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protecting birds and biodiversity

SAVE NATURE - SAVE FARMING

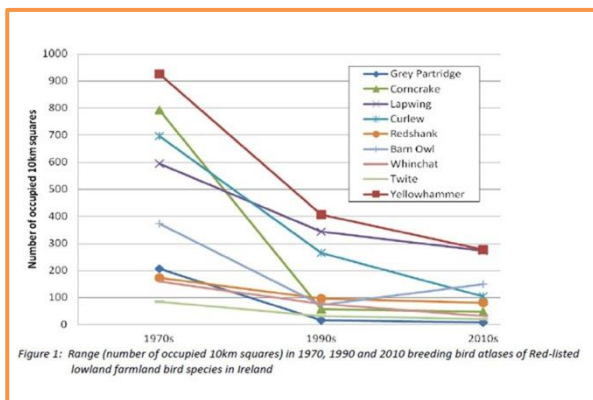
Reform the CAP: 3 solutions to beat
the biodiversity & climate crisis

#Space4Nature
#Money4Nature
#Transition4Nature

Reform the CAP: Three solutions to restore nature, climate and a future for farming in Ireland and across Europe

Nature is in trouble. While temperatures rise, extinction rates are tens to hundreds of times higher than they have been for tens of millions of years: scientists say we are already in the midst of a sixth great mass extinction. Sixty percent of global animal populations have disappeared since 1970. In 2018, scientists stated that we have 12 years to act, meaning that immediate action is needed to avoid ecological collapse by 2030.

Across Europe, including Ireland, farmland birds, and insects are experiencing dramatic declines. Agriculture is the main cause of species and habitat loss in Europe (EEA, 2015). Biodiversity loss and climate change now threaten our future ability to produce food and thus farmers' livelihoods.



In Ireland, farmland birds have crashed since 1970s. Source: Balmer, D., Gillings, S., Caffrey, B. et al. 2013. Bird Atlas 2007–11: the Breeding and Wintering Birds of Britain and Ireland. BTO, Thetford.



Farmland bird species like the Curlew (97% decline in Ireland since the 1980's) are declining far more rapidly than other types of bird species. Birds are an indicator species, being at the top of the food chain, meaning that they reflect more generally the trends in our biodiversity. Photo: Mike Brown

Why this CAP reform is critical to achieving 2030 goals and securing a better future for farmers

EU taxpayers pay 58 billion euros a year to the CAP, or 114 EUR per EU citizen. It significantly determines how farmers farm on more than 40% of the EU's land. However, at present 75% of the money goes to unconditional per hectare 'income' payments – of which 80% go to the top 20% of beneficiaries – locking in business as usual, intensive agriculture. Much of the rest also funds intensive practices that harm biodiversity, climate, water, air and soil (only 7% goes to environment).

Nature and climate cannot withstand another decade of intensive agriculture. Across Europe, citizens, scientists, the European Courts of Auditors, but also more and more farmers are calling for a fundamental reform of the CAP, which protects nature and provides the investment and incentives needed to make agriculture economically and ecologically fit for the future.



In Europe, all but the largest farms declined between 2005 and 2016 Size classes in hectares (ha)

green Number of farms

orange Utilised agricultural area

Source: Eurostat (ef_m_farmleg)



In October 2019 farmers, NGOs and citizens mobilised across Europe as part of

#goodfoodgoodfarming to demand a different CAP.

Photo: www.goodfoodgoodfarming.eu

MEPs have the power to change all this in their First Reading Position on the CAP files. The changes voted in the Environment Committee Opinion on 14th February 2018 herald a change in direction towards more sustainable farming, but the urgency and scale of the ecological crisis means that the next Parliament must go even further than this.

The 3 key solutions to boost the CAP's performance for nature, climate and farmers



#1 Space for nature – dedicate at least 10 percent of every farm in Europe for biodiversity (non-productive areas and landscape features under “conditionality”)



#2 Money for nature – ensure sufficient income for farmers from targeted biodiversity measures (€15 billion/year ring-fenced in the CAP)



#3 Transition for nature – by 2027, transform all direct payments into funding for a just transition, so farmers can invest in the future

Let's start the transition from the CAP that supports this to a CAP that supports farmers to do this:



Photo: Christian Schwier/stock.adobe.com



Photo: Matthias Tschumi

The following sections explain each of these solutions in more detail.



Solution #1: Set a minimum of 10% space for nature on all farms as part of “conditionality”

What is Space for nature?

