



Cooperative nature conservation to benefit people -

Preserving and fostering our agricultural heritage landscapes with farmers, conservationists and political decision makers.

Imprint

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Foreword

The Biodiversity Strategy 2030¹ aims at maintaining and restoring biodiversity and habitat connectivity over the whole of Europe with the target of protecting 30% of Europe's land and maritime territory in 2030. New designations towards this target will help to complete the Natura 2000 network as the largest coherent network of nature conservation areas in the world. However, the 2020 'State of Nature' report² found that only 15% of EU protected habitats are in good conservation status. The most frequent pressures for habitat and species derive from agriculture, most of all intensification or abandonment of extensive agriculture. Consequently, farmers are important to achieving the goals of the Biodiversity Strategy.

The challenges for agriculture are not new and there are well-established organisations, which have been working on win-win situations between nature conservation and farming for more than 35 years in many European countries: Landcare Associations (LCAs). Their unique characteristic is the voluntary and equal collaboration of people engaged in farming, nature conservation and politics, known as the "cooperative approach". Their aim is to preserve the diversity of European landscapes,

which is closely linked to the improvement of biodiversity as well as the status of water, soil and climate and the sustainable development of rural economies.

This cooperative approach is much needed in Europe, while moving to a new agricultural model, which no longer focuses exclusively on the provision of food but also on the provision of public goods. This transition needs to be accelerated in the EU. Most of all by further reforming the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), so that it becomes the central instrument in achieving our nature conservation goals.

Landcare Associations will play a decisive role in this process. They advise farmers and land managers as equals on available funding options for "green" farming programmes and how to apply for them. However, they also support politicians by giving feedback from the ground back to policy makers and authorities. This mediator role allows LCAs to contribute to changes in policies, funding programmes and suggested measures, which translates into a greater ecological impact and better feasibility for implementing environmentally friendly measures on the

ground. Best-practice examples exist throughout Europe – from species-rich hay meadows in Romania to ecological water management in Spanish olive groves.

There have been exchanges of ideas and mutual visits between European LCAs for over 20 years. After presenting the concept of Landcare in a 2017 conference in Brussels, the European Union acknowledged the benefits of such a cooperative approach by supporting the establishment of a recognised network. June 7 2023 marks the official foundation of the network “LANDCARE EUROPE” as a non-profit organisation. LANDCARE EUROPE aims to support people who implement eco-friendly measures in agricultural areas by sharing knowledge among LCAs and their stakeholders as well as channelling feedback from LCAs in the Member States as recommendations to the EU’s policy makers. As a European network, it will spread the Landcare concept throughout Europe and support the foundation of Landcare Associations and umbrella organisations where they do not yet exist.

This brochure shows how Landcare Associations operate and presents the key success factors for cooperative conservation

benefitting people and nature. It gives a glimpse of the practical work from large-scale habitat restoration to regional production and direct marketing, a concept promoted in the EU’s Farm to Fork strategy. The concluding recommendations collected in exchanges between European LCAs underline how politicians and authorities can support and facilitate Landcare work.

This brochure is dedicated to all people in farming, nature conservation and politics who can identify with the cooperative approach.

Get inspired and join the European Landcare movement.

Yours sincerely,

Maria Noichl
MEP, Chairwoman DVL



1. How Landcare Associations operate

The concept of Landcare – the cooperation between farming and nature conservation has evolved in many countries, both in Europe and worldwide since the 1980s. European Landcare Associations (LCAs) vary in their organisation, size, scope and political involvement. However, their common cooperative nature conservation approach with farmers supports the people who preserve landscapes and public goods and services through their land management activities, thereby benefitting nature and the population. In contrast to farm advisory services or nature conservation organisations, LCAs operate:

Cooperatively – Landcare Associations collaborate very closely and as equals with people working in agriculture, nature conservation and politics. This approach enables mutual understanding, acceptance and trust. With this constellation, LCAs have shown new ways to mediate on conflicting topics between farming and nature conservation.

Voluntarily – Landcare Associations work with farmers and other stakeholders on a voluntary basis and offer advice on nature conservation measures in agriculture.

Regionally – Landcare Associations operate at regional level. Each region differs in ecological habitats, biodiversity, agricultural structure, political and cultural context. Rooted in the regions, LCAs can develop appropriate solutions that fit the situation.

Interdisciplinary – By bringing together experts from different disciplines, Landcare Associations develop complex, holistic concepts that address issues of agriculture and nature, including biodiversity, water, soil and climate.

Independently – As non-profit and non-governmental organisations (NPOs/NGOs) LCAs serve the public by ensuring the preservation of ecosystem goods and services that cultural heritage landscapes provide.

2. Working areas of Landcare Associations

As they operate at regional level, each Landcare Association has a slightly different focus, depending on the topics within their region. However, general key activities of LCAs are:

Supporting and advising famers and other land managers on available funding under the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and other financial instruments, which foster species conservation and habitat restoration.

Fostering new ways of creating income sources for agricultural value chains while preserving natural resources and biodiversity, such as direct marketing, landscape management, renewable energies, eco-tourism, participation in research and others.

Regenerating biodiverse and resilient ecosystems in and outside Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas in cooperation with farmers and other stakeholders, e.g. renaturation of water bodies, rewetting of peatlands, restoration and (re)connecting habitats.

Advising politicians and administrative bodies on necessary regulatory frameworks to protect and preserve our public goods biodiversity, water, soil and climate.

Raising public awareness on sustainable farming practices that provide reliable living conditions for farmers, nutritious produce as well as ecosystem goods and services for the public.



Photo credit: Legambiente Lombardia

3. About Landcare Europe

Landcare Europe is the network that brings together agriculture, nature conservation and communities for biodiversity, resilient ecosystems and quality of life in our European cultural heritage landscapes

What is our Mission?

