

Landcare Europe: a new European network for a cooperative approach between agriculture and nature conservation

INTERNATIONAL Founded in 2023, the umbrella organisation Landcare Europe opens a new path to promote and support cooperation between various stakeholders in EU countries, in order to preserve the diversity of European agricultural landscapes and their biodiversity.



→ Panel discussion during the presentation of Landcare Europe's recommendations for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to the European Parliament on June 7, 2023.
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Why create another organisation? Aren't there already enough stakeholders on the subject at the European level? The initiators of this network believed that this was not the case and, on the contrary, that an important niche in the European socio-system was in fact not occupied and was missing. This article looks back at the foundation of Landcare Europe and its rights to exist, and offers a concrete example of an achievement in Spain that clearly illustrates the nature of the action it has begun to develop.

It all started in Germany...

This initiative came from a wise man well-versed in European affairs: Mr. Josef Göppel (1950-2022), a forester by training and profession, who became a member of the German Bundestag between 2002 and 2017. Convinced that it was vital for human activity, particularly forestry and agriculture, to be compatible with nature conservation, he also believed that to achieve this objective, one of the most effective methods was for those involved in nature conservation, agriculture and

local communities to engage in concrete dialogue around pragmatic solutions.

It was in this spirit that he created the DVL (Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege), the German Landcare Association, which currently comprises more than 200 [editorial change to the translation] independent but federated "Landcare" associations, each operating at the level of German cantons. They all aim to promote the reconciliation of agriculture and environmental issues through support, advice, and financial assistance through consultation to farmers. Their governance is based on parity between farmers, representatives of nature conservation associations, and local authorities. Some 40,000 farmers are currently involved in projects and benefit from financial aid, which can come from various sources of funding available in Germany as well as from European funds and help from local authorities.

An enlargement on a European scale

Josef Göppel had identified in France the Conservatories of natural spaces (FCEN) as a network of associations pursuing the same goals as him with his Landcare Associations in Germany. They followed the same approach of tripartite dialogue

and pragmatism. Having taken up his pilgrimage, he suggested that they join the informal European network that he had started to build in 2007 under the name of "Landcare Europe".

A pilot project funded by the European Union (EU) was launched in 2021, further fleshing out the idea of raising awareness and recognition on a European scale for concrete initiatives of successful cooperation between stakeholders in nature conservation, agriculture and territories.

Thus, between March 2022 and April 2023, four workshops in Italy, Romania, Spain and Lithuania enabled rich and constructive exchanges and reflections which led to the publication:

- key factors for preserving European nature and agricultural landscapes;
- main recommendations for decision-makers;
- a brochure presenting the Landcare Europe project and summarizing the discussions.

Consolidation and expansion of the network

The official foundation of the formal Landcare Europe network took place in Brussels on the 7th of June 2023 in the European Parliament. Founding members, from 11 EU countries (Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, Spain, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Romania) signed the

association's statutes. France is represented by the Federation for Conservatories Natural Space (FCEN).

This new European network continues the objective of the initial informal network, namely to strengthen a cooperative and pragmatic approach between agriculture, nature conservation, and local authorities as well as other stakeholders across Europe, in order to preserve the diversity of European agricultural landscapes and the biodiversity they support. Characteristic European landscapes are indeed unique and often marked by agriculture. They represent a true shared heritage.

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