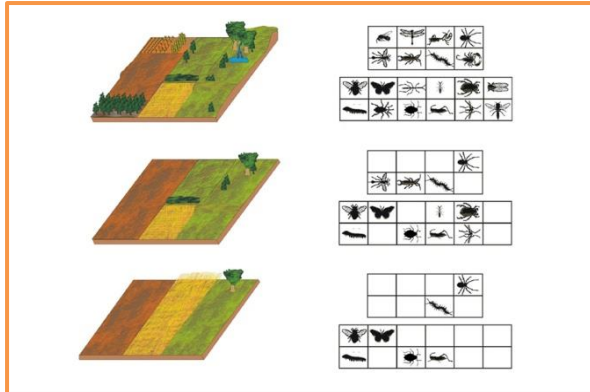
Space for nature refers to areas that are not cultivated, such as hedgerows, flower strips, wetlands or other habitats that are exclusively left (or managed) for wildlife. A minimum of 10% across all farmed landscapes is needed to provide insects, birds and other animals with food, shelter and breeding grounds. As part of the farmed landscapes these spaces safeguard or even increase productivity by providing valuable environmental services, such as pollinators, pest control, soil and water protection.

In accordance with scientific evidence, space for nature must be complemented by both additional voluntary measures (see next chapter, “money for nature”) as well as other binding standards for farming on the entire area of each farm, such as a reduction of fertilizers, pesticides and a legal definition of good agricultural practice.

Our ask: Set a minimum 10% of non-productive area on all farms in the conditionality (Annex III, GAEC 9) and without any exemptions or equivalent practices such as allow cultivation of any type of crop on these areas. After a transition phase in which direct payments should be phased out, this has to become a legally binding requirement at EU level.

Will 10% of space for nature help address biodiversity loss?

Yes. Wild animals require habitat for breeding, shelter and sourcing food. The intensification of agriculture, encouraged by CAP subsidies, has led to the removal of natural habitat in the farmed landscape: hedgerows, flower strips, field margins, wetlands (such as ponds), fallow (uncultivated) land.



Landscape simplification in the EU, which goes hand-in-hand with declines in natural predators.

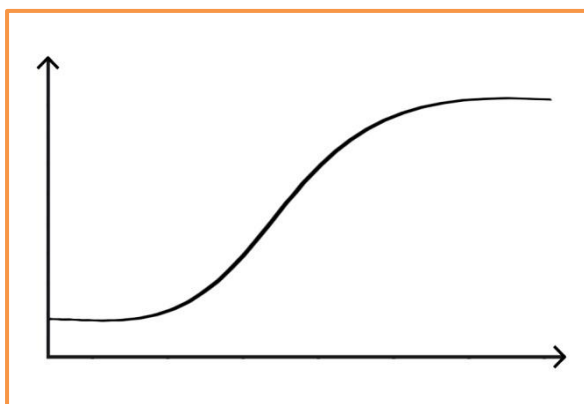
Source: Gámez-Virués et al., 2015

Studies from across Europe show that if a minimum of 10-14% of agricultural land were to be non-productive, then birds, and thus other wildlife, would recover (Busch et al., 2020; BIOGEA, 2020; Traba and Morales, 2019; Walker et al., 2018; Langhammer et al., 2017; Pe'er et al., 2014; Oppermann, 2008). It is the minimum, as at landscape level, 26-33% may be required for landscape-level recovery (Walker et al. 2018).

Until 2008, it was compulsory for all farms to leave 10% of their land fallow. Not intended as a biodiversity measure, it indirectly had a significant positive impact for wildlife (Traba et al., 2019).

Further, studies suggest that intensification of farming and related loss of natural habitat and species are reducing crop yields (Dainese et al., 2019), whereas restoration of space for nature can improve yields (Pywell et al (2015).

A simple, Europe-wide minimum standard based on science is needed to ensure a level playing field for farmers, as otherwise those doing harm to biodiversity will be at a competitive advantage against those delivering for biodiversity. Further, many farmers that already work in nature friendly ways will have little extra effort to do, as they can count many features as space for nature.



A minimum threshold is needed to start biodiversity recovery on farms - the research recommends a 10% minimum.