Landcare Europe aims to preserve and restore biodiversity and resilience in our rich European landscapes in a contemporary, innovative and sustainable manner. The network connects European Landcare Associations that take a cooperative approach in working with farmers, local communities, nature conservation organisations, political authorities and decision makers. We foster a more nature-inclusive agricultural system, providing healthy food and other public goods and ecosystem services, which improve the quality of life for people and other living things.

What are our activities?

- ❶ We contribute to reaching the goals and targets of current environmental EU strategies and policies by consulting farmers and gathering feedback from national LCAs and preparing recommendations for EU policy makers.
- ❷ We support the foundation of new LCAs as well as the creation of national umbrella organisations in countries with existing LCAs by means of manuals and personal guidance.
- ❸ We foster the exchange of knowledge among LCAs by organising workshops, trainings and field visits as well as facilitating project collaboration.



Our goal is to grow the network to all European countries.

– Dr. Sylvie Rockel, Landcare Europe Network Coordinator

Photo credit:
Patricia Gorgonzola Pozo

Do you want to join us?

*Please contact:
info@landcare-europe.org*

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The current network (as of April 2023)

- connects 11 partners
- representing more than 250 regional LCAs in 11 European countries
- with more than 2000 employees,
- that collaborate with 29 countries on implementing projects, organising workshops with field visits and fostering the exchange of knowledge.

Landcare Europe consults and works with

- > 100,000 farmers
- > 1,000 citizens
- > 600 political stakeholders

We contribute to the following EU Targets & Strategies

- EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030
- Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
- Water Framework Directive (WFD)
- EU Soil Strategy 2030
- European Green Deal 2050
- EU Climate Adaptation Strategy
- Farm-to-Fork Strategy EU Nature Restoration Law

The network is open to all non-governmental (NGOs) & non-profit organisations who can identify with the mission and take a cooperative approach.

4. Key Factors for cooperative nature conservation benefitting people

Landcare Associations look for appropriate solutions that combine nature conservation and economic viability in agricultural landscapes with a cooperative approach. Landcare work covers a variety of aspects concerning the planning and implementation of measures, collaborations, communication and education as well as funding.

4.1 Successful planning and implementation of measures and projects with a cooperative approach

Creating a win-win between benefitting people and nature conservation: Examples of win-win situations are the strengthening of local rural value chains, the development of new agricultural niche products in the field of bioeconomy, the marketing of nature-friendly products or cooperations with eco-tourism providers.

Balancing nature conservation goals, feasibility and actual impact: Instead of demanding the maximum possible output for Landcare measures aiming to protect natural resources, LCAs focus on the practical implementation in the field. Their goal is to develop feasible solutions with tangible outcomes.

Setting the right focus: Regional Landcare Associations know about the pressing topics in their region. Before starting a project, they can assess whether its implementation is realistic, as they are in close contact with relevant key stakeholders such as mayors, administrative bodies, heads of farming associations and land managers.

Choosing a holistic approach: Although project funding is usually focussed on specific targets, such as reducing carbon dioxide emissions or protecting certain species, LCAs consider the entire (eco-)system and their functions, as there are strong connections and synergies between the natural resources biodiversity, water, soil and air.

Pooling different experts: A variety of partnerships is needed to develop successful solutions, including with practitioners, scientists, politicians, administration, private enterprises and NGOs. Furthermore, experts come from different thematic backgrounds, for instance farming, nature conservation, regional development, tourism, the food processing chain, marketing, engineering and others. In that way, it is possible to support decision makers who often don't have the expertise but the leverage and mandate to implement laws and measures.

Collaborating with local stakeholders: Landcare Associations involve local stakeholders with suitable knowledge in developing measures, because they are familiar with the specific regional context.

Organising field visits: Field visits are a very powerful tool, as they can demonstrate more than words alone. When LCAs want to implement new projects in their regions it is extremely helpful to invite decision makers and other involved parties to an excursion showcasing best practices. Seeing and experiencing first hand that new measures are possible helps to overcome potential doubts.

Organising activities that value role models: Sharing best-practice examples is a good way of highlighting farmers and land managers who function as role models. Their farms, land management and products can be brought into focus by means of prizes, videos or events such as a "scything championship".

Considering diversity and gender equality: Diversity is key to finding and spreading new solutions. The farmers with whom Landcare Associations work differ in backgrounds, age, gender as well as their agricultural enterprises. Experience from LCAs has shown that women were often more open towards new solutions and sharing them with others, e.g. in dealing with wolves or diversifying farms.

Including monitoring and quality control: Where funding regulations allow, projects include monitoring and quality control to evaluate implemented measures and their impact. Factual results can be better communicated to political decision makers and multipliers and allow meaningful inclusion in future projects and funding regulations.

4.2 Collaborating with our farmers

Communicating as equals: Our farmer have different agricultural businesses and personal backgrounds. Listening carefully to individual concerns, suggestions and the professional expertise allows Landcare Associations to include the farmers' perspective and to speak the same language.

Involving farmers in decision-making: Farmers have essential practical knowledge in agricultural measures and natural operational procedures on farms. Landcare Associations include their professional expertise in the decision-making processes. This is, for instance, reflected in the board composition of German LCAs, in which an equal distribution of farmers, conservationists and politicians ensures that decisions are taken together.

Finding economically viable solutions: When finding solutions to improve the ecological conditions in agricultural areas, it is important to keep in mind that farming land is not primarily dedicated to nature conservation, but to the production of food and other goods as part of the farming business. Therefore, changes in land management always need to be considered under economic aspects.

Advising on funding sources: Landcare Associations provide farmers with professional advice on good practices and conservation measures that foster species protection and habitat restoration. They also advise on funding programmes and how farmers can apply for them, such as agri-environmental measures within the Common Agricultural Policy but also beyond.

