



## A Green Architecture for Green Infrastructure? How the future CAP could support Green and Blue Infrastructures

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### Background

Despite some successes integrating biodiversity measures into the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), it is clear that species and habitats dependent on agricultural management, continue to decline at an alarming rate.

Loss of “green and blue infrastructures” i.e. semi-natural habitats within the farmed landscape, are a major challenge for reaching biodiversity targets.

With the new European Commission now in place, the Green Deal launched, and the Biodiversity Strategy on the way, there will be increasing pressure and interest from civil society to examine the level of environmental ambition for the new CAP.

### Agenda

This event was hosted by **MEP Clara Aguilera** and **MEP Michal Wiezik**, and it presented the findings of the BIOGEO project on the importance of green infrastructure for agricultural biodiversity and the engagement of farmers in managing green infrastructure.

The BIOGEO project was presented by:

- **Katrina Marsden**, from Adelphi research, Berlin and BIOGEO co-ordinator
- **Dr Mario Díaz** (MD), from the National Museum of Natural Sciences, Madrid
- **Dr Yanka Kazakova**, from the University of National and World Economy, Sofia

The panel, moderated by **Alberto Arroyo Schnell** from IUCN, also included:

- **Martin de Cock de Rameyen**, from Agriland SA agriculture and advice company, Wavre, Belgium
- **Harriet Bradley**, Agriculture and Rural Development Policy Officer, BirdLife Europe
- **Dr Guy Pe'er**, from the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig and Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ)

### Presentations and discussion

**MEP Clara Aguilera** opened the event, providing the audience with information on the ongoing reform of the CAP, its delay due amongst other things to Brexit, the discussion around the Multiannual Financial Framework (MFF) and the engagement of the Parliament. Ms Aguilera highlighted the fact that DG ENV and DG AGRI have a shared responsibility on the matter, and that the result of the reform must be agreed between the different decision-making groups involved. Political agreement is essential, but it must come together with a clear idea of the budget. Ms Aguilera described the planned reforms as potentially a significant paradigm-change for agricultural policy. Its implementation will depend on Member States elaborating effective strategic plans.

**Katrina Marsden**, adelphi research, Berlin and BIOGEO co-ordinator thanked the MEPs for making the event happen and expressed her appreciation to IUCN as co-organisers of the event. She also thanked the donors of the project, namely BiodivERsA, the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research, the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness,



and the Bulgarian National Science Fund. She highlighted the policy recommendations from the project most relevant for the ongoing CAP reform negotiations, namely the need to have a certain proportion of Green and Blue Infrastructure (GBI) in the agricultural landscape.

**Dr Mario Díaz**, from the National Museum of Natural Sciences of Madrid, presented the findings of the biological fieldwork and modelling. The project found that GBI features generally favour biodiversity across the range of different types of farmland; however, their effectiveness vary among study sites and systems, with no GBI feature universally effective across Europe. Certain productive features such as nitrogen-fixing crops provide little in the way of benefits for biodiversity. There is a minimum threshold for GBI features to provide biodiversity benefits: at least 10% of farmland (at farm level) should be ecologically highly effective GBI; this means semi-natural and connectivity features but not productive measures. Moreover, the biodiversity benefits of GBI features depend on the amount of existing GBI in a particular area. Additional GBI shows greatest benefits for biodiversity in landscapes farmed at intermediate intensity. The main take-home message is that promotion of GBI has a good perspective value for biodiversity conservation and recovery in European farmland. Nevertheless, greening and other measures promoting specific GBI elements should be regionally targeted and designed, and its performance should be evaluated and monitored in terms of explicit biodiversity goals.

**Dr Yanka Kazakova**, University of National and World Economy, Sofia, described the findings of the policy fieldwork, the interviews and focus groups with farmers and other stakeholders. The initial rhetoric about making greening as easier as possible for farmers contributed to the mind-set “choose the easiest option of least change”. This was confirmed by the discussions with farmers where the measures requiring least change were consistently chosen in all case study areas. That means that better communication and explanation of environmental and farm benefits of the different green options at the start is urgently needed. Additionally, the lack of guidance and training for both farmers and local offices in the first years of greening only contributed to the already low ambition. Farmers’ main source of information was the local agricultural offices who did not necessarily have specialised training on environmental measures. Dr Kazakova stressed the need to introduce monitoring of green options, preferably involving farmers, as the lack of monitoring of the effects of greening makes both farmers and stakeholders uncertain about the stated environmental improvements.

The presentations were followed by a lively debate with the audience. Points raised included farmers familiarity with the terms GBI and how they should manage it. The project found that no-matter the farm size, familiarity with GBI was lacking, though farmers’ recognise GBI features. A discussion was also held about farm size and the importance of cut-off points for implementing greening measures.

After summing up the discussions and thanking the BIOGEO team, **MEP Ms Aguilera** gave the floor to **Alberto Arroyo Schnell** from IUCN, who moderated the panel.

**Mr Arroyo Schnell** excused the DG AGRI representative Valentin Opfermann for not being able finally to attend the event as a panellist and presented the other speakers. He then asked how is possible to ensure that the green infrastructure features in the agricultural landscapes are better maintained in the future.