X-graph: Biodiversity

Y-graph: Landscape complexity

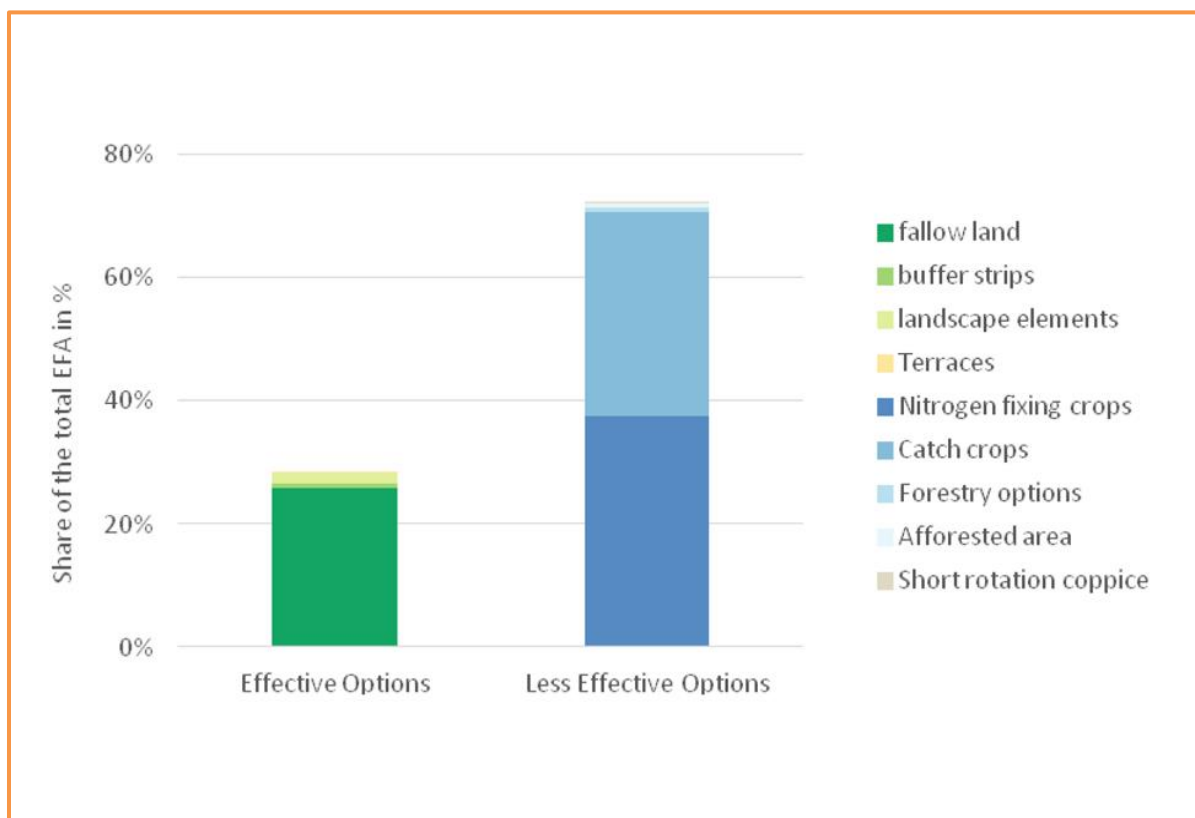
Source: BIOGEA, 2020

Does Space for Nature have co-benefits for the wider environment?