Guiding farmers: Farming is a very demanding and time-consuming job. To initiate change, LCAs approach the farmers and offer professional advice and qualified guidance. Many farmers are open to new ways of production and to conservation measures when they receive the necessary support.

Being aware of the various demands farmers need to meet: Farming is tightly regulated, for example regarding compliance with the conditionality and environmental regulations of the CAP. Moreover, farmers need to make decisions on long-term investments, keep up with new technologies and research findings as well as adapt their farms to changing conditions, all whilst staying economically viable.

Securing financial compensation for farmers: Farmers are key stakeholders in the work of LCAs. However, unlike nature conservation NGOs and other environmental or administrative bodies, farmers implement environmental measures in addition to their daily farm work. LCAs advise farmers on compensation, which they can apply for and support them in this process.

Adapting meetings and trainings to farming schedules: Farm work peaks around seed and harvest time with very long working days and often no weekends. In addition, farmers are usually busy before the deadline for submitting the CAP measures application form. Ideally, trainings, consultations and other target events are scheduled outside these peak times, e.g. in the winter months and/or in the evenings, when it is more convenient for farmers.

Photo credit: Roggenthin



4.3 Communicating and exchanging knowledge

Providing interdisciplinary exchange: Projects at the intersection of farming and nature conservation are very complex and require a different expertise, for instance on protected species, endangered ecosystems, but also economy and technology. LCAs bring together interdisciplinary stakeholders for exchange and engage with them as equals. Additionally, LCAs facilitate communication between these different groups to ensure that projects progress and new solutions to complex challenges can be found.

Organising interregional and international exchanges: Challenges within a biogeographical region are usually similar. Landcare Associations exchange ideas with different regions and countries to share knowledge on best practices and solutions, which they then pass on to their stakeholders.

Enabling farmer-to-farmer trainings: The best way to teach farmers new production methods is by their colleagues as they face similar challenges and use the same jargon.

Photo credit: Legambiente Lombardia



4.4 Securing funding

Applying for public funding: Funding for Landcare activities comes from the EU, the national and regional level and can be sourced from different sectors, such as environment, agriculture, regional development, tourism or economic development.

Acquiring private money: Cooperation with private companies and foundations can be an important tool, especially in countries with political and economic instability where public financial support is not secured. Mapping the interests of all involved stakeholders and subsequently looking for common interests is a useful analysis that can help to convince private investors to support Landcare initiatives.

Working with community resources: Many measures carried out by Landcare Associations are in the interest or even the duty of municipalities. Examples are the implementation of the European Water Framework Directive (WFD), flood protection, the support of local value chains or climate adaptation measures.

Therefore, communities can and should support Landcare projects with human, land and financial resources.

Aiming for permanent funding: Permanent funding of LCA activities has several benefits compared to project funding: It allows for flexibility, reduces administrative efforts, and thus fosters (thematic) project development and on-the-ground work. Additionally, permanent funding enables fixed work contracts, setting up and maintaining infrastructure, stability in staff and therefore long-term relationships with farmers and communities, built on trust and reliability.

Combining different funding sources: Different funding sources make it possible to work on various topics and secure the continuation of Landcare work in case some funding sources are discontinued.

4.5 Engaging in environmental education and public outreach activities

Utilizing media: Engaging with media channels including local print, television, radio or social media ensures consistent communication on Landcare work. Videos in particular have shown to be impactful as they reach a bigger audience and enable emotional engagement.

Designing information boards: Documenting on-site information about ongoing projects or involved farms is an inexpensive and efficient tool to educate the public. Using pictures, graphs and engaging facts helps people to better understand specific topics and challenges on their own terms.

Organising information and participation events: LCAs support in-person engagement through educational and volunteering activities. These are particularly useful for large-scale projects when public support within the community is critical for the success of the intervention.

Targeting students & children: LCAs reach out to schools and kindergartens to teach environmental awareness and sow seeds of change from an early age.

Photo credit: Landcare Europe





5. How Landcare Associations improve biodiversity and ecology with farmers – Examples from the field in Natura 2000 areas and beyond

According to the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030, the network of protected Natura 2000 areas should encompass 30% of EU maritime and terrestrial territory by 2030. In these areas, no deterioration of the ecological condition must take place and their ecological status should reach a “good” condition. Further objectives of the Biodiversity Strategy are the inclusion of at least 10% of the agricultural area under high-diversity landscape features and reducing the overall use and risk of chemical pesticides by 50%. Additionally, the Farm to Fork Strategy³ aims to reduce nutrient losses of soils by at least 50%, and the use of fertilisers by at least 20% by 2030.

Nevertheless, the 2020 State of the Nature report found that only 15% of habitats in the EU are in good condition. The report further states that agriculture-dependent habitats and species have the highest proportion of bad status assessment and further declining trends. Grassland habitats are in a particularly bad state and are further deteriorating.⁴ Action is required.

The implementation of nature conservation measures represents extra challenges for farmers in Natura 2000 areas, such as lower productivity and additional work and costs. However, certain conservation measures, e.g. protective soil tillage, also improve farming conditions such as soil quality and water retention and therefore benefit farmers in the long run. The following section outlines ways in, which Landcare Associations support farmers and land managers to perform an environmentally friendly agriculture in Natura 2000 areas and beyond. Each chapter highlights important aspects of the practical implementation, key factors in communication, useful cooperations and education, and finally explains the necessary regulatory and funding conditions.



Agroforestry systems are a great chance to introduce more flexibility and holistic approaches in the CAP.

