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 Castilla y León for the environment, specifically for biodiversity.

**STATE OF PLAY FOR THE ENVIRONMENT:**

Habitat loss and nitrate and herbicide pollution are some of the main pressures on nature and biodiversity in Castilla y León and they are closely linked to agricultural production.

Traditional extensive production systems (for example in mountainous areas, rain-fed crops, extensive livestock) are being abandoned or intensified.

Castilla y León has a high share of High Nature Value systems (31% of Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA)).

**More than 85% of pastures protected under EU legislation are in bad status, with overgrazing as an even higher threat than abandonment in this region.**

Large farmed areas are designated as Natura 2000 sites (21% of total UAA), mainly for cereal-steppe birds in the lowlands (this region holds most of the biggest SPAs for these species) and vultures and grazing habitats in mountainous areas. Conflicts with wolves (and to a lesser extent with vultures) in mountainous areas are highly mediatised and influence public perception.

**FARMLAND BIRD INDEX:**

Farmland Birds have decreased by 34% between 1998 and 2015. Other common species, small raptors, and owls linked to arable crops and cereals are showing negative trends. About 32% of EU protected bird species, and close to 60% of protected fauna are not in a favourable condition.

Some threatened species are doing better, with positive trends for the Great Bustard in recent years mainly due to targeted agri-environment schemes in the previous spending period.

**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 27% of the RD money in Castilla y León has been allocated to measures that should directly benefit biodiversity, water and soil, 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. Indeed, in the Spanish Castilla y León region 35% of money under this priority will go to ANC farmers. As elsewhere in Europe, this scheme is being used as an income support to compensate the low economic viability of farming in marginal areas scheme but without any strict environmental conditions (except for setting a maximum area for irrigated systems), objectives or guarantees. Additionally, agri-environment measures, receiving almost a half of the budget under Priority 4 include several light schemes targeted to the most intensive crops for which high budgets have been allocated at the expense of support for the most environmentally-valuable farming systems and schemes.

Some RDP measures also risk harming the environment and biodiversity, for example by supporting the loss of landscape diversity and landscape elements and enlargement of parcels through land consolidation measures.

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

In Castilla y León, 12% of RD money will be spent on Agri-Environment measures (AEC) – this is a slight cut compared to the previous spending period despite the fact that Member States were required to maintain AEC funding levels\(^2\).

However, although 35% of the AEC budget will be spent on measures targeted directly at specific species, habitats or biodiversity problems, i.e. those which are ‘dark green’ and really tackle the issues at stake, such as the ‘steppe birds’ scheme, this is a large cut in comparison to 85% of the AEC budget during the previous period. Another large share of the AEC budget (also around a third) will go to measures that are not that effective in the delivery of environmental or biodiversity objectives, such as ‘sustainable alternatives in irrigated crops’ and ‘integrated production’ schemes. 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.

**FARM BIODIVERSITY CONTRACTS INSUFFICIENT TO REACH EU BIODIVERSIRY 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 on or affected by agriculture.

\(^2\) Rural Development Regulation, Recital 22.
The region of Castilla y León claims that 22.6% 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, i.e. ‘dark green’ schemes, are only applicable to a smaller proportion of farmland (less than 15% of UAA). The ‘dark green’ schemes are: a cereal-steppe scheme (‘Extensive rain-fed agro-ecosystems in wetlands of international importance’) targeting proper management and diversification of crops and the creation of refuge areas which has been hugely reduced in terms of both budget and implementation area; and, two schemes on the maintenance of extensive livestock systems (one targeted at sustainable grazing on private land and support to transhumance, and the other for grazing of sheep and goats on common pastures).

Even considering the indirect benefits from the other schemes (beekeeping, sustainable farming or organic) it is likely that no more than 17% of farmed area will deliver for biodiversity protection or improvement.

**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 (pollinator strips).

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

**INACTION ON NATURA 2000**

This RDP does not specifically or properly address all the needs of the Natura 2000 network in farming areas of Castilla y León.

Natura 2000 payments have not been included to the RDP although the work on N2000 management planning is almost completed and would offer a perfect opportunity to address the identified needs of the Natura 2000 network in the region. There is a risk that, due to the reduction of the ‘steppe birds’ scheme and the lack of Natura 2000 payments, the success of the measure and positive trends that have been achieved for some of these species in the previous period will be jeopardised, as it is unlikely that farmers will continue implementing the practices (harvest delay or planting of legumes for birds) without payment.

Some other RD measures can benefit Natura 2000 areas (advisory, basic services, forest investments, organic farming, ANC etc.) but overall the spending and delivery for Natura 2000 will be limited and is neither targeted nor 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.

THE SPANISH CASTILLA Y LEON REGION NEEDS:

1. A continuous level of ambition for the ‘steppe birds’ schemes, at least for all the Natura 2000 sites designated for these species.

2. Further options or requirements in the ‘extensive livestock systems’ schemes or through investment measures to prevent attacks from wild fauna

3. Guaranteed environmental contents and proper prioritisation of Natura 2000 within advisory and knowledge transfer measures through selection and prioritisation criteria
4. Further requirements to prevent damages to biodiversity, and even to ensure improvement of conditions for biodiversity, from land consolidation and irrigation projects

5. A scheme for pilot projects with environmental purposes

6. The development of a basic system to monitor the impact of RD schemes on Natura 2000

SOURCES:

EC factsheets on 2014-2020 Rural development programme for Castilla y León:

The data in this factsheet is based on the first version of the Rural Development Programme in Castilla y León.

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