La Cañada

Newsletter of the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism

No 28 Summer 2012
ISSN 1027-2070

Sheep grazing a fire break in Spain.
See article page 6.

Rubén García

'Greening' the CAP for permanent pastures – why the Commission's proposals need an urgent review

This CAP reform is quite different from previous reforms. The European Parliament now has a far bigger role to play, thanks to the changes brought in by the Lisbon Treaty. The new co-decision procedure means that neither the Council nor the European Parliament may adopt legislation without the other's assent.

In practical terms for CAP reform, it means that we are now going through several months of feverish activity while the Parliament picks through all the legislative proposals made by the Commission in October last year. The key Parliamentary committee is COMAGRI; this is the group of MEPs that is empowered to propose amendments to the CAP legislative proposals. The environment committee COMENV also gives its opinion. After the summer break, the Parliament, Council and the Commission services will have to work out compromise texts, which then have to be voted on by Council and Parliament.

Cioloş's 'Big Idea'

Another aspect that makes this reform different is the Commissioner's 'Big Idea' for making the CAP, especially Pillar 1, greener. In principle, EFNCP supports 'greening' of the First Pillar. We have always taken the view that making Pillar 1 more supportive of HNV farming is as important as using Pillar 2 measures such as agri-environment, not least because the Pillar 1 system reaches the great majority of farmers, whereas more administratively complex systems, such as agri-environment, often fail to engage with a significant number (e.g. older and/or less informed farmers, smaller farms, etc.).

But the Commissioner's approach to Pillar 1 greening is completely different from ours (see also *LC27*). EFNCP has proposed a system of targeted top-up payments, offering farmers a simple premium for things on their farm that are of particular environmental value, such as semi-natural pastures and landscape

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features (e.g. Ecological Focus Areas, or EFA in the new CAP parlance).

The Commission's approach, as expressed by Dacian Cioloş in many speeches, is for all EU farmers to be presented with a common set of 'greening' rules, which a farmer must follow if he wants Pillar 1 support (or part of it – this aspect is still a bit fuzzy). Arable crops have one set of rules, permanent crops another, and a third set of rules would apply to *all* permanent pastures.

Can such an approach be right? How can it work? Can the technocrats come up with a set of standardised rules that are suitable for all EU farmland (in its wonderful diversity), achieving environmental benefits across the Continent without any significant perverse effects on the environment or on farming?

How is this approach really any different from cross-compliance? Wouldn't it have been more straightforward simply to improve the current cross-compliance package, as some authorities have suggested, instead of pretending that 'greening' is somehow a great policy innovation?

Permanent pastures greening

EFNCP believes that the EC's proposed approach to CAP greening (and Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition, GAEC) for permanent pastures[1] (PP) is fundamentally flawed. It is unlikely to deliver significant environmental benefits, while creating heavy bureaucracy and unnecessary restrictions for farmers. In this article, we set out some of the issues arising, and propose what we consider a better system based on the differentiation of broad types of PP.

The Commission proposes blanket rules ('one size fits all') for all PP, ranging from the most agronomically intensive and productive to the most extensive and environmentally valuable – we believe that this cannot be made to work. The problems with a 'blanket rules' approach become obvious as soon as you start to think of different farming situations and what environmental outcomes you might want to achieve in each.

Different rules for different pastures

The EC's proposed greening mechanism says to farmers 'to receive the greening payment you must keep the same amount of all PP on your holding'. But it says nothing about how PP are *managed*, which is the most important factor for the environment.

Fossilising the extent and/or location of all PP gives absolutely no guarantee of environmental benefits. In fact there could be enormous environmental losses through the re-seeding and intensification of older, more environmentally valuable pastures. Not only would this be compatible with the EC's proposed greening rules and GAEC, but the changes would go unnoticed. The EC's greening approach seems to give very little consideration to environmental outcomes, which should be the whole purpose of greening mechanisms.

As currently defined, PP covers an immense range of farmland types (see *LC26)*. At one extreme of PP are intensively-managed, sown crops of grass, lucerne or sainfoin that may be heavily fertilised, in some regions irrigated, and re-sown within 5 years, or sometimes more frequently.

At the other extreme are unsown, semi-natural pastures such as moorland, alpine grassland or dehesas, usually under highly extensive grazing. We believe it makes no sense to introduce a standard set of rules for such highly diverse types of farmland, across the EU, and with minimal consideration of options or environmental and agronomic outcomes.

There is no environmental benefit in 'freezing' the area of the most intensively used PP (reseeded within 5 years), nor in keeping it permanently on the same parcels. It should cease to be counted as PP, and be re-classified as temporary grassland within the arable land category. This is already the approach in some countries, but not in all, and not at EU level (PP is simply grass that is 'out of the arable rotation').

The most useful greening option for this land is the requirement to have a minimum proportion of the land under Ecological Focus Areas (EFA), as for arable crops (the rationale is the same).

This change is needed, but it still leaves a very wide range of pasture types as PP. Much PP will be re-seeded when the productivity of the sward declines, maybe after 6-8 years, or maybe after only 10-15 years (just for example), depending on many local factors. It might be heavily fertilised and grazed, or not so heavily. It might be put into a cereal crop after more than 10 years, and then return to PP.

The environmental value of this grassland will vary considerably according to historical and current management practices, landscape context, region, etc. It is not just a question of how many years have passed since reseeding or cropping, so moving the definition threshold from >5 years to >8 years as proposed by the EC does not provide a solution.

Under some types of management, PP may accrue significant biodiversity and carbon storage over the years, and ploughing and/or reseeding will eliminate most of these gains (even over-seeding will reduce above-ground biodiversity). In these cases, preventing any reseeding of the grassland would be beneficial for the environment, but it many other cases it would not, while imposing a major restriction on farmers.

In fact, in many cases PP of >5 or >8 years will be very similar environmentally, with very limited biodiversity. Depending on fertilisation, grazing pressure and environmental factors, many of these 'medium-intensity' PP will be of no more value than 'temporary' grasslands reseeded at <5 years.

So a blanket prohibition on cultivating or re-seeding all PP in the hope of environmental benefits in some cases makes no sense, either environmentally or agronomically. In fact, such a restriction on PP would merely encourage farmers to reseed within 5 years (or 8 years, were that threshold to be chosen), thus avoiding PP restrictions.

If the EC's proposed start date of 2014 is retained, then *all* PP could be ploughed up in the intervening years – the obligation to replace it under national cross-compliance rules would do little to compensate the massive environmental impacts of ploughing up more valuable PP. This proposed start date has the potential to cancel out any environmental benefits of CAP reform by incentivising ploughing of PP. The baseline year should be 2011.

There may be some climate justification for preventing ploughing (as opposed to light tillage or harrowing), but then long-term rotations to cereals would be more difficult; in some specific situations, it is environmentally beneficial to introduce some arable cropping into existing permanent pasture 'monocultures'. There may be benefits in some situations from requiring farmers to maintain the same amount of PP at the holding level, but this is far from clear in all cases; attempting to 'freeze' all PP is simply not a rational greening measure.

Overall, it seems that for grassland that is agronomically improved, whether over short or long periods (<5 years, >5 years or even >10 years), the EC greening option that is most likely to generate benefits across a range of situations is the EFA requirement (in some situations this sort of PP is found in landscapes that already have well over 7% EFA, but often they do not). So we propose that the same EFA should be required for PP as is required for arable.

Semi-natural pastures (SNP) need targeted greening measures and support

The PP with most environmental value by far is PP that is in a broadly semi-natural

1 The term 'pasture' is used here to include meadows, as under current CAP definitions

EFNCP's greening proposal

EFNCP proposes a simple approach, as set out in the table below. Within the overall category of permanent pastures (PP), we propose a sub-category of semi-natural pastures (SNP). The only greening requirement for SNP would be to maintain them at the parcel level in farming use without cultivation. The only greening requirement for other PP would be EFA.

