the first version of the Rural Development Programme in Andalucía

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