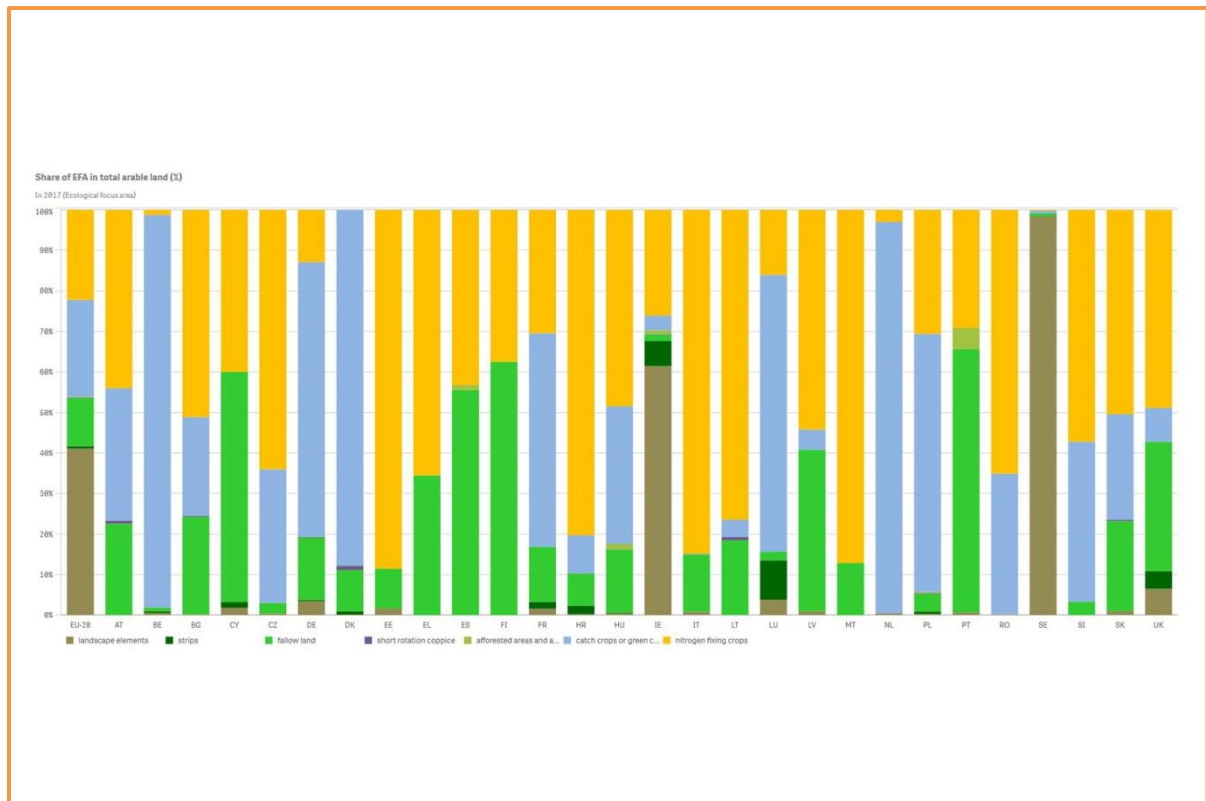
Yes. Space for nature is also positive for the climate because hedgerows and natural vegetation provide carbon sinks. As soon as the land is ploughed the carbon is released. Natural vegetation is also beneficial for water, acting as a buffer between cultivated fields and water courses. Hedgerows and trees also help to prevent soil erosion and flood risk, when implemented in the right area.

Doesn't the CAP already provide space for nature?

No, hardly none at all. In the current design of the CAP, only arable farmers over 15 hectares have to implement “ecological focus areas” (EFAs) on five percent of the farm area as part of the “greening” of direct payments. To make things worse, various exemptions for organic or small farms (“green by definition” classifications), alternatives and equivalences to this measure are diluting the effects for biodiversity (Pe’er et al, 2014). Ineffective measures can be counted towards this “greening”, namely, the cultivation of catch crops and legume crops. Reviews of the implementation, including by the European Court of Auditors, show that the ineffective measures (nitrogen fixing crops, cash crops) were unfortunately the most popular options farmers have selected, meaning that requirements for “space for nature” (EFAs) and crop diversification lead to changes on only 2% of farmland. Thus with a very high budget of 12 bn EUR per year the current “greening” of the CAP created far more bureaucracy than positive outcome for nature.



Effective and less effective options within the Ecological Focus Area in the EU 2015. Source: Pe’er et al., 2017



Choice of ecological focus areas broken down by member state, showing that in most countries farmers chose productive options (nitrogen fixing crops and catch crops or green cover) that do not provide habitat for wildlife. Source: agridata.ec.europa.eu

Why all types of farms should be included this CAP reform

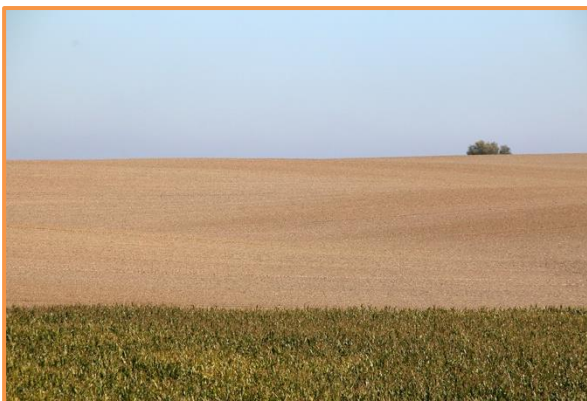


Photo: Eric Neuling/NABU



Photo: Matthias Tschumi

Nature needs space on arable land because wildlife such as birds, pollinators and mammals need hedgerows, flower strips, and field margins to shelter, breed and feed.