	GREENING OPTIONS APPLIED TO FARMLAND CATEGORY			GAEC at farm level (same for all farms)	GAEC for Member States
	Crop rotation	EFA[3]	Maintain as pasture at parcel level without cultivation[4]		
Arable crops	■	■		Retain existing landscape elements and prevent habitat deterioration[5]	
Permanent crops		■			
Permanent Pasture[1]		■			Monitor the extent of both PP categories at NUTS2 level[6]
Semi-natural Pasture[2]			■		

Notes

1 Permanent Pastures – land used to grow grasses or other forage (self-seeded or sown) and that has not been ploughed or sown for 5 years or longer.

2 Semi-natural pastures consist of predominantly self-seeded forage maintained by livestock grazing and/or harvesting. The vegetation has not been substantially modified by agronomic improvement (reseeding, fertilisation). It should be registered as such on LPIS.

3 EFA to include trees, hedges, dry-stone walls, buffer strips, **semi-natural pastures (very important).**

4 Specific minimum maintenance to be defined by Member States, including minimum grazing/cutting regimes (as in current GAEC Member State options, already applied in some Member States). Permission for cultivation of parcels for environmental reasons may be given on the basis of environmental assessment by the appropriate authorities.

5 As in current GAEC (including options already applied in some Member States).

6 The two categories require different thresholds and different policy responses in the event of decline, as the drivers are different. Databases in many countries and at EU level require improvement and harmonisation.

state, i.e. unsown forage that is not agronomically improved through cultivation or fertilisation. This is also known as High Nature Value (HNV) Pasture, as it is of exceptional biodiversity value and contributes other environmental services such as carbon storage, water-catchment management and fire-break functions.

Preventing the conversion of this SNP through ploughing, reseeding or afforestation is an environmental priority across the EU, and in some Member States (e.g. the UK), conversion and intensification of SNP is prohibited (except with permission) under current GAEC rules for prevention of habitat deterioration. We propose that similar rules should be included in GAEC at the EU level.

In terms of greening, there is no need to require additional actions from farmers on SNP (these pastures are themselves a type of EFA). They should merely be maintained at the parcel level. Beacause of their special characteristics, Member States should define appropriate minimum maintenance conditions for these pastures, such as minimum grazing/harvesting regimes (currently a GAEC option implemented in several Member States). Subsidised afforestation should not be allowed on these pastures. In some specific situations, and on the basis of assessment by the appropriate authorities, permission might be given for cultivation of individual parcels, e.g. for scrub control.

Simply imposing rules that oblige farmers not to convert this land is unlikely to achieve the desired outcomes on its own. Abandonment and afforestation are increasingly the main threats to semi-natural PP, as a result of its limited economic viability as farmland and the failure of the CAP to reward the public goods delivered by farming on this land.

Farmers cannot be forced to keep this land in use by rules, if the rewards from farming and from the CAP are insufficient to generate a net income – in extremis, they will just abandon the land, as is happening in some Member States at present. And, of course, only a small proportion of the EU's SNP are currently in agri-environment schemes, so it is unrealistic to expect them to solve such a fundamental problem.

Pillar 1 Premium for SNP

Because of this, all the main environmental NGOs agree that an essential measure to prevent further losses of semi-natural PP is to combine GAEC-greening protection with an additional Pillar 1 Premium – a financial incentive to farmers for maintaining these pastures in non-intensified farming use and to reward their exceptional public goods.

If such an incentive is provided, farmers will be encouraged to register their SNP on LPIS, and to maintain it in farming use without intensification – a virtuous circle, contrasting markedly with the vicious spiral we predict the current proposal will create. Incentives are far more effective than restrictive rules.

Putting SNP and EFA on LPIS

Simple definitions of SNP types can be established at national level, as a category within PP. SNP should be registered on the Land Parcel Identification Scheme (LPIS) as a specific category (EFA will also have to be registered on LPIS for the EC's greening proposals to be implemented, and SNP is effectively a type of EFA).

In some countries, SNP will coincide with existing categories of uncultivated pasture already on LPIS. Where such categories do not exist, SNP can be identified from aerial photos or remote sensing with reasonable accuracy.

In the case of doubt, pastures that are on the borderline of semi-natural can be included (farmers will be encouraged by the Premium payment), thus securing continued non-intensive management of this PP, allowing environmental benefits to accrue over time.

Article 68 approach

The Premium for semi-natural (or

HNV) pastures should be introduced under the Direct Payments Regulation as a special payment for implementation in all Member States, following the current Article 68 approach, but explicitly targeted. This would follow the example of Denmark which implements a special Article 68 payment for PP, with specific GAEC requirements.

Unlike the EC's proposed greening options, this approach addresses a specific environmental priority for PP. It is more likely to achieve significant environmental benefits, with fewer blanket restrictions on all PP. It would make a major contribution to the objectives of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for maintaining habitats, species and ecosystem services.

Permanent pasture eligibility issue

As we have stressed in previous editions (e.g. *LC 26, 27*), it is also essential that all SNP are eligible for Pillar 1 basic payment, so long as they are in active farming use, regardless of the relative proportions of grasses, shrubs, trees and hedges. Many types of vegetation have a practical function in extensive livestock systems (forage may be provided by grasses, shrubs and trees, and hedges and trees provide shade and shelter, etc.) and farmers should never be penalised for the presence of such features. The definition of PP should allow for grasses and other forage types, with no limitations to only 'herbaceous' pasture.

Conclusions

It is very significant that it is not only the environmental NGOs that think that the EC's proposals are unworkable and not good for the environment or for farmers – farmers' organisations say the same thing. Alarm bells should be ringing in the Commission.

All parties involved in CAP reform need to think clearly about the objectives of greening mechanisms, GAEC and Pillar 1 payments for permanent pastures, and how these objectives can best be achieved. With constructive discussion the flaws can be corrected and the proposals improved.

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Butterfly monitoring with BCE

The great banded grayling is one of the species that will be monitored in Extremadura.

Ettore Balocchi/Wikimedia Commons

EFNCP has teamed up with Butterfly Conservation Europe (BCE) to undertake a joint programme of work in 2012. This includes developing proposals for establishing butterfly monitoring across Europe as an integral part of EU biodiversity monitoring, especially in relation to semi-natural grasslands.

Although the European Environment Agency has including grassland butterflies amongst its biodiversity indicators (http://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/figures/grassland-butterflies-2014-population-index-1990), the available data is extremely patchy, with many regions providing no data at all. Hence the need to assess the current gaps and propose a way forward for achieving complete coverage of the EU.

At the same time, we are taking some small steps towards establishing local butterfly monitoring in certain regions. One of these is Extremadura, in the west of Spain, where local volunteers are working with Miguel L. Munguira and Juan Hernández-Roldán from the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.

Two transects have been established in La Vera, an area of upland orchards and extensive grazing systems in the central mountains. The transects will be recorded on a weekly basis from April to September.

The aim is to produce data over several years that will feed into the BCE butterfly monitoring at European level, and thus into EEA data (many Spanish regions have no butterfly monitoring to date, including Extremadura). We are also considering how to incorporate other elements in the monitoring, e.g. plant species and changes to land management.

One of the challenges of butterfly monitoring in regions such as Extremadura is the sheer number of species and individuals that need recording on each walk of the transect. Some of the notable species found in this area, and that are seen on a daily basis, include species of bushy and wooded pastures, such as rock grayling (*Hipparchia hermione*), tree grayling (*H. statilinus*) and great banded grayling (*Brintecia circe*); species of open clearings and forest edges, such as silver-washed fritillary (*Argynnis paphia*), dark green fritillary (*A. aglaja*) and high brown fritillary (*A. adippe*); and species of semi-natural meadows, such as marbled white (*Melanargia galathea*), Spanish gatekeeper (*Pyronia bathseba*), small copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*), sooty copper (*L. tityrus*) and purple-shot copper (*L. alciphron*).

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UK seminar on High Nature Value farming policy

EFNCP and LUPG (the UK Land Use Policy Group) held a joint seminar in London on 18 June to consider the future of HNV farming policies in the UK, kindly hosted by Natural England at their London offices.