**Harriet Bradley**, EU Agriculture and Bioenergy Policy Officer from BirdLife Europe stressed how, unfortunately, because of various incentives, the CAP has played role in driving the intensification of agriculture, and how this included the destruction of valuable landscape elements in certain Member States. BirdLife wants those incentives removed from the CAP:



their position is that a mandatory baseline for GBI and landscape elements should be set for receiving any payment, which should be a minimum of 10% across all Europe –as shown by the BIOGEO project results. This is the minimum percentage needed in order to get any kind of biodiversity return. She also called for the use of other instruments in the CAP, like the eco-schemes and the agri-environmental payments, in order to incentivise farmers to implement additional measures that can reintroduce or maintain habitats that are good for biodiversity.

**Dr Guy Pe'er**, from the German Centre for Integrative Biodiversity Research (iDiv) Halle-Jena-Leipzig and Helmholtz Centre for Environmental Research (UFZ), stressed the role of landscape planning integrated with agriculture policy in order to halt loss of landscape features. One of the main outcomes of the BIOGEO project is that the CAP does not support GBI but we know that this is essential for biodiversity maintenance and human well-being. Acknowledging the need for GBI, Member States must be encouraged to implement it in the right way. Member States would need to secure a certain percent of their budget for green measures. Dr Pe'er stressed the importance of moving from a focus on the farm level to the landscape level. Collaborative implementation by the farms need to be supported, and it is crucial that the farmers can benefit from what they are doing; they should work together to create corridors and connectivity. He also highlighted the need to target priority regions in Europe, where we know that financing is not enough to meet biodiversity objectives, including Natura 2000, which is often farmed land. Finally, he pointed out that the lack of effective monitoring is a significant problem for targeting the funds correctly.

**Martin de Cock de Rameyen**, Managing Director of Agriland SA in Wavre, Belgium, highlighted the environmental and climate crisis we are all facing. Consumers need to see what is good for nature and for biodiversity; stakeholders should act and think together. The roles of farmers and landowners are significant. Landowners should be more aware of what farmers do on the land they own and rent. Agriland SA works together with farmers and landowners to put in place conditions for land management encouraging sustainable land use including the maintenance and connectivity of landscape features. Contractors can be specially trained on the specific measures delivering greatest benefits and then work directly with the farmers to put them in place over a wider area than would be reached by an individual farm approach. Labelling schemes such as the “Wildlife Estates Label” also have potential to encourage and better reward those doing most for biodiversity.

An interesting Q&A session followed. First of all, while answering to a question about spatial planning, Dr Pe'er highlighted the lack of landscape planning and advisory bodies that supports the **collaborative implementation** of GBI across wider areas and that could bring knowledge to farmers and decision-makers. Collaboration between farmers has the potential to reduce administrative costs, a potential win-win that should be considered in the next CAP.

Ms Bradley addressed the dilemma between flexibility for the Member States and the maintenance of environmental goals, stressing that the compromise is reached in every EU policy, and there should not be any difference with the CAP. She emphasized that there is a need for a **common baseline across the EU**, including for the EU to be able to meet its biodiversity targets (minimum 10% that should be required for GBI). However, this still shows flexibility, because it allows farmers to choose what kind of landscape features, and non-productive elements they want, and also where they want them on their farm.

A question about public support for the CAP was addressed to **MEP Ms Aguilera**. She reminded the audience how every public policy needs support from society, and it is difficult to explain policies that go against public opinion. There is a significant opportunity with the



reform, but there is a danger that farmers feel they are being blamed for the climate and environmental crisis rather than being part of the solution. In the new circular economy, every sector is connected. The CAP represents almost 40% of the EU budget. In her opinion, the CAP needs to give security to the farmers and support them moving towards a more sustainable production system, but changes in society are also needed. As part of this, the European Green Deal will need coordinated actions between all sectors and enough budget to be effective.

**MEP Isabel Carvalhais** described the situation in Portugal's rural areas. Over the years, farmers have experienced many changes, and this has made them tired and suspicious. The main concern is that the rural population is aging and there are not enough young people coming in to the sector, which is not viewed as being an attractive employment area. A long-term vision for rural areas should be discussed now before the final budget is agreed. People in rural areas must be included in these discussions, not left aside.

Ms Bradley from BirdLife stressed again the importance of non-productive habitat, and the urgency to act now. The environmental crisis is the main priority, and it is underpinning and attacking every other sector.

A representative from **DG AGRI** highlighted the work carried out by DG AGRI on the CAP proposals to target the CAP better while leaving sufficient flexibility for the member states. The importance of commitment from all kind of stakeholders in engaging, discussing the CAP and successfully implementing it was highlighted, if we want the CAP to be effective in reaching its environmental aims.

**MEP Michal Wiezik** closed the meeting, thanking the participants and the organisers. He highlighted the need to target biodiversity management and to reduce the detrimental impacts of some types of agricultural practices, not only for species loss but also for the sake of agriculture itself. He described how biodiversity should be maintained with effective measures, with an overall aim to increase landscape heterogeneity. It seems that intensive discussions will be needed between the Commission, Parliament and Member States in order to ensure the CAP is coherent with the European Green Deal and the new Biodiversity Strategy.

### Participation

The event was attended by 47 participants from the European Parliament, NGOs, farming representation, scientists, European Institutions, project funders and journalists.

### Further information

More information on the BIOGEA project can be found on the website: [www.biogea-project.eu](http://www.biogea-project.eu)

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