Building up a central and eastern European cooperation in nature conservation-oriented grassland use – TRINET

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Antragstitel	**Entwicklung einer naturschutzorientierten Grünlandnutzung in Mittel- und Osteuropa – Aufbau einer Kooperation (TRINET)** Building up a central and eastern European cooperation in nature conservation-oriented grassland use – TRINET
Stichworte	grassland farming, agrobiodiversity, networking

Laufzeit	Projektbeginn	Projektende	Projektphase(n)
1/2009 – 12/2010	**01.01.2009**	**31.05.2011**	**1**
Zwischenberichte	31.12.2009		

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Zielsetzung und Anlass des Vorhabens

The project aim is to build up an international partnership between initiatives in which nature and water protection organisations collaborate with farmers to maintain or restore high nature value grasslands in order to preserve biodiversity and landscape, but in such a way that this nature-oriented land use is economically viable for the farmers.
High nature value (HNV) grasslands and traditional semi-natural open landscapes are under threat across Europe, with agricultural intensification on the one hand and land use abandonment on the other. The kind of farming which maintained ecologically valuable grassland biotope types is no longer technically, socially or economically attractive. Small-scale traditional farming is now collapsing in new EU member states, a process accelerated by the accession to the single EU agricultural market. Practical experiences of grassland use which is benefiting conservation and interesting for the farmer, of marketing produce from such grassland use as a quality ‘nature’ product, of dealing with technical or administrative obstacles exist, but are not disseminated well enough, especially not at an international level. Knowledge transfer and exchange of experience at a European level is largely missing.

Darstellung der Arbeitsschritte und der angewandten Methoden

The project, with acronym TRINET, or NETwork promoting the TRIple aims of preserving biodiversity, water quality and landscape, involves partner organisations in six CEE countries (Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) plus Germany, Austria, Belgium and Finland.
Main activities are:
(1) Communication and networking to improve the knowledge and experience base ("capacity building").
(2) Scoping in the six CEE countries the possibilities for developing exemplary projects putting into practice the TRINET ideas about economically viable grassland farming in favour of nature values.
(3) Laying the foundation for such exemplary projects and developing them to the point where they can receive funding and begin work. The focus is on pasture and meadow projects in the Danube region and in the Baltic states.

Ergebnisse und Diskussion

Main activities were:

- an initial workshop in Austria and a meeting during the follow-up projects' development phase (Rhön, Germany);
- the production of national scoping reports about the grassland situation, problems connected to using HNV grasslands and possible solutions;
- a national workshop in each of the partner countries to assess the status quo and develop projects;
- the elaboration of concrete follow-up projects by the partners.

In carrying out these activities, the network which was built up through the project, and the exchange of experience between practitioners from grazing projects, proved to be a decisive help.

In summary, the following results were obtained:

1) High nature value grassland in Europe is declining sharply, both in terms of quantity as of quality. In the six CEE countries which were examined, this is mainly caused by land use abandonment, but partly also by intensification or change of land use.
2) The principal causes are the transition from a state-run to a market economy, and the succession between generations: the younger generation often does not stay in agriculture but departs for the cities.
3) Consequently, the core challenge is a socio-economic one: how can the use of HNV grassland, which is so important for nature conservation, be secured for the future by making it economically viable, and where it has already been given up, can it be revived again?
4) Two target audiences seem to be important in this context: on the one hand traditional farmers, on the other the increasing number of 'new farmers' who start new farm holdings which reintroduce grazing and mowing or modify it compared to the past.
5) A series of problems occurs more or less equally in all six CEE countries: lack of knowledge how to manage HNV grassland, both technically and economically, in the most effective way; inadequate EU programs and the wide divergence in the way they are applied at national level; problems with the definition of 'grassland' at national and EU level which mean that certain types of HNV grassland are not eligible for subsidies; lack of alternatives for using hay from very poor land, economic and technical problems with the direct marketing of meat and milk from HNV grassland.
6) The EU agriculture policy needs to improve basic structural frameworks, so that HNV grassland can be used conform to the objective of multifunctional use in an economically viable way. Notably the funding from the second pillar must be improved and the direct marketing of niche products ('nature meat and milk') supported.

Because the framework which will be established by the CAP reform for the next budgetary cycle of agricultural support (2014-2020) is of crucial importance, the project got involved in the lobbying platform ARC2020 and contributed to its policy papers.