This was an opportunity to present findings from case studies in England, Wales and Scotland, and to discuss the future of HNV farming indicators with Zelie Peppiette from the CAP evaluation unit of DG AGRI. The relevance of the UK Countryside Survey for HNV farmland monitoring was analysed using the Northern Ireland survey as an example.

The findings of the England and Wales case studies (including policy recommendations) are also presented in detail in a new brochure, *HNV farming in England and Wales*, available as a pdf at http://www.efncp.org/download/HNV_Farming_brochure_final.pdf

Further details of the individual projects can be found at:
http://www.efncp.org/projects/united-kingdom/devon/
http://www.efncp.org/projects/united-kingdom/carmarthenshire/
http://www.efncp.org/projects/united-kingdom/wye-valley/

The seminar looked at two overall questions:

- How can one monitor trends in HNV farmland/farming against a baseline situation, as required by the Community Monitoring and Evaluation Framework (CMEF) indicator since 2006?
- How can one target policy at HNV farmland/farming (not an explicit EU requirement, although maintaining HNV farming is a Pillar 2 priority)?

The first step in answering both these questions is to define and identify HNV farmland/farming at country level, but the tools for putting into practice a policy response are not necessarily the same in the two cases, although there may be overlaps.

The concept of HNV farmland has been around for 20 years or so but in the UK context HNV farmland has still not really established itself in the policy framework. The four UK administrations (England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland) have found it difficult to report on the HNV farmland indicator, which forms part of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) reporting process under the CMEF under the current Rural Development Regulation (EAFRD).

We need not only to identify HNV farmland and find ways of monitoring change (partly to meet the RDP monitoring requirement), but also to understand the mechanisms that will ensure its continued survival. In turn, this points to the need to consider whether a more focused package of measures will be necessary under the next round of RDPs to support HNV farmland from the risks of either intensification or abandonment.

EU level – latest news

At EU level, the proposed new EAFRD regulation for 2014-20 retains HNV farming as an environmental priority, and retains HNV farmland (or farming) as an indicator. Member States will continue to be required to report on their HNV farmland indicator.

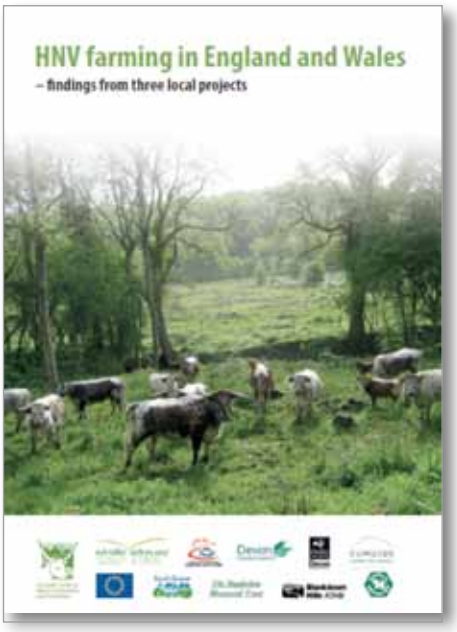
One particular improvement is the proposal to extend the monitoring framework to cover Pillar 1, which is important to ensure HNV farming systems are appropriately targeted; HNV will be an indicator for Pillars 1 and 2.

For the upcoming programming period, the Commission proposes accepting different methods for implementing the HNV farming indicator, within the common concept. This flexibility was welcomed at the seminar.

The minimum option that will be accepted by the Commission as an HNV indicator is the updated EEA figure or the Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) in Natura 2000. However, concern was expressed in the seminar that this minimum requirement, if adopted by a Member State, will contribute very little.

There is no 'value added' in simply reporting the extent of farmland in Natura 2000, while the EEA maps are based largely on CORINE and protected areas and are too crude for either targeting HNV farmland or for monitoring changes in this farmland.

Another point raised during the discussions was that the term used is still 'UAA'. This is a concern, as large areas of HNV



The fragmented nature of High Nature Value farmland on the Culm grasslands in north Devon, one of the case study areas presented at the seminar.

Phil Burgess/Devon Wildlife Trust

farmland (e.g. common grazings) are currently excluded from UAA data in some Member States, although included in others.

The European Commission is looking at current data systems, such as LPIS, LUCAS, FADN and FSS, to see how they can be improved from the point of view of indicators and monitoring needs. Discussions highlighted the need to improve how data relevant to HNV farmland is captured under current information systems and the scope for doing so.

It was also pointed out that the EU Biodiversity Strategy requires all Member States to map ecosystem services by 2014. This should include semi-natural farmland and there is a clear overlap with HNV farmland mapping and monitoring.

UK level discussion

The complete discussion notes are available at http://www.efncp.org/events/seminars-others/uk-land-use-policy/

What follows is a summary of some key points from an EFNCP perspective.

- The England and Wales case studies showed that semi-natural farmland is being lost gradually to abandonment, afforestation and intensification. Agri-environment measures and NGO projects are helping to slow this process on the land they are targeting, but a large proportion of semi-natural farmland is not being targeted at present. There are also big changes in Scotland, especially destocking in marginal areas.
- There is a need for information on these changes and their impact, and it is likely that the decline in activity levels and employment has a direct effect on the environment. HNV monitoring should be designed so that it can provide data on such trends, and to inform RDPs so that they can respond effectively.
- There is a continuing threat to permanent grassland in the UK from afforestation. Poorer land with low productivity and steep slopes is being targeted for woodland expansion. This is also happening elsewhere in the EU and HNV grasslands are vulnerable.
- Accurately identifying the distribution of semi-natural land cover on farmland would be an extremely valuable first step for monitoring and targeting HNV farmland. Can the UK Land Cover 2007 map do this? The Carmarthenshire case study showed that it can be done with sufficient accuracy using remote sensing (in this case by the Habitat Inventory of Wales).
- Species data generally is not useful on its own for identifying HNV farmland, and does not generate robust maps. This was confirmed by the case studies in all countries. However, species *monitoring* is potentially useful as a means of tracking trends in the condition of HNV farmland. If we could monitor semi-natural farmland plus a farmland index for birds, butterflies (and bumblebees?) and flora, this would provide a good indication of trends in condition.
- Farming systems data is also potentially useful for monitoring farming tendencies (changes in broad farm types, and in specific farm practices).
- Dialogue is essential, not just technical desk studies. Some EU countries have set up working groups (including Scotland) that have been effective in moving forward. Is there a need for some UK co-ordination and a role for LUPG in this?
- We need to assess current data systems, especially Countryside Survey and UK Land Cover Map, and IACS/LPIS – these are highly relevant tools. How can the best use be made of them in relation to current policies and priorities, and how can they be developed and adapted for this purpose?
- We should consider possible changes to LPIS/IACS to register semi-natural grassland. This could be filled in by the farmer for each parcel. Could this be achieved easily? A simple, unambiguous description would be needed.
- The HNV concept is about outcomes. It is not just a technical policy indicator. We need to know what is happening to farming and biodiversity on the ground and why, and to develop appropriate policy responses. Our farmland of most environmental value, which is central to biodiversity strategy, RDP etc., is declining and we need to work harder to reverse this process. Once it has gone, it will not come back – restoration is expensive and is not a substitute for keeping what is there already.

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Wildfire prevention: a reason for promoting pastoralism in Spain

In the Mediterranean region, the climatic conditions (particularly the prolonged dry and hot summer season) are naturally favourable for wildfires. The frequency and impact of wildfires have increased over the last few decades in southern European countries, and this is mainly attributed to land-use changes associated with socio-economic development (FAO 2007).

Many traditional rural activities (e.g. firewood collection and grazing-based livestock production systems) have been partly or totally abandoned in favour of alternatives (e.g. fossil fuels and factory farming). These changes have led to more homogeneous landscapes and the accumulation of fuel loads in forests and rangelands (Lasanta *et al.* 2006), resulting in an increase in fire hazard.