- Conclusion from Landcare Europe Workshop in Jaén, Spain, March 2023

5.1 Improving biodiversity, water & soil through agroforestry systems

Challenge

One effect of the climate crisis is a different water availability over the year compared to the past: There is more precipitation during the winter months, and less during the summer, as well as a higher likelihood of heavy or constant rainfalls on the one hand and longer droughts on the other. Hence, we need to improve the natural water retention of agricultural landscapes, so that we can store water when it is available. The amount of infiltration and storage can be increased by creating landscapes that reduce surface runoff and erosion, such as diversified, mosaic-like landscapes with a high percentage of landscape features, trees, shrubs and grasslands with soils that are rich in humus.

The higher the proportion of humus in soils the more water can be stored.

Agroforestry systems - the combination of trees and arable lands and/or grassland - can contribute to these goals. They reduce erosion caused by wind and water, support the production of humus and have a positive effect on water availability in the system. Land management according to the "keyline design" aims at using water efficiently by farming the land according to the characteristics of its terrain and geology.

☯ Key success factors for improving biodiversity, water and soil

Designing an economic concept: Agroforestry and other land management systems must be economically attractive enough for farmers to adopt them. Modern agroforestry systems are not protected but constitute productive land, and therefore need a use and distribution concept to be sustainable.

Applying a mix of species: Monocultures are vulnerable to diseases and only provide habitats for certain species. A variety of tree, shrub and bush species will create a more resilient and ecologically valuable agroforestry system. Moreover, the mixture of, for instance, fast growing energy wood and slow growing trunk wood allows for fast effects against erosion and timber harvest on the one hand, and long-term investment in ecologically and economically valuable trees on the other.

Using natural regeneration: Apart from planning and targeted planting, it is recommended to allow the vegetation to grow naturally. This supports the growth of plants that are naturally adapted to the regional soil and climate conditions and also saves costs.

Adapting existing water management practices: In some cases, water management systems already existed in the past and can be reactivated, for example old irrigation channels. On the other hand, existing drainage systems may need to be adapted to cope with heavy rainfalls and potentially provide irrigation during prolonged droughts.

Adapting draining systems: Existing draining systems should be considered in the planning stages. Due to climate change and the need for more water during the summer months, they might not be necessary anymore or only to a lesser extent.

Continuous teaching of farmers: Farmers have been told for the last decades how to farm with artificial fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides. Moving towards holistic farming without these chemical substances requires the re-education of farmers over a longer period to teach them the complexity of such holistic farming methods. Methods from organic farming can also be applied in conventional farming.⁵

🗣️ Recommendations for regulations & funding

Allowing farmers flexibility and freedom: It is beneficial when regulations allow for experimentation with the implementation of new agroforestry systems and when administrative bodies are not mentally trapped in the old funding system.

Supporting mixed systems: Allowing for a mixture of different plant species within an agroforestry system must comply with CAP regulations. Moreover, incentives for a broader diversification should be set.

Including forests in farmland regulations: New, holistic concepts for jointly managing agricultural lands and forests should be considered by forestry and agricultural authorities. As grazing is not allowed in the forests in certain EU Member States within the CAP (e.g. in Croatia, Germany or Poland), it is, for instance, not possible to use animals as a forest fire prevention measure. Moreover, wood pastures are proven to be especially high in biodiversity.

Defining grasslands generously: A broad definition of permanent grassland by the Member States can allow funding for pastures with shrubs and trees within the CAP to be obtained, e.g. by defining that all grazed areas are grassland.

Balancing funding: There must be a balance between funding landscape elements and agroforestry systems, as landscape elements do not represent agricultural land and have special protection status according to the CAP definition while agroforestry systems can be eligible for funding as agricultural land and can be harvested.

Holistic approach needed: Carbon certificates and CAP measures for agroforestry systems need to be regulated to avoid double funding between CAP money and private money.





Figure 4: Landcare Europe





Case Study LIFE project Olivares Vivos 2015-2021 / Olivares Vivos+ 2021-2026

Partners & scope	University of Jaén, Experimental station of arid zones (EEZA-CSIC), Regional Government of Jaén, since 2021: ELGO-DIMITRA (Greece), D.R.E.AM. Italia, University of Évora, Juan Vilar Strategic Consultants S.L. Spanish Ornithological Society – SEO/BirdLife (coordinator) >60 municipalities >50 farmers, with farms 50 – 1500 ha in Spain, Italy and Greece
Goals	1. Find a solution for biodiversity loss and landscape deterioration. 2. Prepare a solution for the economic crisis in traditional olive groves
How it works	Step 1: Designing and scientifically certifying a model of olive growing that restores biodiversity. Step 2: Transforming biodiversity into profitability through a certification, which positions this added value as a recognised and profitable value in the olive oil market.
Examples of measures in agriculture	Sustainable management of the herbaceous cover, e.g. no mowing October – March, no use of herbicides. Landscape diversification measures, e.g. improving landscape elements by restoring unproductive areas in farms such as streams, rivers, wadis, gullies – mainly through revegetation. Placement of structures to help local fauna, e.g. nestboxes for birds, insects and bats.
Project activities	Bringing together agricultural farms, consultants, distributors and consumers. Monitoring of biodiversity with indicators for: birds, ants, pollinators, herbaceous plants and woody plants. Preparation of a certification standard for biodiversity in olive groves. Drafting recommendations to improve sectoral policies. Transferring the conservation model to other crops.
Further information	https://www.olivaresvivos.com/



Photo credit: Landcare Europe

5.2 Large-scale habitat restoration and innovative agricultural products as new sources of income

Challenge

The Biodiversity Strategy 2030 aims at maintaining and restoring biodiversity and habitat connectivity all over Europe. The re-naturation of deprived habitats such as dry mires, straightened rivers or scrubby grasslands can result in considerable changes in the landscape and landscape management. For the farmers, this task for the benefit of society brings a significant change in their farming practices as well as a change in the quality and quantity of the agricultural products, which might lead to a loss in productivity. Farmers need to adapt innovative production methods, potentially invest in new equipment and materials and commit long-term to different land management practices in order to preserve and regenerate ecologically valuable areas and remain economically viable. Habitat restoration can even become essential for their livelihood, for instance the rewetting of mires or adaptation to more resilient cultivars and breeds. This process can be facilitated by a new understanding of the farmer's profession: Farming for biodiversity and nature conservation. Additionally, these new services for our common goods need to be accepted as farming activities by politicians and society alike, and need to be made eligible for funding within the CAP system. Furthermore, large-scale restoration requires the coop-

eration of several farmers and land managers and therefore good coordination and a collective approach. Landcare Associations can support large-scale habitat restoration through their close contacts with farmers and their ability to combine ecological and economic requirements.