Photo: Klemens Karkow/NABU



Photo: Oonagh Duggan/BirdWatch Ireland

Nature needs space on grasslands because if all the grass is cut frequently or entirely trampled by cattle, then no ground nesting bird can survive, no flowers can complete their cycle and there is no food for butterflies. Nature needs some area managed exclusively for biodiversity, which will be unmown/late-mown and un-grazed or rotationally grazed, especially during the breeding season and so that flowers can complete their cycle.



Vineyards in Cariñena, Spain Photo: JOSE RAMON GIL/Unsplash



Vineyards in Doñana, Spain Photo: Ariel Brunner/BL



BirdLife_LIFE project Olivares Vivos Photo: SEO



BirdLife_LIFE project Olivares Vivos Photo: SEO

Nature needs space on permanent crops because intensive olive groves or vineyards with bare soil and heavy use of inputs do not provide feed for wildlife. Nature needs wild vegetation between rows of trees or vines, which can act as pollinator habitats and hence help production.

What amendments to the Commission's proposal will achieve this?

In the present CAP proposal by the European Commission, under the term “conditionality” there shall be an unspecified minimum % of non-productive area on the farms (Annex III, GAEC 9). In the discussions of the Agricultural Council, the environmental ambitions of the proposal have been watered down in the last 1.5 years, similar to the last reform period of the CAP, with the risk that Member States will end up with the option to include popular, but ineffective, productive areas (see Peer et al., 2017).

The power is with the European Parliament to set a minimum 10% of non-productive area on all farms in the conditionality (Annex III, GAEC 9), and without any exemptions or equivalent practices such as allow cultivation of any type of crop on these areas.

This requirement must be kept in conditionality, because this will ensure it is mandatory for all farms receiving payments, rather than becoming voluntary as with the eco-schemes or agri-environment payments, which would significantly reduce the land on which it will be implemented, even with a budget for the eco-schemes. These voluntary measures can however be used to fund additional space for nature beyond the baseline.

Look at the following the positions of the two committees. They show clearly that the Environment Committee's amendments to the Commission proposal, while not sufficient, are a significant step forwards towards a sustainable transformation of the CAP. On the other side, the Agriculture Committee removes this requirement from the conditionality and places it in the voluntary eco-schemes, which will mean it will apply to a much smaller area, and therefore insufficient to bring back biodiversity to farms.

COMENVI

Obligation within conditionality to have 7% of agricultural land as non-productive areas and landscape features.

COMAGRI

Deletion of ecological focus areas within the conditionality.



Solution #2: €15 billion per year for nature

What is Money for nature?

In order to create, on top of legal requirements, positive incentives for land users to undertake targeted measures for nature conservation, but also to finance management planning, habitat restoration or monitoring, the EU should provide 15 bn EUR annually from the CAP to biodiversity measures. This ring-fencing needs to be legally referenced also in the EU's Multiannual Financial Framework.

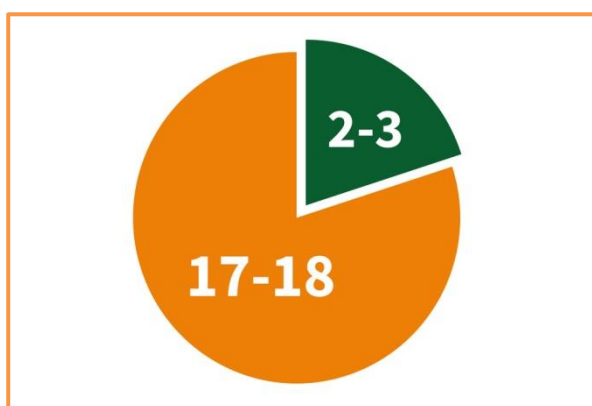
This funding should go to all measures (incentive payments for certain practices and investment grants) that have nature conservation as their primary objective. Spending must be approved and overseen by the environmental authorities at all levels, in close cooperation with all relevant authorities and stakeholders. Beneficiaries should be all those who implement eligible measures (e.g. farmers, land and forest owners and managers and public bodies). Quality control must be ensured, inter alia through use of the Prioritized Action Frameworks (PAFs) under Art.8 of the EU Habitats Directive.

Our ask: Dedicate €15 billion per year from the CAP funds to biodiversity measures, to come out of a 50% ringfencing for environmental objectives in both Pillars (Article 86).