The situation is further aggravated by current climate trends and the persistent high numbers of human-caused wildfire ignitions (Martínez *et al.* 2009). Under such conditions, the likelihood of severe wildfire events happening is nowadays very high along the northern rim of the Mediterranean.

Accordingly, wildfires have become a major issue for forest services in the region and so specific wildfire prevention programmes have been established. In these programmes (e.g. Plan 42 in Castilla y León, see *La Cañada 25*), preventative actions usually concentrate on a network of fire breaks designed to contain the spread of wildfires and improve the chances of fire suppression brigades successfully attacking fires (Agee *et al.* 2000). Regular fire break maintenance is necessary to offset vegetation growth, but can be costly when mechanical means (e.g. brush shredders) are used. Since livestock is known to effectively control shrub growth (Torrano & Valderrabano 2005; Jauregui *et al.* 2007), targeted grazing offers a possible alternative to such techniques.

Livestock grazing reduces wildfire hazard

When adequately managed, most types of grazing livestock can give excellent wildfire prevention (Dopazo *et al.* 2009; Thavaud 2009), but sheep and goat systems have some features that make them particularly well suited to this objective.

In the Mediterranean, many sheep and goat breeds are native and so are well-adapted to the kind of pasture resources available in the region, where animals have to graze in forest and scrub areas where the quality and quantity of fodder may be limited.

Furthermore, in the Mediterranean, livestock are usually guided by a shepherd, who can ensure that high

stocking rates are maintained on the fire breaks without the use of fences, while still allowing the flock access to adequate water and feed. Involving shepherds in forest protection can have further benefits for wildfire prevention as they can provide an early warning of any fires which occur and their very presence on the pasture can discourage arsonists.

The management of fire breaks by silvopastoralism has been widely applied in south-eastern France over the past 25 years (Thavaud 2006), providing the most important reference point for the region. Other Mediterranean countries have also run tests, but only a few of these have developed into permanent management programmes. Quite a number are in the regions of Spain, where the government forest services and local livestock farmers collaborate in wildfire prevention programmes, following a number of different formats.

Fire break grazing programmes in Spain

Fire break grazing programmes are mostly funded directly by the forest services of the Spanish regional governments. This is an indication of the importance placed by forest managers on maintaining some livestock grazing in forest areas. Now that extensive livestock systems and the associated grazing pressure have declined, efforts are being made to offset this process and achieve better forest protection.

The usual pattern is that the farmers that take part in these programmes graze their livestock intensively in fire break areas defined by forest services, thereby reducing vegetation fuel loads. In exchange for this service, they receive monetary and/or in-kind remuneration, for example, animal housing, fences or water troughs.

In the Comunitat Valenciana in eastern Spain, for instance, a programme which ran between 1996 and 2009 established a payment of □22 per ha per year to farmers who concentrated their livestock on fire breaks for a minimum of 130 days each year, during which period a minimum stocking rate of one cow, three goats or five sheep per hectare had to be maintained. If fencing or the watering facilities were necessary, the payment could be increased by some €20-40 per ha per year. Under this system, 3,680ha of fire breaks were grazed in 2009 with the collaboration of 62 farmers.

In Andalucía, in southern Spain, livestock grazing of fire breaks started being tested in 2003 and was more widely promoted in 2005, while remuneration for farmers was implemented from 2007 (Ruiz-Mirazo *et al.* 2009). The payments currently range from €42 to €90 per ha per year, depending on the grazing difficulty (steepness, type of vegetation and distance to animal housing) associated with the fire breaks. The work of each farmer is evaluated every year (Ruiz-Mirazo *et al.* 2011), and the amount of money they finally receive can be decreased (or even cancelled) if the grazing objectives are not met. On some occasions, complementary in-kind remuneration is also provided to facilitate grazing on public lands. By 2011, the grazed fire break network of Andalucía had expanded to cover 6,680ha and involve the collaboration of 222 farmers.

In Aragón, a northern Spanish region, where only in-kind remuneration is offered, 42 farmers undertook the maintenance of approximately 3,500ha of fire breaks in 2010. This programme started in 2008 with the ultimate objective of managing 5,000ha of fire break.

Funding for forest conservation reaches farmers

Reinforcing positive links between farming practices and environmental protection has been an objective of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) since the first agri-environmental measures were introduced in 1992. As a good example of such links, the grazing management of fire breaks has long been financed from agricultural funds in south-eastern France (Thavaud 2006). In the current CAP period (2007-2013), the region of Catalunya (north-eastern Spain) has also used an agri-environmental scheme to promote livestock grazing in forest areas with high fire risk, but fire break grazing was not specifically targeted.

As reported in *La Cañada 25*, the region of Castilla y León (north-western Spain) set up a CAP-funded (RDP) programme in 2003, addressed at livestock farmers and aiming to reduce their use of fire to regenerate rangelands – a major cause of wildfires in the region. The funds were used to improve farm infrastructures and grazing planning, as well as to promote shrub-shredding as an alternative technique to regenerate overgrown or encroached pastures. Outreach to farmers via local project officers was also a key element (but not RDP funded). Most importantly, drastic reductions in the number of wildfires have been registered in the areas of application of this programme.

Unfortunately, this very successful programme has been dropped by the regional government, as was the scheme in Valencia.

Alliances to support pastoralism in Andalucía

Wildfires are making all stakeholders realise the benefits of working together and the importance of pastoralism for forest management in Andalucia. The network of professionals from different sectors (farmers, foresters, researchers, etc.) collaborating in the grazed fire break network has given rise to a new organisation. The *Asociación Pastores por el Monte Mediterráneo* (Association of Shepherds for the Mediterranean Forest) endeavours to back pastoralism by claiming its positive nature conservation outcomes. This association has recently become a member of EFNCP and both organisations have agreed a programme of work to be carried out in 2012. Further details about this collaboration will be published in coming issues of *La Cañada.*

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Pastores por el Monte Mediterráneo, http://www.pastoresmonte.org

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Subsidies harmful to biodiversity: how does the CAP measure up?

Destructive hedge narrowing in Northern Ireland – a response to apparently biodiversity-neutral direct payment rules.

The Conference of the Parties for the Convention on Biodiversity held in Nagoya in 2010 highlighted a key issue for biodiversity conservation in the field of agriculture: the harmful subsidies.

The idea is that it is not sufficient to target some policy instruments on biodiversity conservation while other subsidies – *sensu lato*, including tax incentives, for example – have the opposite effect.

For instance, in the recent past, higher payments for crop production in the CAP has ruined what could be achieved through agri-environmental measures (e.g. higher premium for irrigated crops in France before 2003). Furthermore, the higher the 'anti-biodiversity' payments are, the higher the 'pro-biodiversity' ones need to be in order to counterbalance their potential negative impact.

Effect of decoupling

From 1992 onwards, and even more significantly since 2003, CAP payments have moved towards decoupling, and the upcoming reform will further consecrate this trend. Decoupling means that a subsidy in itself is no longer 'good' or 'bad' for biodiversity, as there is no longer a direct incitement for a farmer to plough up his field or to intensify his grassland. And, indeed, this shift *is* better from a biodiversity point of view compared to the former crop-related payments, not to mention the bonus for irrigated crops, whose *raison d'être* was to compensate for their higher production costs!

Can we then conclude that the CAP has achieved what its advocates claim: no more harmful subsidies (the effect of most is neutral), some targeted positive subsidies (agri-environment measures) and even some positive signals for biodiversity (cross compliance, green payments)? The answer needs to be approached in at least two ways.

Rules and conditions

First, we need to examine the criteria attached to the payments, not just the payments themselves. The requirements attached to the management of landscape features have been extensively discussed in the Forum's publications (see for example http://efncp.org/download/EFNCP_Permanent-Pastures-and-Meadows.pdf). If it is accompanied by a rule which limits the width of a hedge to 4m, leading to the clearance of wider ones, the SFP, which might appear to be 'neutral' for biodiversity can in fact have a huge impact on the ground.

Similarly, food or animal health rules attached to payments that push extensive livestock farmers towards giving up because they are inherently incompatible with the management of low-intensity systems are harmful for biodiversity.

