



EUROPE'S LIVING COUNTRYSIDE

promoting policies for sustainable rural development



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for a living planet[®]

From the wetlands of Southern Spain to the Carpathian mountains of Romania, rural areas make up 90% of the European Union's territory, and are home to half its population.

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Europe's rural areas contain a diverse range of habitats, biodiversity and landscapes, many of which depend on traditional farming practices for their existence. However, commercial pressures and a lack of adequate policy support are forcing these farmers to intensify or go out of business, putting Europe's rich natural heritage under threat.

For many years, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) encouraged the trend towards intensive farming practices, which can have a damaging

impact on the environment. Intensive livestock production, the use of pesticides and chemicals, deforestation, drainage of wetlands and soil erosion all lead to water and air pollution and to loss of landscape character, habitats and biodiversity. Although recent reforms of the CAP are a step in the right direction, more still needs to be done.

Rural communities are also suffering socially, as a lack of jobs and opportunities forces young people to move to towns and cities in search of work.



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A New Rural Development Policy for Europe

The EU is currently developing a new policy for rural development. This represents an important opportunity for Europe to develop and secure environmental services (such as flood plain management and sustainable biomass production), and reduce the impact of intensive farming (e.g. by training land managers to use more environmentally friendly practices).

The Europe's Living Countryside project will help to ensure that the new policy provides effective measures and sufficient funds to deliver the EU's objectives for sustainable rural development.

The Project

Working together across seven countries over three years, the project partners have analysed the effectiveness of current rural development policies and programmes. Having identified examples of good and bad practice, they propose practical solutions to how environmental and social priorities can best be integrated into rural development policy at the European level.

At national level, they are developing specific recommendations so that effective rural programmes, consultation processes and delivery mechanisms can be designed and implemented.

All too often, environmental concerns are seen as a barrier to competitiveness. With these examples and practical proposals, the project partners hope to demonstrate to those responsible for making and implementing rural development policy that a thriving rural economy, based on the sustainable use of natural resources, is an essential component of a healthy European economy.



The Project Partners

WWF WWF is one of the world's largest and most experienced independent conservation organisations, with almost 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 90 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by: conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption.

Website: www.panda.org/europe/agriculture

Land Use Policy Group (LUPG)

The LUPG comprises six GB statutory conservation, countryside and environment agencies: the Countryside Agency, Countryside Council for Wales, English Nature, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Environment Agency, working with the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. The LUPG aims to advise on policy matters of common concern related to agriculture, woodlands and other rural land uses. It seeks to improve understanding of the pros and cons of policy mechanisms related to land use, particularly farming and forestry; to develop a common view of desirable reforms to existing policies; and to promote these views.

Website: www.lupg.org.uk

Stichting Natuur en Milieu

SNM (the Netherlands Society for Nature and Environment) is an independent organization committed to securing a vigorous and healthy natural environment. We are helping to build a sustainable society in which nature, the environment and the landscape are treated with care and respect. We want a world in which we can enjoy nature close to home, a world in which we can breathe clean air and travel without harming the environment – and harming other people.

Website: www.snm.nl

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