Key success factors for habitat restoration and innovative farming

Creating a plan on the landscape level: As a first step, a coherent vision for the regional development of the area in the next decades needs to be designed together with authorities and local interdisciplinary stakeholders in a participative approach. These can be Natura 2000 management plans. New concepts should be aware of existing strategies in the area, e.g. water retention concepts, climate adaption plans, tourism development concepts.

Including areas outside the Natura 2000 network: Efforts and resources for habitat restoration and species protection are not only relevant within Natura 2000 areas but also beyond. This is crucial for the connection of habitats: Species must be able to

roam and spread to different areas.

Prioritising measures: The implementation of measures should be prioritised for increased impact, i.e. measures that are easy, cheap and have a strong impact on improving the ecological situation are implemented first. The prioritisation can be done by performing a SWOT-analysis and creating a scoring system for the impacts of each method.

Scheduling adequate preparation time: Significant transformation in land management needs a long preparation time to meet administrative requirements, to identify and convince farmers and land managers, to create and adjust restoration and land management plans or to find replacement plots for land that cannot be used for production due to habitat restoration measures.

Creating innovative agricultural products: The change in quality and quantity of the agricultural products calls for new products and/or marketing concepts. For instance, late-mowed grass and thus nutrition-poor hay can be transformed into pellets that can be used as ecological animal bedding (see example).

Upcycling before energy production: Instead of generating energy, biomass and agricultural residues should be primarily transformed into products, e.g. furniture, insulation panels,

grass paper or pharmaceuticals. This process can create products with a higher economical value and prolong the life cycle of the source materials.

Providing farmers with equipment: New farming or production techniques often require new equipment. Changing land management practices can be encouraged by providing farmers with the necessary tools, e.g. reintroducing grazing in a shrubby area can be supported with fencing, water facilities and animal shelters.

Investing in adapted cultivars and breeds: Transformed habitats may require adapted breeds suitable for grazing the specific meadows. Examples are heck cattle or water buffalo in re-wetted areas, or old, regional breeds, such as the “Harz Red Cattle” that can feed on the nutrient-poor grasslands of the Harz uplands.

Creating new professional profiles for farmers: Farming on ecologically valuable land requires a new understanding of land management. Landcare Associations support this “farming for biodiversity” approach, e.g. Landcare Germany created the professional profile of a “Peatland Climate Farmer”, in which the identity as a farmer remains the baseline, but additional production branches such as climate protection or nature conservation facilitate the paradigm shift. This can provide a role model function for colleagues.

Teaching planning offices: It is important that technical planners and landscape architects consider ecological aspects, e.g. use of natural dynamics to renature rivers instead of planning artificial forming and fixing of river beds. Landcare Associations can advise them in the planning process.⁵

Recommendations for regulations & funding

Creating specific agri-environmental schemes: The restoration of habitats and/or the protection of species usually require changes in land management. LCAs help to create specific agri-environmental schemes, adapted to local context and feasible to implement, e.g. for the protection of the aquatic warbler in Lithuania (see example).

Enabling collective approaches: Large-scale renaturation projects affect a large number of farmers. Therefore, using a collective approach that enables the shared application for CAP funding is a useful approach to reduce administrative costs and risks for individual farmers. Such a collective approach has been established successfully in the Netherlands, for example.

Supporting innovative farming practices: Innovative ways of farming that are still less known and widespread should be

backed up by the responsible authorities, such as in CAP administration, nature conservation or veterinarians. They should ensure that farmers will not get sanctioned.

Accelerating the shift: Initial funding is required to upscale niche products to an economical scale. Public subsidies should be available for the start of production and processing, e.g. for planting, quality management, sorting, special machinery development and investment, funding of building process lines in industry until the economic turning point is reached.

Providing a network of good advisors: When farmers understand why certain measures are ecologically important it is easier to implement green measures. In order to be able to adequately advise farmers, good consultants are needed who have knowledge in the field of nature conservation, farming, regulations and funding plus the corresponding soft skills to communicate their knowledge accordingly. LCAs provide such consultants.

Photo credit: SICONA





Photo credit: Heuheinrich



Case Study LIFE Baltic Aquatic Warbler 2010-2015 / LIFE Magni Ducatus Acrola 2016-2026

Partners & scope	Baltic Environmental Forum (coordinator) and others, Ca. 100 farmers in the in the regional park and Natura 2000 site Nemunas delta, Lithuania + further regions in Lithuania, Poland & Belarus
Goals	Restoring habitats on agricultural land for Europe's rarest songbird, the aquatic warbler, while securing its function as farm land.
How it works	Aquatic warbler singing male counts are performed in the first decade of June. Plots observed with singing males will then be extracted for agri-environmental schemes. Creation of a specific agri-environmental scheme for the conservation of the aquatic warbler differentiated for (1) natural and semi-natural meadows and (2) wetlands.
Examples of measures in agriculture	Late mowing after August 15 th if birds are present and somewhat earlier (starting from 1 st of July) if birds are absent. Mowing to be completed by 1 st of October. Baled or stacked biomass may be left for winter, but should be removed from the field by 1 st of March; Extensive grazing (1 SLU/ha) what is allowed until 15 th of October
Project activities	Habitat restoration – removing of bushes and reeds Water level management: Building of an additional sluice to create different water levels to provide additional habitats for the aquatic warbler. Creation of an agri-environmental scheme Purchase of a grass pelleting machine to produce bedding for horses from late-mowed hay and marketing of the product Engaging with farmers, e.g. organisation of a scything championship
Finances	LIFE project, contribution of the Ministry of Environment of the Republic of Lithuania
Further information	https://meldine.lt/en/