A more fundamental and direct impact arises when payments eligibility rules exclude HNV pastures, thus fuelling the process of land abandonment or intensification. In this case, the design of payments itself is harmful for biodiversity.

Taken together, the set of rules and conditions attached to payments is far from being neutral for biodiversity; on the contrary, they discourage many HNV farming systems.

Area-based payments

Secondly, a more indirect but nevertheless powerful influence can also be recognised. In a nutshell, the combination of area-based payments with ineffective capping on those payments surely acts as an incentive for larger farm structures. CAP payments promote capitalisation in larger farms, and with attached conditions that, as shown above, fit them perfectly. Landscape simplification and intensification follow naturally from such payments, as the farmer tries to lower the risks of production losses as his structural costs get ever higher in absolute terms; paying the bank interest that goes along with enlarging farms requires a production safety net.

Seen in this light, a system of flat-rate payments with no capping, supporting hundreds of thousands of euros of dead capital (machinery, housing) per labour unit, is likely to be harmful for biodiversity, even if the payments are notionally decoupled. Even if decoupled payments are no longer attached to a particular type of production (in the past most payments were made to arable farms), it should be pointed out that the structural-economic patterns of farm enlargement, landscape simplification and intensification are happening in *every* sector. Blindly supporting this process across Europe, whether in the arable, beef, dairy, sheep or permanent crop sectors, will have major impacts. And the more the sector is linked to HNV farmland, the more it makes sense to be aware of the impacts on biodiversity.

Finding a balance

Removing payments which harm biodiversity is therefore *still* an issue for the current CAP reform, even though the most obvious black marks have been removed in the last decades. A smart balance must be found between supporting the income of farming systems that contribute to biodiversity and landscape management, while avoiding some of the more harmful development trends which higher incomes have fuelled in the past. Acceptable or desirable development has important qualitative as well as quantitative aspects.

It would seem that any solution should encompass at least two essential elements:

- well-designed accompanying criteria (e.g. eligibility, cross compliance),
- capped and strongly degressive payments.

The first one is no surprise to readers of *La Cañada*, but the second might be less familiar in a discussion on biodiversity impacts, but we believe it needs to be taken seriously.

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Farmers to train conservation professionals

An interesting and innovative project to raise the level of understanding of hill farming in conservation professionals is about to get underway in two pilot areas in England.

The project is funded by the Prince's Countryside Fund with match funding from Leader in Cumbria under the England Rural Development Plan (RDP), and administered by the Foundation for Common Land. The novel element is that the training will be delivered by Cumbrian and Dartmoor hill farmers.

The inspiration for the project will be a story familiar to farmers in many marginal, High Nature Value, areas of the EU. In the pilot areas, 93% of hill farms have an agri-environment agreement contributing c.20% of gross farm income. Without these schemes, many businesses would have made a loss in each of the last 3 years[1], despite the recent improvement in livestock prices.

In the Lake District National Park, 530 old agri-environmental schemes will expire between now and 2013, affecting half the farmers in the park. The situation in Dartmoor is comparable, with around 300 farmers affected. A smooth transition to the current Environmental Stewardship (ES) schemes is crucial to maintain farm incomes, strengthen marginal communities and to retain cultural landscapes and environmental benefits.

Conservation advisors working for government and non-governmental organisations are the key to ensuring that agri-environment schemes incorporate prescriptions that are compatible with farming objectives and pay properly for the environmental benefits delivered.

However, experience in both areas suggests that the process of negotiating environmental schemes needs improving. Conservation officers, while highly trained in their own field, often have limited practical understanding of hill farming. The result is that scheme design often undermines hill farming by seeking reductions in stock numbers to levels that are unviable and impose unrealistic additional labour demands.

Individual officers have considerable discretion in matters of scheme design and, since they cover a large patch, an individual officer's strengths and weaknesses can affect a wide area and many farms. While this autonomy can produce good results when an officer understands hill farming, some do not.

Furthermore, in practice, hill farmers do not have an equal place at the negotiating table. The terms of the agreement in general are determined by Natural England (the conservation agency), which has the statutory duty and holds the purse strings, but large environmental NGOs also have substantial influence, much to the concern of farmers, whose livelihoods are under discussion.

Managers in these organisations recognise that many of their staff need a greater understanding of hill farming systems in order to perform their jobs well. When the project was mooted, many wrote letters of support and a number indicated a willingness to pay for this type of training as part of staff professional development in the future.

On-farm, hands-on training

The project will train 12 hill farmers to deliver on-farm, hands-on training to 60 professionals working for conservation organisations in order that they appreciate the implications of the management options in environmental schemes on farm businesses.

The training will not only enable conservation professionals to update their knowledge of hill farming systems, but will also provide opportunities for genuine dialogue between the professionals and hill farmers – something sadly missing in most areas at present. One element of the programme will be discussion sessions with a wider circle of 48 farmers.

There will be three levels of training, aimed at conservation professionals as part of their continuing professional development:

- Level 1 (Basic level for conservation staff who have some interaction with hill farmers). This training will provide an introduction to hill farming systems, how common land fits with enclosed farm systems and hill farm economics.
- Level 2 (Intermediate level for staff working regularly with hill farmers). This level of training is directed towards the acquisition of a sound practical understanding of the social, economic and environmental dimensions of upland farming systems.
- Level 3 (Advanced, aimed at those with a leadership role in delivering and designing complex agreements, policies and schemes). This will be a specialised course to provide an in-depth knowledge of hill farming systems, common property rights, governance and successful common pool resource management.

Each course will last three days: a two-day course with a follow-up day some months later. There will be a maximum of eight delegates and two farmer trainers. The course will be held on-farm and in the farm kitchen (if there is room), or in the nearest village hall. Delegates will be expected to attend from early morning to dusk and take part in practical farm tasks, such as walling, fencing, helping with shearing, basic animal health tasks and farm walks, as well as discussions, group work and classroom-type activities.

The project will run for two years, but a major objective is to develop a programme of training that can be continued afterwards, not only in the pilot areas but potentially also across other upland areas of England, Wales and Scotland.

This type of project has never been done before and the design is the result of a collaborative effort between many organisations and hill farmers. It aims to change the underlying culture of Natural England and other conservation staff towards farmers, so that they start agri-environment scheme negotiation with a different attitude of mind.

The project is not without risk for both farmers and conservationists. The sheer novelty of the approach guarantees that there will be tricky moments to work through. But by taking the initiative to raise funding for the project and organising the programme of training, hill farmers are giving both parties the opportunity to make connections, to gain better understanding of what the other does and to increase mutual respect. Hopefully, the result will be better agri-environment schemes that improve agricultural incomes in the uplands with a long–term, durable impact.

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1 See The farm practices survey 2009 – uplands
http://archive.defra.gov.uk/evidence/statistics/foodfarm/enviro/observatory/research/documents/UplandsFPS_report09.pdf

Difficulties foreseen for Basic Payments on common pastures

Gwyn Jones

Common grazing land in Scotland, where around 30% of the common forage is grazed but not claimed.

Common, communal or shared pastures remain a very significant part of the cultural landscape and of farm economies in many parts of Europe, despite centuries of subdivision and privatisation. EFNCP estimates that something in the order of 30 million ha of such land survives in the EU, and the area will rise significantly if the current Candidate countries acceed to the Union.

Common pastures are an ideal touchstone for any rural policy (see *La Cañada 26*). If new measures and rules work there, they have a very good chance of working on more conventional farmland that is in 'sole use'.

The move from the current plethora of implementation models for the direct payments to a single Basic Payment mechanism to be applied across the EU calls for just such an evaluation.

Direct Payments 2007-2013 and post-2014

In the current programming period, the bulk of the €40 billion spent on direct payments is delivered through two schemes – the Single Payment Scheme (SPS), operating in the 'old' Member States plus Slovenia and Malta, and a transitional Single Area Payment Scheme (SAPS), operating in the remainder of the 'new' Member States.