How much funding is needed for biodiversity?

A thorough Fitness Check of the EU Nature Directives, of the European Commission, backed by the European Parliament and the Member States, showed that the lack of funding is the main reason why Europe is not meeting its biodiversity obligations. Most of this funding is required to provide incentives for voluntary measures of farmers, forest owners and other land users. The less funding there is available, the less chances there are for cooperation with stakeholders in nature conservation. BirdLife estimates a funding need of €20 billion annually for all Member States combined (terrestrial Natura 2000 network and other measures for species and habitats on land). Three quarters of this (€15 billion) should be provided by the EU budget, as biodiversity is a common heritage and not equally distributed across the continent. Currently a funding gap of at least 80% is estimated (Kettunen et al., 2017), while more detailed figures are currently collected by the European Commission.

The CAP is and should remain the main provider of nature funding. At the moment the CAP funds nature conservation only through measures under the Rural Development Programmes ("2nd pillar"), but these are only 7% of the overall CAP budget and Member States are largely free to choose quantity and quality of spending. Other instruments like the "Greening", which in theory amounts to 30% of the much larger 1st pillar, have proven to be ineffective and just another form of income support (EU Court of Auditors, 2017). Such measures are further undermined by the majority of CAP payments funding intensive farming through both pillars.



*The funding needs for Natura 2000 have been estimated at €20 billion /year while only €2-3 billion is mobilised.
Source: Graph based on BirdLife Europe's calculations*

What measures should be financed?

These funds should finance targeted measures (suited to regional conservation needs) by farmers and other land managers, which exceed baseline legal standards. Schemes (e.g. ecoschemes or agri-environment schemes) must have, as their number one goal, biodiversity conservation, and be backed scientifically, or piloted, and be monitored for their effectiveness so that ineffective schemes can be improved or funding transferred to more effective ones.

Priorities of biodiversity funding should be given to schemes that link to:

- Restoring and maintaining species and habitats of EU importance to a favourable conservation status.
- Implementing management requirements related to Natura 2000 sites.
- Undertaking other targeted biodiversity measures as well as monitoring and communication activities (including Farm Advisory Services) that underpin the achievement of EU biodiversity legislation and policy.

Along with oversight by environmental authorities to ensure schemes align with biodiversity priorities, 2% of the budget of each biodiversity measure has to be ring-fenced for independent scientific monitoring of schemes, in order to follow up on whether they are delivering on their objectives.

Benefits to farmers

Money for nature is in reality income for farmers to carry out biodiversity-friendly management. Whilst it ensures that EU taxpayers also receive a benefit (public goods), long term contracts for environmental stewardship (e.g. agri-environment or Natura 2000 payments to look after habitats such as biodiverse grasslands or wetlands), can help stabilise their income and make them more resilient. Farming revenue from selling crops inevitably fluctuates with market prices, yields and input costs. Public goods payments, on the other hand, are stable and predictable (at least for the duration of the contract — typically around 5 years). So blending market income and income from public goods payments is a way to help farmers' economic viability, while delivering value to society and providing the farmer with the dignity and pride of being paid for actual delivery rather than as a form of welfare.

Research by BirdLife/NABU in Bulgaria has shown that paying for biodiversity would improve the income of the majority of farmers, including high nature value ones (Trapp & Lakner, 2018). Practices like leaving land fallow, green infrastructure for preventing erosion, or creation of pollinator habitat also build resilience of farms to future environmental shocks, and have positive impacts on productivity of farming (Dainese et al., 2019).



Peatland restoration in Germany Photo: E. Nerger/NABU

Co-benefits for climate

Often, nature-based-solutions are also positive for the climate, such as restoration of peatlands and wetlands, additional green infrastructure beyond the baseline providing carbon sinks. Where there could be trade-offs, such as between semi-natural grassland versus restoration of natural forests, these should be managed based on where the most biodiversity benefit can be achieved versus where the best climate mitigation can be achieved. Natural restoration of forests is both preferable from a climate and biodiversity perspective to planting or forestry monoculture.

Biodiversity schemes are also likely to be beneficial for water, acting as a buffer between cultivated fields and water courses. It also helps to prevent flood risk, when implemented in the right area.

What amendments to the Commission's proposal will achieve this?

