

# The CAP & High Nature Value farming

## High Nature Value farming

Farming in Europe ranges from some of the most intensive production systems in the world to very low-intensity, more traditional land uses, usually on poorer land. The concept of “High Nature Value farming” (HNV) developed from a recognition that the conservation of biodiversity in Europe depends on the continuation of low-intensity farming across large areas of the countryside<sup>1</sup>. HNV systems maintain Europe’s most characteristic landscapes that are often the basis for thriving tourism industries and produce many of Europe’s traditional regional speciality foods.

In contrast to intensive use of the land where opportunities for wildlife are reduced, in HNV systems the productive land itself supports a range of wildlife species, especially when it includes a high proportion of semi-natural<sup>2</sup> vegetation. HNV farmers face enormous challenges to the socio-economic viability of their farms<sup>3</sup>. This often leads to abandonment or intensification of the land. In these processes, the quality of grasslands diminishes, scrub invades grasslands and pollinators lose their food plants and habitats, posing threats to many species and ecosystem services.



### Facts & figures

- Estimates suggest that over 30% of farmland in the EU may be HNV. In some countries the figure is over 50%<sup>4</sup>.
- The majority of HNV farmland is found on naturally less productive land<sup>5</sup>.
- Many species of conservation concern, such as chough<sup>6</sup>, great bustard<sup>7</sup>, pin tailed sand grouse<sup>8</sup> and lesser kestrel<sup>9</sup> are almost entirely reliant on the heterogeneous habitats maintained by low intensity farming. Declines in many other species have been linked to farming intensification<sup>10</sup>.
- Populations of butterflies such as dingy skipper<sup>11</sup>, orange-tip<sup>12</sup>, large blue<sup>13</sup>, and meadow brown<sup>14</sup> are also seriously declining. Their most important habitats are maintained by HNV farming<sup>15</sup>.
- HNV farms have lower incomes than non-HNV farms<sup>16</sup>, and often have a negative net income if CAP support is excluded (sometimes even with CAP support)<sup>17</sup>.

### Recommendation

**The CAP needs profound change to support the kinds of farming Europe needs in the 21st century. Public money must support public goods. Taxpayers must see real value for the billions they invest in the CAP. Those who farm sustainably must be effectively supported while those who harm the environment should receive no public money.**

**If politicians are serious about maintaining HNV farming, they must support a fundamental CAP reform now.**



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## Unfair competition and perverse subsidies in the Olive sector

Intensive, irrigated olive production causes major environmental problems in Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal such as soil erosion and water stress which impact on other sectors<sup>18</sup>. Low input olive production on the other hand provides multiple public goods such as landscape diversity, biodiversity and reduced soil erosion and landslides.

The current system of CAP payments favours the more intensive systems. A farmer with intensive irrigated olives can receive around

€1,000 per ha, whereas a low-input olive grove might receive only €100 per ha. Yet the most intensive production system also earns a far greater income from the market without CAP payments, whereas the production from low-intensity is not enough to cover labour costs. As a result of the low support they receive, the low input olive groves are abandoned, leading to a loss of biodiversity and increased risk of wild fires. CAP reform needs to ensure those farmers providing public goods have a fair income stream.

## ADEPT project, Romania

Romania holds a large proportion of the HNV farmland in Europe. There are 3.8 million holdings (45% of the farmed area) classed as "subsistence farms", with an economic activity of less than €1,200 per year. The Romanian government has set up an ambitious scheme for supporting HNV farming through agri-environment payments. However, national rules exclude 1.9 million farms of under 1 ha from the scheme (and other CAP support).

The ADEPT project in Târnava Mare shows how a NGO-led local approach can maintain HNV systems. The ADEPT team works with

farmers to bring them into support schemes and market their produce. They also work together with the government to improve the design of schemes.

Thanks to this dynamic approach, up-take of the HNV farming scheme is higher. In one municipality where ADEPT is active, 99 farmers joined the scheme in 2009, compared with three in a neighbouring municipality<sup>19</sup>. Rural development programmes should fund this local project approach to address the needs of HNV systems.



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## Machair LIFE+ project, Scotland

Machair is a coastal grassland habitat, extremely rich in biodiversity. Included in Annex 1 of the EU Habitats Directive, it supports internationally important populations of breeding and wintering birds, including waders, corncrakes (*Crex crex*) and terns (*Sternidae*). Over two thirds of the world's machair is in the crofting areas of Scotland.

Crofting systems are essential to conserving this unique habitat. They are typified by many of the features of HNV farming such as: low nutrient input; low stocking density; low yield

per hectare; hardy, regional breeds or crop varieties; traditional harvesting techniques. The key threat to conservation in crofting areas is abandonment of activity.

The EU LIFE + scheme aims to increase the area of actively managed machair and expand the skills and knowledge base<sup>20</sup>. Management techniques such as late harvesting of arable crops are encouraged to increase biodiversity benefits. Such pilot projects should be built on in the new CAP to provide systematic support to HNV systems.



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