A major difference between these schemes is the way in which payments are kept within budgetary limits. Under SAPS, this is in practice done by limiting the area of eligible land by which the national envelope of payment is divided, thereby setting the national payment rate per hectare. All farmers can at any time start to claim SAPS on land shown as eligible on the Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS), at least in theory.

SPS, on the other hand, works through entitlements held by individual farmers and not linked to any particular land – to claim their entitlements, the farmer must declare a sufficient amount of eligible land, but he can choose which land. The entitlement to payment was established by claiming in a specific reference year and can thereafter be traded freely within the claim region. Previously unclaimed land can brought into the system at any time, but a new claimant must obtain entitlements from an existing claimant.

Most of the countries implementing SPS already had a complex (and highly unequal) distribution pattern of CAP direct payments before 2007. To accommodate the practical and political difficulties involved in introducing SPS, three models were allowed:

- the 'historic model': based on the payments received by the individual farmer during a reference period, resulting in different aid levels per hectare
- the 'regional model': taking all payments received in a region and dividing them by the number of eligible hectares resulting in a flat rate, which can only be differentiated under very limited circumstances (SI, MT)
- the 'hybrid model': a mixture between these two models that can be 'static' or 'dynamic' (with the latter moving towards a flatter rate over the period). (Static: UK-NI, SE, LU; Dynamic: UK-E, D, DK, FI)

The Commission's draft proposals for the period 2014-20 call for this mish-mash to be replaced by one Basic Payment mechanism, which will resemble the regional model of SPS. To minimise problems with speculative distortions of the land sale and leasing markets, claimants wishing to establish entitlements in 2014 will need also to have been claimants of SPS or SAPS in 2011 (i.e. before the proposals were published). New entrants may (or may not!) be accommodated by provisions for a National Reserve. In some regions there is more eligible land than needed to claim current historic entitlements, and these 'spare' hectares may activate the new basic payment.

For most of the SPS-implementing states this implies some very difficult adjustments, with many winners and losers, and some politically-sensitive decisions over whether and how to divide the country into regions to limit such effects. (It is likely that some states will continue to avoid these issues by the use of at least partially-coupled payments.)

But 2014 is also likely to pose many challenges for at least some SAPS states – forgetting to fill out a claim form means losing out for at least seven years, but many producers are aged and advisory services are sometimes below par. The proposals also offer the option to introduce regionalisation for the first time, which ironically could *increase* payment inequalities when they are being reduced in the rest of the EU (following the example of England, which created one region for the most disadvantaged land and one for the rest of the country).

Avoiding freeloading on common pastures

While some parcels of communal pasture are managed by single claimants (sometimes themselves communal organisations), many are still managed in common. In other words, there are multiple users and multiple claimants on the same Land Parcel Identification System (LPIS) parcel.

This in itself leads to significant problems for the logic of decoupled direct payments. Support which is not linked to animals owned by the claimants, but to an area of common ground managed by them all, makes cross-compliance relating to the condition of the land well-nigh impossible to impose fairly.

More than that, current eligibility rules do not require the claimant to carry out any agricultural activity, demanding only that the land must be maintained in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC). Even if this requires some form of agricultural management, on common pastures inactive claimants can freeload on the active claimants who actually carry out maintenance on the shared forage area.

To avoid both the spending of scarce EU funds on claimants who contribute noth-

ing to public policy goals, and to be fair to the active farmer working in what are usually difficult agricultural conditions, it would seem that some tightening of the rules is required.

EFNCP would favour minimum activity rules which are explicitly agricultural (minimum LU/ha or minimum grazing days) but, recognising that some would see this as a problem for WTO, we call for at least a tightening of the proposed regulations so that at least **on common pastures any management which is necessary for the claimant to meet the new 'active farmer' rules must be carried out by the claimant in person or by his direct agents.**

Discussions on possible wordings are being undertaken in the UK just now between the Government and stakeholder organisations. Such an amendment would sit logically next to the safeguards in relating to agricultural areas naturally kept in a state suitable for grazing or cultivation.

Unclaimed forage on grazed common pastures

Another serious issue which should be considered in the course of the current reform is that of unclaimed forage area. This is a complex matter in which CAP rules and national regulations and land tenure law all cause difficulties; the important thing is for the CAP to recognise that issues arise and allow the maximum scope for solving them.

So what is the issue? It stems from the fact that the claimants are all claiming parts of a single parcel of forage.

The European Court, in the case of Niedermair-Schiemann (see *LC 27*) makes it clear that farmers should be able to claim *all* the land which they farm and that the legal basis on which they actually use the land is not specified in the Regulation.

However, in many countries, the area of forage which farmers are allowed to claim on a common pasture is limited to that specified by their grazing (as opposed to SPS) rights or grazing leases.

Thus, in Scotland, for example, 33% of the forage area of common grazings parcels maintained in GAEC (177,255ha of 537,615ha) was not claimable in 2009[1], i.e. there is more grazing land in use than is reflected in grazing rights. A similar percentage is unclaimable in Ireland (Andy Bleasdale pers. comm.), with between a fifth and a quarter of managed common land estimated to be unclaimable in England and Wales. It is likely that similar problems arise elsewhere. EFNCP would be eager to get real data from other EU states.

In SAPS and regional-SPS states, this means that active claimants are already losing out, and are not being paid for actively delivering policy goals. But in historic-SPS states, the effect will only happen when the basis of payment is changed. Up until now, the historical reference effectively 'corrects' aberrations in forage area.

And, of course, any tightening of 'active farmer' rules for common graziers would probably free up more forage, which up until now has been claimed but not otherwise used by the claimant.

Similarly, any success for EFNCP's campaign to redefine 'permanent pasture' to include non-herbaceous vegetation (see *LC 26*) will further increase the amount of eligible forage which active graziers should be able to claim, but cannot if their grazing rights are limited.

What about solutions? Once again, the nature of common pastures causes complications, for these are not only resources for the current graziers, but potential resources for the currently inactive rightsholders or for potential users in the community (depending on the legal system). National or local policy goals may wish to safeguard not only these rights or possibilities but also the option to link these to CAP payments.

The proposed rules for the new CAP say that entitlements must be established in 2014; thereafter new claimants will not get entitlements. How can states design a system which allows subsequent new entrants to receive support? In SAPS countries, having such a deadline is a completely new concept, which will itself cause problems. In all states, it is a very short time in which to design and implement workable solutions in socially-complex situations.

In some jurisdictions, from Scotland to Romania, it would be possible for collective legal persons – grazings committees, farmers' associations, for example – to be applicants for direct payments. They could claim instead of individual producers or alongside them, ensuring that all forage was claimed.

In fact, if Niedermair-Schiemann means that the actual claimants in any year should be able to claim all the eligible forage between them, then a single claim would seem to be the only way of avoiding having unclaimed entitlements one year and unclaimed forage the next, as the number of claimants varies over time!

The mandatory substitution of a graziers' association for a previous claimant would appear to be inconsistent with the draft Regulations issued by the Commission, however practical a solution it might offer. And on the ground, many graziers would be loath to lose direct control of their subsidy claim.

In any case, any collective body which did not make a direct payments claim in 2011 will not be able to activate entitlements in 2014 unless it receives an allocation from the National Reserve. It is essential, given the likelihood of complications arising, that **the list of possible uses for the Reserve includes the addressing of unclaimed forage issues on common pastures.**

Understandably, it is not common for National Reserve allocations to be made to legal persons – they are usually targeted at individuals such as young entrants. **In the case of common pastures cases, the National Reserve should exceptionally be made available to legal persons.**

Need for urgent assessment and action

Common pastures are some of the gems of the European cultural landscapes; their governance and management regimes are themselves historically-valuable surviving remnants of once much more widespread systems.

The downside of this diversity is immense complexity. It is not realistic, nor desirable, for EU rules to be so detailed that they address all the ins and outs of each pasture. But that doesn't mean that EU rules don't matter: they must be framed in a way which neither creates greater difficulties for the active common grazier nor makes obtaining support easier for inactive claimants compared to their peers on sole use farmland.