In the present CAP proposal by the European Commission, a minimum of 30% of Pillar 2 funds are reserved for the environment (article 86). This should be increased to 50% in each Pillar for the environmental objectives, and include a specific allocation for biodiversity. Setting a specific allocation of 15 bn EUR per year for measures that have biodiversity conservation as their primary objective would firstly allow the EU to start to tackle the loss of farmland biodiversity, and would also make it far easier than currently to track the effectiveness of the spending. This allocation should be linked to the Prioritized Action Frameworks (Member States plans for implementing the EU's Nature Directives that detail funding needs and priority species and habitats), to ensure that it is addressing the biggest conservation problems with adequate funding. Quality of spending must also be ensured with proper involvement of environmental authorities and proper consultation with civil society.

The proposal is currently undergoing the co-decision between Parliament and Council. So far, only the Environment committee of the European Parliament has positioned itself, to increase nature financing under the CAP and the quality of spending.

COMENVI

Dedicated funds for biodiversity within second pillar, based on needs identified within the PAFs. High ring-fencing for eco-schemes and shift of ANC-payments to first pillar. Yet biodiversity ringfencing missing within 1st pillar and reference to EU-wide identified financial need of 15bn/year only as non-binding recital.

COMAGRI

Mandatory eco-schemes with low ring-fencing, which includes GAECs that were part of conditionality within EC proposal. Inclusion of ANC payments within environmental ring-fencing in 2nd pillar. No dedicated money for biodiversity.



Solution #3: Investing in a just transition instead of harmful subsidies

What is Transition for Nature?

To save our planet we need a transformative change of our economy, in particular for the way we use our land. We need to help farmers to move to a business model that is compatible with the high environmental legal baseline we need, that is economically viable with far less subsidies than today and that is fair both to farmers, consumers and taxpayers.

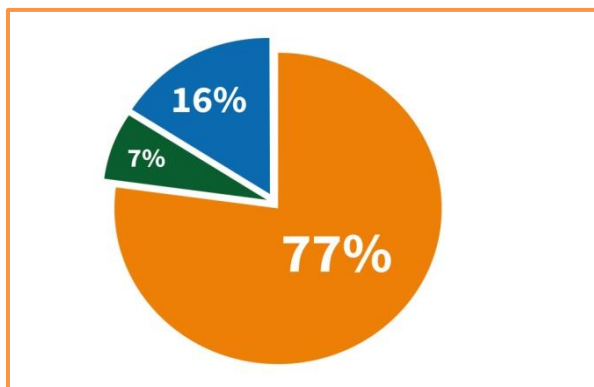
In comparison to other sectors, European agriculture has the advantage of already having the funds needed at its disposal, in the budget of the CAP. However 75% of this tax money is currently locked in inefficient, unjust and harmful flat rate per hectare payments – more than €40 billion annually. These “direct payments” are paid out independently from both the need and from the performance of a farmer. They accelerate environmental damage and do not even stay within the farm sector, as they inflate land prices and other costs of production. Other CAP payments, such as coupled payments and certain types of investment grants, are also actively harmful to the environment and long-term viability of the sector.

Our ask: Move away from payments that actively cause harm or continue with the status quo, towards payments that fund a transition of farming practices towards sustainable environmental, economic and social outcomes.

Why are most of CAP subsidies currently unfair and harmful to the environment?

Today, the bulk of the CAP budget goes to either directly to harmful practices or to those that maintain business as usual practices. Around three quarters of the CAP budget goes to direct payments (“Pillar I” of

the CAP), which have proven to be economically inefficient, socially unfair and environmentally harmful (Pe'er et al., 2017). These are extremely unfairly distributed—they are not linked to farmers' income and are paid by area. Environmental conditions are weak and unenforced, meaning that essentially the payments go to business as usual practices — or worse in the case of coupled payments, which directly encourage intensification. The per-hectare set-up also contributes to the increase of land prices and land rent, which is causing problems for new entrants to farming, particularly for those who would like to farm in a more environmentally friendly way. A recent study in Germany showed that the direct payments were having little impact on slowing the rate of farm decline (BMEL, 2018), although this is also frequently used to justify their existence.