5.3 Regional production and direct marketing from farm to fork

🔊 Challenge

Agricultural production that included nature conservation measures such as products from free-range animals or fruit from meadow orchards can usually not economically compete with intensively farmed products. These more environmentally friendly products therefore come at a higher cost and cannot simply be sold at world market price. They need rather to be distributed via direct marketing and regional value chains. The development of a regional brand can help these products to reach more customers by ensuring reliable production standards and quality.

However, creating a regional brand and direct marketing of products are labour- and cost-intensive processes and require the long-term engagement of the public. After launching a regional brand, the products must be constantly promoted, an activity that LCAs can actively support.

👁️ Key success factors for regional production and direct marketing

Forming an effective expert group: When the local context is analysed and a product niche identified, LCAs use the local expertise for product development and monitoring. A marketing expert is needed to develop a good concept, a communication and marketing strategy. Health, environmental and legal experts can support the marketing message and credibility as well as ensure compliance with laws.

Aiming for variety: Working with a variety of farmers and other local stakeholders to develop a brand allows growth in several branches. The Upper Palatinate brand “Juradistl” (Jurassic thistle) from the LCA Neumarkt i.d. Oberpfalz started by marketing lamb meat and has now extended its regional brand to a range of products including fruit juice from orchards and honey in addition to offering services in education, nature and tourism.

Organising regional events: Markets, excursions and tastings are a good way to introduce the products to the public as they result in memorable events and positive associations.

Creating meaningful quality criteria: For successful marketing it is important to ensure quality control of your branded products through defined meaningful criteria that are regularly checked and communicated. These criteria and monitoring results should be made available to the public. Examples are product origin, farming methods, health, environment and biodiversity, processing, waste, energy consumption and transport.

Working with storytelling: Landcare Associations have had good experience with storytelling when marketing products, using authentic personal stories that consumers can relate to. They create emotions, trust, identity and a connection to the product.

Forming a cooperative or collaboration: Connecting producers to share equipment, facilities, know-how and marketing efforts saves resources. With organised marketing, Landcare Associations reach more people than farmers will with individual marketing. Collective approaches have proven to work well in many countries.

Building local product chains: LCA engages with all kinds of local stakeholders to build trust, local production chains and marketing support, e.g. hotels, restaurants, bakeries, butchers, local markets & vendors, schools, kindergartens, cafeterias, touristic locations.⁵

Recommendations for regulations & funding

Supporting farmers with direct marketing: As their primary focus is on the production of food, there is a need to fund organisational structures, for instance regional managers who coordinate the development of regional brands as well as the collection and distribution of products.

Funding through tourism and economic development: Offices for economic development and the tourism sector should support the establishment of regional distribution chains.

Regulations for public canteens: Public institutions should set criteria for their canteens in terms of origin and quality of the groceries used.

Raising public awareness: Landcare Associations create consciousness for local environment, agricultural products, seasonal availability, importance of maintaining biodiversity rich grasslands with extensive grazing and buying local.







Case Study Regional marketing project “Natur généissen” / “Savouring nature”, Luxembourg

Duration	Since 2012 - today
Partners & scope	SICONA (initiator), Naturpark Our, Naturpark Öwersauer, Natur- a Geopark Mëlldall 38 farmers: 6 conventional, 3 in transition to organic farming and 29 certified organic farmers 24 municipalities - 9,500 meals per day
Goals	1. Creating a higher demand for agricultural products issued from environmentally sound land use inside and outside NATURA 2000 sites 2. Healthy and sustainable diet in the childcare centres of the member communities
How it works	Creating supply relationships between producers and buyers: Farmers (producers) meet Natur généissen criteria and supply agricultural products Childcare centres (buyers) respect the Natur généissen specifications and demand high quality products (from Natur généissen producers) & further regional, organic and fairtrade products and use min. 30% organic products, e.g. beef only from Luxembourg, used “From nose to tail”
Examples of measures in agriculture	Participation in certain agri-environmental schemes: Diversity of crops, rotation, nutrient, humus and energy balances, fertilization, water protection, crop protection strategy Conservation of existing habitats & biotopes and restauration (e.g. by SICONA) 5% of farmland have to be structural elements and natural surfaces, of which at least 3% have to be structural elements, no genetically modified feed
Project activities	Define and keep production criteria up-to-date in accordance with CAP regulations Regular control and evaluation of food purchasing Continued trainings for cooks, educational staff and farmers
Finances	Collaboration with municipalities and the state of Luxembourg (e.g. subsidization of practical conservation work a. o.), Synergies through projects of the Ministry of Environment (e.g. farmland birds project)
Further information	https://sicona.lu/projekte/natur-geneissen/



Photo credit: SICONA

5.4 Supporting farmers and nature with livestock protection

🔊 Challenge

Grazing animals play a crucial role in maintaining extensive grasslands and their biodiversity, such as species-rich swards. This is especially true in areas where mechanical cutting is not appropriate or not possible due to the steepness, stoniness or wetness of the terrain. Large carnivores such as wolves, lynx or bears are essential parts of functioning eco-systems as they are apex predators. For instance, wolves naturally regulate deer and therefore avoid extensive browsing of undergrowth in forests. Nevertheless, livestock, especially small farm animals such as sheep, goats and young cattle, can fall prey to large carnivores. This situation brings new challenges and tasks for shepherds and farmers with livestock which require knowledge, time and resources. Consequently, systematic support for farmers concerning prevention and compensation measures is essential.