To ensure that this principle can be enforced, they must also be sufficiently accommodating to allow Member States to put in place rules which are not only practical, but consistent with wider policy goals and local legal principles, such as keeping open opportunities to non-claimants who nevertheless have legal rights which they could use at any time.

At present it would seem that the elements of the draft Regulations which are most likely to need amendment or clarification are:

- active farmer rules;
- National Reserve purpose and eligible applicants.

In England, a working group was set up by the Government to look at these issues; it is now led by the Foundation for Common Land and is making considerable progress. We hope to work on the same questions in the next months in Scotland.

It is essential that graziers' groups all over the EU remind their Government of the urgency of such matters. EFNCP is keen to act as a clearing house between Member States and to bring the issues to the attention of the Commission and other stakeholders. We need evidence and we need it quickly!

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1 http://efncp.org/download/Trends-in-Common-Grazing3.pdf

Ecological connnections: a case study of common frog migration in the Eastern Carpathians

Demeter László

A lek of male common frogs waiting for females.

One European amphibian is so closely linked to semi-natural and natural grasslands that it is called *Grassfrosch* in German, *gyepi béka* in Hungarian, and *grass frog* in some English dialects.

The standard English name for *Rana temporaria,* the European common frog, is very unfair; this species displays behaviours that are not common at all. For example, males engage in clutch piracy, mating with already deposited spawn (Vieites *et al.* 2004). In the 1980s a case of long-distance migration was described, unheard before for European amphibians. Indeed, it was so unusual that the authors assumed it to be a somehow aberrant local phenomenon (Beshkov & Angelova 1981, Beshkov 1988).

The '*temporaria*' in the frog's Latin name refers to the very short and explosive breeding season, during which adults can be observed in large numbers in the breeding habitats, after which they apparently disappear, in fact dispersing to their terrestrial habitats.

The common frog is a widespread amphibian in temperate Europe, with the main distribution in the mountains and at higher latitudes (Gasc *et al*. 1997). It used to be extremely abundant before river regulation and the industrialisation of agriculture and thus it probably played an important ecological role, being consumed by a large number of animal groups, including dragonflies (predators of tadpoles), crayfish (predators of adults and consumers of dead individuals), fish (predators of tadpoles and adults), newts (predators of eggs and young tadpoles), birds and mammals, including humans (predators of adults).

In our research area in the mountain basins of the Eastern Carpathians, Romania, the former abundance of this species is demonstrated by the fact that it is present in the local folklore. We collected three versions (in three villages) of a funny story where the frog ends up accidentally in the soup, and the little girl who sees it cries out: 'Look mother, the noodles have eyes!' This must have been a very common event in springtime, when the frogs drifted down the streams by the thousands to find their breeding ponds (and stream water was clean enough to be used for cooking!).

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A frog drifting at night in a slow-flowing length of stream.

When we observed the same 'local' phenomenon in 2004 in the Csík Basin, Romania, that Beshkov & Angelova had seen in Bulgaria decades ago, we began an annual data collection effort. Not for the first time, behaviour 'new to science' was in fact well known to country folk – 65 out of 68 people aged between 33 and 87 surveyed in 2010 were aware of it!

There are no historic records in our study area on population sizes prior to the large-scale river regulation works of the late 1970s, but our data show that there has been a catastrophic habitat change, which can be related to decline, even in the past decade in our study area.

By the end of autumn, frogs have moved to the upper section of mountain streams for hibernation. Their preferred hibernation sites are springs. With the first snowmelt they drift down to the lower sections and move to the shallow breeding pools to breed. This happens mostly during the night and is very spectacular, with up to six frogs per minute travelling down certain streams. The drifting may last several days, but usually has a peak of one day. The reason for this behaviour is not known. It is possible that the lower sections of the streams had a large predation pressure on this species by large fish and crayfish which forced the frogs upstream into hibernation habitats lacking these predators.

The study

The goal of our study was to map the migration directions of this species, to measure population size and to document the dynamics of the breeding.

We identified hibernation sites by searching for frogs from autumn through to the end of winter. During snowmelt we observed drifting in the stream at night time at four observation points. We marked 25 individuals by puncturing the swimming web on one leg. This causes minimal injury to the frog and the wound disappears in a couple of weeks. We drift-fenced and monitored three breeding ponds, totalling about 400m of fence. These ponds were visited 1-4 times per day between 19 March and 4 May 2011, and frogs found on any side of the fence were moved to the other side, after being identified, sexed, their back pattern photographed and, in some cases, their weight and body length measured. Four other amphibians were known to use the ponds, and these were similarly recorded. We counted spawn of common and moor frogs (*Rana arvalis)* in about 30 breeding ponds. We used the weather data (daily average temperature and total precipitation) from a meteorological station about 5km away from our study site.

We identified two springs that act as hibernation sites, and a large fen with

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Putting up the drift fence.

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The recaptured male showing the marking method.

Map of common frog migration in 2011. Hatched green areas are known hibernation habitats, red arrows are movement directions in spring, green polygons are wet meadows; yellow, breeding ponds. Red numbered circles are the ponds fenced and monitored in the study.

more hibernation springs. In one spring we found frogs in February 2010 and 2011.

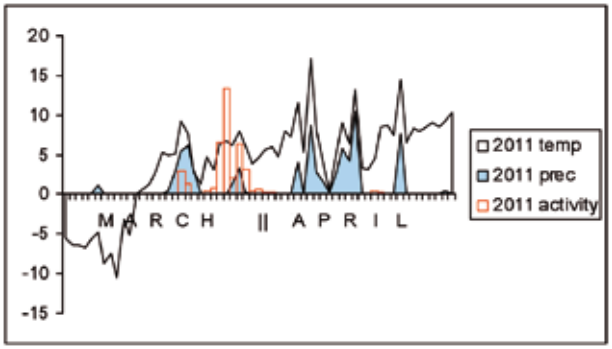
On 23 March 2011 we recaptured a male frog at Pond 3 which we had marked on 15 March in the stream roughly 3km away. This frog must have drifted down the stream for about 1km, then crossed a relatively busy road, some arable fields, a narrow patch of wet meadows and some more arable fields to reach a larger patch of wet meadows with the breeding pond.

We recorded drifting frogs at all observation points: at the hibernation sites and both upstream and downstream of the village. There was some frog mortality at several sections of the road and live frogs were also observed.

There is a close link between frog movement and temperature and precipitation. The frogs start their movement to the breeding ponds with the first snowmelt (see graph). If the weather is dry, there is a risk of freezing, so they reduce their movement through dry land. Our long-term observation is that in years with a dry March and April the amount of spawn is much less than in years with a wet spring.

In 2011, the movement of frogs into the breeding ponds started on 19 March, coinciding with a warming up and some precipitation. A cooler period followed and then a dry, warmer one, when the movement into the pond peaked and then, within a few days, stopped (see graph). The spring of 2011 was very dry and cold. Frog numbers were much lower in all the ponds than in previous years.

Parallel to this study of common frogs, the fence made it possible to follow the movement and population size of three



Movement of common frogs into Pond 1 in relation to temperature and precipitation. The scale of the frog activity is five times smaller than the actual numbers.

	Common frog	Moor frog	Great crested newt	Smooth newt
Pond 1	215	89	78	324
Pond 2	13	65	17	40
Pond 3	16	27	32	104
Sum	244	181	127	468
m:f ratio	1.9:1	0.7:1	0.8:1	0.9:1
Spawn counts between 2005-2010				
Pond 1	85-280	52-245	no data	no data
Pond 2	23-64	142-392	no data	no data
Pond 3	33-244	29-210	no data	no data

Table 1. Pond population sizes and spawn counts of the four amphibian species breeding in the fenced ponds in 2011.

other amphibians: moor frog, great crested newt (*Triturus cristatus*) and smooth newt (*Lissotriton vulgaris*) (Table 1). The data for the newts is especially valuable, since they are more difficult to study and there are no data on population sizes.

