



Summary report

Declining European biodiversity needs territorial and collaborative approach

On December 1 a broad mix of representatives of European institutions, farmers organisations and green NGO's gathered in Brussels to be informed by a European network of local 'green' farmers groups on how territorial cooperation could help address the challenges of declining biodiversity, landscape management and overall environmental sustainability of European agriculture. The event took place at the EESC Trèves Building under the heading: "Territorial cooperation for the provision of public goods under the new Common Agricultural Policy: better delivery, better value for money, less red tape".

There seems to be an overall consensus that the greening of the First Pillar of the CAP will do little to halt the loss of biodiversity and agricultural landscapes, to mitigate climate change or to improve soil, air and water quality. Some even fear that the greening measures will be counter-productive, in the sense that there is a risk that farmers will be discouraged to further engage in agri-environmental-climate actions under Pillar II of the CAP.

One positive aspect is the growing number of territorial groups of farmers across Europe engaged in bottom-up initiatives to combine economically viable agricultural production with enhanced (i.e. above and beyond legally required measures) environmental actions. These initiatives have demonstrated that they can improve the overall sustainability of farming and achieve better delivery of public goods such as landscape and biodiversity management at lower transaction costs. These farmers represent a cross section of the existing diversity of farming systems in Europe: organic and non-organic; intensive and extensive production; small farms and large(r) farms; dairy, beef and arable farmers and fruit and vegetable growers; farmers in highly productive regions and farmers in areas with natural constraints.

These farmers have – from practice – come to understand that performance can be greatly improved by working together at territorial level, instead of doing so on a strictly individual basis. Many of them also involve close collaboration with researchers and with local green NGOs.

Under Pillar II of the new CAP these groups of farmers (and other land users) can now act collectively as beneficiaries for European funding from the EAFRD budget. There are also opportunities – under Article 35 – to fund the creation of such territorial cooperation initiatives. Representatives of these initiatives from 12 Member States, and numerous other stakeholders (researchers, green NGOs, farmers organisations, government officials) have [gathered twice](#) over the last year to exchange experiences and best practices. Based on this they have formulated a [common manifesto](#) and a [common work programme](#).

These bottom-up territorial cooperation initiatives are now in the process to form a European network to implement the work programme, to develop further similar initiatives, to disseminate the concepts of coordinated and collaborative territorial action, and to propose adaptations of the CAP and other relevant European and national policies to support these initiatives. A [Steering Group](#) has been set up to further prepare this in the coming year. The Dutch Ministry of Economic Affairs has meanwhile confirmed to give further support in the next year.

The main objective of the meeting on 1 December was to show that across Europe a growing number of bottom-up initiatives of groups of farmers of all types and sizes – in collaboration with other land users, NGOs, researchers and policy makers – are working together to make agriculture more sustainable, with greater care for biodiversity and landscape management, through coordinated and collaborative territorial actions.

Based on practical experiences over recent years, they hold the view that coordinated and collaborative territorial actions will:

- substantially increase the effectiveness of policy instruments to promote sustainability of agriculture and the delivery of public goods
- achieve better delivery and therefore better value for tax payers' money
- reduce the administrative burden for both farmers and government institutions
- promote creative and innovative cooperation between these actions and other stakeholders (green NGOs, civil society organisations, researchers)
- unlock greater willingness of larger numbers of farmers to engage in actions above and beyond legal requirements to improve sustainability of their production and management of public goods.

Positive feedback from both green NGO's as well as farmers organisations during the meeting have strengthened the Steering Group's intentions to pursue these objectives over the coming years

The full report and other relating documents can be downloaded from the Groupe de Bruges' website: <http://groupebruges.eu/3rd-european-conference-materials-documents>.