👁️ Key success factors for supporting farmers and nature with livestock protection

Securing human presence: Apart from measures such as fencing and guard dogs, the human presence of shepherds has proven to be essential.

Being quick about prevention measures: Ideally, prevention measures will be realised before the arrival of new predators in a new territory, e.g. wolves, to avoid that the large carnivores will specialise in hunting livestock.

Applying independent monitoring: It is crucial to guarantee independent and transparent monitoring of the numbers of large carnivores and their activities. This should be implemented by independent experts, e.g. foresters, rather than by hunters who have their own, conflicting interests.

Being aware of the emotional component: It is essential to acknowledge that being confronted with carcasses and / or severely wounded animals has a strong emotional effect and/or can even cause trauma.

Working with unbiased, competent consultants: Independent expert advice team, e.g. authorized advisers for carnivore prevention measures or veterinaries, have proven to be effective measures, as they are respected, guarantee consistency and have a permanent presence on farms.

Offering training for farmers: Prevention measures, such as fences and guard dogs, only have a protective effect if installed and maintained correctly. This often means significant additional work and expense for the farmers. Besides, knowledge amongst farmers in regions with a long absence of large carnivores is often low, even for basic themes such as correctly installed grounding for electric fences. Therefore support, training and practical assistance is crucial.⁵

Targeting tourists and locals: Informing and educating tourists and locals, for instance in not feeding bears or on how to face guard dogs, is part of the solution. A possibility to address this target group is to advise municipalities first.

Including hobby farmers: More awareness raising and advice on prevention measures has proven to be essential, also for hobby farmers with few animals.

Recommendations for regulations & funding

Enable comprehensive prevention measures: Prevention and compensation measures need to be available in a whole region and must not be attached to specific zones as is the case in Bavaria, Germany, as animals can cross large distances and exploit new territories faster than the administration can follow.

Fund maintenance of infrastructure: It is essential that not just the set up, but also the maintenance of fences is funded. According to the CAP, this is possible. Nevertheless, it is not implemented everywhere.

Funding advice: It is essential to not only fund prevention measures such as fences or getting guard dogs. Rather, it is necessary to also provide advice on the adequate implementation of the measures.

Simplify regulations: Prevention and compensation measures need to be simplified to work at a large scale. The burden of proof should not be on the side of farmers, and reporting mechanisms need to be direct and simple, not attached to strict deadlines. A shepherd cannot leave its heard on the alp unprotected to report a predator kill in person within 24 hours.

“There is common agreement amongst experts that preventive measures generally work, but the success depends on the willingness of different institutions and people to implement them correctly. Landcare Associations can support this process with their consulting activities.”

– Conclusion Landcare Europe Workshop, Romania July 2022



Photo credit: Roggenthin



Case Study “Livestock protection for grazing animals: experiences and training courses for practitioners on possible solutions for consulting shepherds”, Germany

Original title: „Herdenschutz in der Weidetierhaltung: Praxisgerechte Aufbereitung von Erfahrungen und Schulungen zu Lösungsansätzen für eine Beratung von Landwirtschaftsbetrieben“

Duration	1.11.2020 – 31.10.2023
Partners & scope	Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege (DVL) e.V. / Landcare Germany
Goal	Support farmers and consultants with practical information on livestock protection measures
How it works	Training courses for livestock farmers and consultants Selection of flagship farms that have already successfully established protection measures and want to pass on their experiences Implementation of model projects on selected aspects of livestock protection measures Public relations work and publications with information for livestock farmers and specialists
Examples of training materials and courses for livestock farmers and consultants	Correct use of electric fences Funding mechanisms and insurance Installation of protection against digging under fences Keeping electric fences free of vegetation Fencing ditches and rivers Prevention measures for cattle
Finances	Bundesministerium für Ernährung und Landwirtschaft (BMEL) project sponsoring via Bundesanstalt für Landwirtschaft und Ernährung (BLE).
Further information	https://www.herdenschutz.dvl.org/ (in German)



6. Recommendations for necessary CAP funding and regulations to facilitate the work of Landcare Associations

EU and national regulations and funding systems must set an adequate framework for the successful implementation of cooperative nature protection that benefits people and landscapes. This includes the eligibility of Landcare Associations and their on-the-ground work for different funding sources.

6.1 Recommended changes in general funding regulations to support Landcare Associations

Support for founding initiatives: The EU and its Member States should support the founding of new LCAs, especially in countries and regions without existing structures for organisations that bridge the gap between farming and nature conservation.

Support for maintenance: Existing LCAs need core funding to maintain their infrastructure and work that cannot be funded via projects. This includes applying for new project funding, strategic thematic development, policy consulting, participation in networking events as well as the necessary research and preparation that comes with this maintenance work. Permanent funding of LCA activities has several benefits compared to project funding: It allows for flexibility, reduces administrative efforts,

and thus fosters (thematic) project development and fieldwork.

Funding of staff costs: Permanent or long-term funding of Landcare managers enables fixed work contracts, continuity in staff and therefore long-term relationships with farmers and communities, built on trust and reliability.

Support for Landcare umbrella organisations: The EU and the Member States should support the foundation and maintenance of Landcare umbrella organisations as they help with coordinating national and regional efforts towards the implementation of European goals and strategies such as the Biodiversity Strategy 2030, the Water Framework Directive or the Farm to Fork Strategy.