The common frog as an indicator species

The behaviour of the common frog provides a good example of the need for maintaining ecological connectivity at a landscape scale. Although it is not a priority species for conservation, there is evidence of a huge population decline in recent decades, and it is a food for priority species such as the great crested newt and lesser spotted eagle (*Aquila heliaca*).

Its hibernation grounds are often at a considerable distance from its breeding habitats, and the connection, as well as means of transport, is provided by

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Smooth newt male eating common frog eggs.

streams. In this case, human-made terrestrial barriers, such as roads and buildings, and barriers in the stream (e.g. small dams, water diversions) increase the risk of high mortality. By the same token, the breeding habitats are very vulnerable, as they can be filled in or drained with relative ease. Combined with natural population fluctuations, such threats can lead to population decline and extinction, which will also have an effect on other species

Our study area has patches of High Nature Value grassland combined with arable land and urban features. The study shows that HNV grasslands are not just valuable terrestrial habitats in themselves but also play an important role as dispersal corridors for this species.

Acknowledgements

We thank EFNCP, DG Environment and Barbara Knowles for supporting this study, as well as the farmers and land owners for allowing us access to their land.

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Mixed messages from European Union institutions on 2020 biodiversity strategy

On 19 December 2011 EU Environment Ministers adopted conclusions on the EU Biodiversity Strategy to 2020. This involved a compromise decision by the Ministers to remove calls in the Strategy for biodiversity objectives to be integrated into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

This decision shows how it is national governments that call the shots in EU decision-making, and that their commitments to real progress on halting biodiversity decline are not on the same level as the Environment Commissioner, who clearly is annoyed by the decision.

In a more positive vein, the European Parliament has voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on the same EU2020 Biodiversity Strategy which contains plenty of good messages, including references to HNV farming and to the need for much improved RDPs.

The resolution gives strong support to the strategy proposed by the Commission, including all its targets and actions; but it also emphasises that some actions may have to be strengthened and specified more clearly, and that more concrete measures should be deployed in order to ensure effective implementation of the strategy.

It stresses the urgent need for action, and the need to give higher political priority to biodiversity in order to meet the EU's 2020 headline target for biodiversity and global biodiversity commitments.

Under the agriculture heading, the resolution calls for a strengthening of Pillar II and for drastic improvements in all Member States to the environmental focus of that Pillar and to the effectiveness of its agri-environmental measures, including through minimum mandatory spending on environmental measures – such as agri-environmental measures, Natura 2000 and forest environment measures – and support for High Nature Value and organic farming.

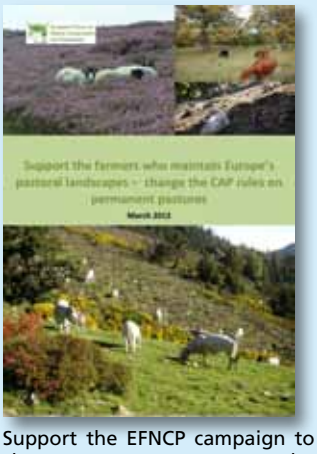
It encourages the Commission and Member States to explore the phenomenon of land abandonment in some parts of Europe supporting the targeted maintenance of biodiversity and avoiding desertification, whilst providing new socio-economic opportunities for rural development.

A proposal to see abandonment as a potential opportunity to rewild large parts of the landscape as major wilderness areas was removed. Instead, the resolution highlights the importance for biodiversity of halting and reversing land abandonment, and advocates increased support for small and medium-scale farming, family-based farming and extensive farming, which promote proper conservation of natural resources.

Guy Beaufoy, policy@efncp.org

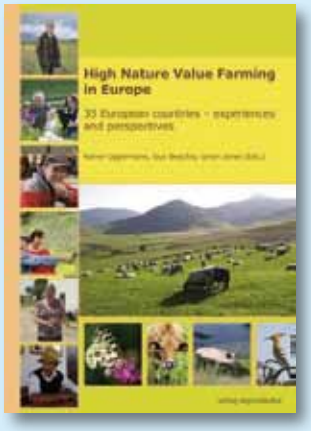
From the Forum

Petition on Permanent Pasture rules



Support the EFNCP campaign to change Permanent Pasture rules – sign up to our petition at http://www.efncp.org/forum/from-the-forum/support-the-farmers/
84 farming and environmental organisations have done so already!

HNV farming book



HNV farming has been at the centre of EU rural development policy for the best part of seven or eight years without there being any reference book on the subject. With the publication of *High Nature Value Farming in Europe,* EFNCP, with our collaborators IFAB Mannheim, have at last filled that gap.

This landmark volume is introduced by a joint foreword by Commissioners Dacian Cioloş and Janez Potočnik. It provides a comprehensive introduction to the subject and outlines how the concept can be applied in 35 European states, as described by local experts.

This 500-page book is richly illustrated throughout with colour photographs, maps and figures and is now available for purchase, at a special introductory price of £40/€45 plus postage and packing from the UK. For a precise postage quote, send details of your location and requirements to book@efncp.org.

CAP and the Environment Fact Sheets

EFNCP has joined up with a range of leading European NGOs to produce a set of Fact Sheets on the CAP and key environmental issues, including Biodiversity, Climate Change, Soil and Water. EFNCP was lead author on the Grasslands and High Nature Value farming Fact Sheets.
http://www.efncp.org/forum/from-the-forum/fact-sheets/

Delivering public policy on commons – EFNCP/CCRI panel in the 2011 European Conference of the International Association for the Study of Commons, Plovdiv

Common land is socially and legally complex; policy rarely considers it ex ante, yet the systems that use it are highly affected by Government regulations and incentives. The need for academic research to inform policy making is clear, yet many researchers steer clear of work which is clearly applied to such questions.

EFNCP and CCRI organised a panel at the 2011 IASC conference in Plovdiv to raise what we consider are urgent issues requiring research and to report on some relevant projects. The session looked in detail at the range of approaches across Western Europe where public policies are delivered on common grazings. This includes the Common Agricultural Policy, rural development, biodiversity and natural resource management (fire prevention).

The papers within the session explored a range of diverse commons and the policy environments that interact with them. Among the core questions that were considered are the extent to which:

- integrated policy delivery is possible on commons and the unconventional notions of property that they represent;
- common land institutions, and the traditional governance they represent, are able to cope with and deliver new policy demands;
- common land institutions facilitate or obstruct the making of a clear link between action and reward or action and penalty;
- the peculiarities of common land in all its forms is considered in the policy-making process.

The presentations and associated papers are available at http://www.efncp.org/projects/common-land/plovdiv-conference/

New SE Europe report

A report of the Zagreb seminar on High Nature Value Farming in South-Eastern Europe: Policy Opportunities and Challenges in the EU Accession is now available online at http://www.efncp.org/download/SEE_report_2011.pdf

Lessons for Irish commonages from England and Scotland? Study visit organised by IT Sligo and EFNCP

Further details, reports and pictures from this Leonardo da Vinci-funded study tour from Ireland to the UK are available at: http://www.efncp.org/projects/common-land/study-tours/scotland-england/

New Romania project reports

Vegetation mapping and abandonment work in the Pogány-havas area of eastern Transylvania are available to download at http://www.efncp.org/projects/projects-in-romania/poganyhavas/
A report detailing work carried out in 2010-11 by the Mozaic Project in the Eastern Hills of Cluj, partly using EFNCP funding, is available at http://www.efncp.org/projects/projects-in-romania/mozaic-project/
We hope to report more fully on these important projects in future issues of *La Cañada.*

Delegates on the study tour to England and Scotland.

Declan Feeney

The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism brings together ecologists, nature conservationists, farmers and policy-makers. This non-profit-making network exists to increase understanding of the high nature-conservation and cultural value of certain farming systems and to inform work on their maintenance.
www.efncp.org

Edited and published by the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism. This issue was supported by the European Commission DG Environment. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information contained herein.

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Views expressed within *La Cañada* do not necessarily reflect those of the editor, the supporting organisations or the publisher.
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