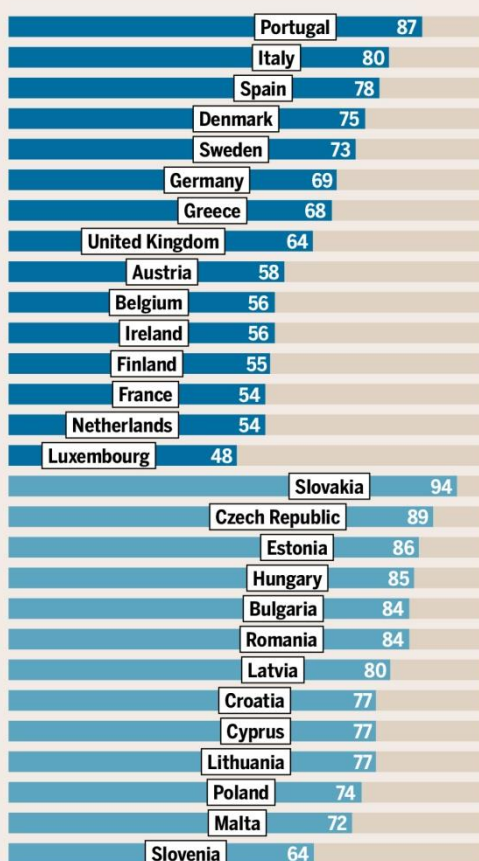


CAP 2014 – 2020 budget (without national financing)
Allocation of CAP funds at EU level in the current period:
77% goes to Pillar I, 7 % to Agri-Environment Schemes,
16% to other Rural Development Source: BirdLife

CONCENTRATED CASH

Share of EU direct payments that accrues to the top one-fifth of recipients, percent, 2015

■ EU members up to 1995 ■ EU members since 2004



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“33% of the direct payments budget, just less than 10% of the entire EU budget, is paid to a relatively small group of landowners. It is not clear what is the European value added of this expenditure.” Professor Alan Matthews, 2018

“While the case for EU environmental and climate change-related actions is strong, the data and the arguments used to support the needs assessment for farmers' income are insufficient.” European Court of Auditors, 2018

“[Per hectare income support] is not appropriate for addressing many environmental and climate concerns, nor is it the most efficient way of supporting viable farm income.” European Court of Auditors, 2018

“[Direct payments mean] we do not have the money to address the real challenges” Professor Harald Grethe, 2019

Percentage of CAP direct payments going to the top 20% of recipients, the EU average is 80%. Source: Agriculture Atlas 2019 / EC

What should we pay for instead of direct payments – and how?

Farmers must be helped to transition to agro-ecological farming systems, moving from the intensive high-input, high output model to one in line with planetary boundaries. This should cover economic, social and environmental dimensions in one go, e.g. support to switch to organic farming, feed autonomy, to improve marketing through shorter food chains, to increase demand of public bodies for nature and climate friendly food, and to reduce food waste, rather than for example paying for new stables for intensive livestock.

All this can only be done with a proper performance framework set at EU level. However, the performance framework in Commission proposal as it stands is not adequate to ensure this. The proposed indicators report mainly on the amount of money that is spent, but not the actual environmental impact, and controls and sanctions are weak. Furthermore, the proposal simply assumes that 40% of the overall CAP spending and the direct payments contribute to climate action without any reference to the measures the Member States are going to programme. This has been called out by the European Court of Auditors as “an invention”, undermining real action on the climate and thus, the EU’s credibility.

What amendments to the Commission’s proposal will achieve this?

Provisions to curb harmful subsidies, phase out direct payments and to transfer to more progressive forms of CAP spending (agri-environment, eco-schemes, non-productive and agro-ecological investments and sustainable rural development) can be made in the CAP. 50% of the overall CAP should go to climate and environment already from the start of the current reform and they should set a trajectory for transferring direct payments by 2027 to payments for sustainability. In the UK, the government plans a 7-year phase out of Direct Payments to give recipients time to adapt, in favour of a system of payments for public goods, especially environmental.

For all this to work, the system of performance and accountability of the next CAP needs to be geared towards the ecological transition, leading to the phase-out of all harmful subsidies in favour of payments for transition and for sustainable farming practices. This will happen through strong and smart EU level objectives and targets (that are coherent with or based on existing EU targets, such as on biodiversity), proper scientific monitoring of impacts and effectiveness, and an effective system of carrots (for transition pioneers) and sticks (for transition laggards).

The Environment Committee comes the closest to redirecting funds from direct payments to more performance-based types of support. In the Agriculture Committee and the Agriculture Council, the green architecture of the Commission’s proposal has been severely weakened down.

COMENVI

No specific phase-out, but higher focus on environmental spending will lead to lower direct payments. Yet transition support for farmers is missing.

COMAGRI

Ringfencing of large part pillar 1 for direct payments, higher share for coupled support. No phase-out of direct payments.

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Photos, title & back: Matthias Tschumi