Adapting funding programmes: Contents of funding programmes must better address the need for managing Natura 2000 areas and nature conservation goals, for instance funding of special machines and vehicles.

No co-financing: Projects that foster the restoration and maintenance of Natura 2000 areas and protect common goods should

be fully financed, without the need for co-financing projects which is a huge bureaucratic obstacle.

LCAs as “active farmers” in the CAP: LCAs should be considered “active farmers” within the CAP regulations to make them eligible for certain funding programmes.

6.2 Recommendations for CAP regulations at EU and national level to support Landcare work

Focussing CAP on environmental targets: The agricultural sector is the biggest contributor to air and water pollution, soil contamination, CO₂-emissions and biodiversity loss in the EU. Therefore, the next CAP must not be based or focus on a current crisis, such as the geopolitical conflict in the Ukraine, as is suggested by some interest groups. Such a predominantly economic focus undermines environmental-friendly farming regulations and the overall goals of conservation strategies. Representing the biggest EU-budget, the CAP must include support for potential future national, EU and global crises, ensuring that the measures still contribute to the EU’s long-term environmental targets.

Obliging Member States: In general, the CAP sets good framework conditions at EU level for nature conservation in agriculture. The critical point is the national legal or practical imple-

mentation. To foster compliance, the EU should therefore oblige Member States to implement certain measures and fund them adequately in their CAP national strategic plans.

Distributing public money for public goods: Public goods such as ecosystem services without “productive” and financial output should be paid by public money within pillar 1, as suggested in the “Public Goods Bonus” by DVL. Nature conservation and climate protection measures should become additional income sources for farmers apart from the production of food or biomass for energy.

Creating meaningful incentives: Setting financial incentives is essential to foster the implementation of good practices in farming. It is not sufficient to simply compensate for the additional efforts and reduced productivity through pillar 2. Instead,

economic incentives that encourage the implementation of nature-inclusive farming practices must be introduced.

Support for traditional farming: It is crucial to acknowledge the importance of traditional farming practices for nature conservation in agriculture. However, the current CAP discriminates against traditional farming due to a lack of financial and regulatory support. The next CAP should support nature-inclusive traditional practices because they are part of the solution to improve biodiversity, soil, water and air quality.

Support for small farms: Small farms generally have a positive effect on biodiversity by contributing to a variety of mosaic-like agricultural landscapes. Unfortunately, they are often not economically profitable. Many can only afford part-time farming and must generate more income elsewhere or are taken over by large agricultural businesses. Consequently, the size of farms has been growing whilst the number of farmers in the EU is declining. The CAP should set incentives to reverse this trend by supporting small farms as well as should ease the burden to apply for CAP measures, for instance by simplifying bureaucracy and funding for organisations (e.g. LCAs) who advise these farmers on agri-environmental measures and how to apply for them.

Securing eligibility for permanent grassland funding: Permanent grasslands provide important ecosystem services as they

improve water retention and the storage of CO₂ in the soil, and provide a habitat for flora and fauna. There is a need for continuous and unlimited eligibility for permanent grasslands and their cultivation even if their management only pursues nature conservation purposes. The definition of permanent pasture should allow for the funding of pastures with shrubs and trees within the CAP.

Support for collective approaches: There are successful examples of collective approaches to improve ecosystem services (biodiversity, soil, water, climate) e.g. in the Netherlands and Germany, which should be supported by the CAP.

Using results-based payments schemes: Greater effect for nature conservation, empowerment of farmers; they know what they get paid for and can actively work towards it.

Simplify regulations: The administration of conservation measures needs to be simplified in order to lower obstacles and work at a large scale. Measures should enable flexible and adaptive management. Simple and transparent bureaucracy mechanisms allow for more time and energy to implement holistic land management practices and try new methods.

Funding of training and consulting: The training and education of farmers by supporting third parties needs to be funded as it requires a great deal of human resources. Apart from state insti-

tutions, NGOs and Landcare organisations should be acknowledged in the national strategic plans for consulting on the CAP, as is the case in Croatia.

Analysing regional context: EU or national measures must always be adapted to the local situation. Factors such as social context, economic situation, natural areas, etc. usually have an impact on the practical implementation. Therefore, it is inevitable to include local experts such as LCAs in committees for the further development of the CAP.

Evaluating and reviewing strategic plans: The CAP national strategic plans should have a mid-term evaluation, so that necessary adaptations can be set and implemented, and money is used in an efficient way. Within the CAP period, 3 reviews of the strategic plans are allowed and should be used by the Member States, if necessary.

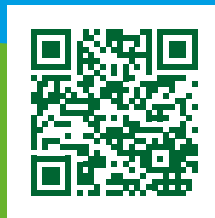
Incorporating project findings: The results of projects, such as LIFE or Horizon, should be used in the preparation of regulations and funding programmes.

Including audits: It is essential that reports by the European Court of Auditors on the ineffectiveness of the CAP are discussed in the European Parliament and taken into consideration for the design of the next period.



Endnotes

- ¹ EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2020): EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Bringing nature back into our lives. [EUR-Lex - 52011DC0244 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)
- ² EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2020): The state of nature in the European Union. Report on the status and trends in 2013 - 2018 of species and habitat types protected by the Birds and Habitats Directives, <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TX-T/?uri=COM:2020:635:FIN>
- ³ EUROPEAN COMMISSION (2020): A Farm to Fork Strategy for a fair, healthy and environmentally-friendly food system. [EUR-Lex - 52020DC0381 - EN - EUR-Lex \(europa.eu\)](#)
- ⁴ EEA (2020): The state of Nature in the EU. Results from reporting under the nature directives 2013-2018, p.3, https://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/state-of-nature-in-the-eu-2020/at_download/file
- ⁵ more key success factors can be found on www.landcare-europe.org



www.landcare-europe.org