EU policies for wood pastures: what’s right? what’s wrong?

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Natura 2000 habitats and sites, semi-natural ecosystems = Biodiversity 2020, Targets 1, 2 and 3

Actively farmed permanent pastures = CAP Pillar 1 direct payments and Pillar 2 measures
Two key areas of policy:

- Biodiversity 2020 + Natura 2000
- Common Agricultural Policy (Pillars 1+2)

They should work together for wood pastures…

on paper AND in practice on the ground

but they don’t
Biodiversity 2020 Target 1 – conservation status of Natura 2000 habitats and species

- Natura 2000 recognises 2 types of wood pasture (Boreal wooded meadows and Mediterranean dehesas with evergreen oaks)
- But NOT the many other types, including the many Natura forests with tradition of grazing
- More explicit guidance is needed on Natura forest habitats that benefit from grazing
- Very limited data on the conservation status of wood pastures e.g. no monitoring of dehesas (our most extensive wood pasture)
Biodiversity 2020 Target 2 – restoration of ecosystems and their services

• What does this Target mean for the millions of hectares of wood pastures?
• There are no quantified objectives for wood pastures in relation to Target 2
• Insufficient data on extent and condition of these ecosystems (as for semi-natural pastures generally)
• So how will we know if Biodiversity 2020 Targets are achieved?
Lack of comprehensive data, but reports from Member States make clear the main threats to Natura 2000 farmland habitats

- Decline of extensive pastoral systems
- Inappropriate pastoral management

Fortunately to address such problems we have the CAP (now “green”, focused on natural resources…)

Pillar 1 direct payments + Pillar 2 measures to influence management practices
CAP Pillar 1 Direct Payments

• Before 2005, no problems for wood pastures as CAP support was for livestock on all types of pasture

• Now we have direct payments per hectare for all farmers, with 3 basic conditions:
  – Land must be eligible (permanent grassland, arable land, or permanent crop land)
  – Land must be either in farm production or under suitable maintenance activity
  – Compliance with rules e.g. cross-compliance
Without direct payments, pastures with trees and shrubs will be abandoned. They should be a priority for the “green” CAP

- Since 2014, Permanent Grasslands (PG) can include any amount of trees and shrubs if these are accessible to grazing – good.
- So wood pastures are PG and automatically eligible for direct payments, if there is proven farming or maintenance activity?
- NO, THEY FACE BUREAUCRATIC BARRIERS AND DISCRIMINATION
In theory all trees and shrubs CAN be counted as part of the pasture’s eligible area

• BUT they must be “accessible for grazing for their full area” – is this rule *practical*?

• And AGRI says that leaves or fruits not eaten *directly* from the tree do not count as “accessible for grazing”
If trees are not ALL fully accessible to grazing, then there are limits or deductions

- A maximum number of 100 trees per hectare. If there are 101 trees, the pasture is not eligible
- Or a “pro-rata” reduction in the pasture’s eligibility, in proportion to the coverage of trees
- What policy aims do these limits serve IF there is proven farming or maintenance activity?
- …and IF the trees and shrubs have clear agronomic and environmental functions, and do not impede farming?
If trees/shrubs cover more than 50% of a pasture’s area, the only way the land can be eligible for direct payments is:

- Special category of Permanent Grassland with Established Local Practices PG-ELP
- Natura 2000 habitats can be designated as PG-ELP to ensure their eligibility
- And other wood pastures with traditional uses
- They must be justified to the Commission and identified on the Land Parcel Identification System
- Why this “special” treatment? So they can be targeted with higher payments? No…
If a wood pasture is in active farming use, why apply more restrictions and rules than to grass pastures, or to arable land?
CAP Pillar 2

• Agri-environment-climate + Natura 2000 payments
  – Very inconsistent use

• Payments for establishing agro-forestry systems
  – Ironic that new systems are grant-aided but existing systems are penalised

• Afforestation of farmland
  – Highly subsidised AND receives Pillar 1 payments. It is clearly the preferred option for marginal pastoral land
Biodiversity 2020 Target 3 – maximise farmland under CAP biodiversity measures

- Greening is irrelevant for wood pastures
- Pillar 2 implementation is inconsistent
- …and weak reporting makes it impossible to know how much land is under such measures
- No data specifically for wood pastures, or even for semi-natural pastures in general
- CAP monitoring indicators tell us almost nothing about trends in habitats and ecosystems and their use
Andalusian blue butterfly

Main threats:
- Abandonment
- Afforestation
Conclusions

- Massive bureaucratic effort and cost to “micro-control” numbers of trees/shrubs on each parcel of land, and to reduce eligibility of wood pastures
- Totally inadequate resources for monitoring and evaluation of the macro effects of CAP policy instruments on wood pastures
- ...and of trends in wood pastures and other semi-natural pastures from perspective of habitats and ecosystems
- EU policy “cannot see the wood for the trees”