All the partner organizations in the six CEE countries developed at least one follow-up project, sometimes several, and submitted these to donors for funding. Three areas were generally covered: production (which means the technical aspects of using HNV grasslands to produce meat and milk products in a manner which is beneficial for biodiversity); processing (how to convert raw meat and milk from HNV grassland farming into products which can be sold to consumers, preferably with added value); distribution (how to get the products to the consumers as efficiently as possible). In addition, an objective was defined for an international networking follow-up project, considered to be a necessary supplement to the national projects.

Öffentlichkeitsarbeit und Präsentation

The backbone of the communications work is the website www.tri-net.eu where all the principal results and documents can be read.

Fazit

The project has successfully established an international network, reported on the serious threats to HNV grasslands in the six CEE countries and their causes and elaborated proposals for solutions, including formulating and submitting follow-up projects to potential funding donors. The exchange of experience between professionals was of prime importance. To maintain the multifunctionality of HNV grassland in future and preserve its biodiversity are needed:

i) a socio-economic context which provides a solid foundation,

ii) the right policy mix for the next CAP budgetary cycle 2014-2020,

iii) a continued, intensified exchange of information and best practice at international level between practitioners.

Contents

1 Targets of the project

The project aim was to build up an international partnership between initiatives in which nature and water protection organizations collaborate with farmers to maintain or restore high nature value grasslands in order to preserve biodiversity and landscape, but in such a way that this nature-oriented land use is economically viable for the farmers.

High nature value grasslands and traditional semi-natural open landscapes are under threat across Europe, with agricultural intensification on the one hand and land use abandonment on the other. The kind of farming which maintained ecologically valuable grassland biotope types is no longer technically, socially or economically attractive. Practical experiences of grassland use which is benefiting conservation and interesting for the farmer, of marketing produce from such grassland use as a quality 'nature' product, of dealing with technical or administrative obstacles exist, but are not disseminated well enough, especially not at an international level. Knowledge transfer and exchange of experience at a European level is largely missing.

The project, with acronym TRINET, or NETwork promoting the TRIple aims of preserving biodiversity, water quality and landscape, involves partner organizations in six CEE countries (Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria) plus Germany, Austria, Belgium and Finland (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Map of the partner countries of TRINET.
In the green colored countries the aim was to develop follow-up projects.

Planned main activities of the project were:

(1) Communication and networking to improve the knowledge and experience base ("capacity building").
(2) Scoping in the six CEE countries the possibilities for developing exemplary projects putting into practice the TRINET ideas about economically viable grassland farming in favour of nature values.
(3) Laying the foundation for such exemplary projects and developing them to the point where they can receive funding and begin work. The focus is on pasture and meadow projects in the Danube region and in the Baltic states.

2 Work steps and methods

2.1 Phase I: Start of the TRINET-project

2009												2010												2011				
1	**2**	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5

Horizontal activities:
The first step was the formal appointment of the coordinators (Eckhard Jedicke, Anton Gazenbeek, Hans Krutzler) and to set up the central secretariat in Austria (hosted by the Weideverein Ramsargebiet Lafnitztal in its offices, rented from the Municipality of Loipersdorf), to act as permanent liaison between the project partners. Brigitte Gerger was appointed as responsible person for the project secretariat.

Figure 2: Coordinators, from left to right Anton Gazenbeek, Eckhard Jedicke, Hans Krutzler

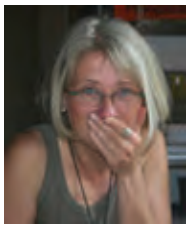


Figure 3: Brigitte Gerger, secretariat at Weideverein

The first horizontal activity was to prepare the opening meeting in Loipersdorf (Austria).
The Coordinators made draft partnership agreements, work plans and financial arrangements for transferring DBU funds to partners.

Activities at country level (EE, LV, SK, HU, RO, BG):

The partner organisations participated in the opening meeting at Loipersdorf (Austria) on 24./25. January 2009. At this meeting partnership agreements, work plans and financial arrangements were discussed, amended and adopted internally.

Figure 4: Meeting in Loipersdorf. From left to right: Eckhard Jedicke (coordinator, Rhön Natur), Janis Reihmanis (Latvian Fund for Nature), Iiro Ikkonen (Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes SouthWest Finland), Gunnar Sein (Keskonnaamet), Dobromil Galvanek (Daphne) and Wim Versteden (Veeakker)

Matters of project content and general issues of grassland conservation were also discussed at Loipersdorf. Some of the members had met before at the workshops in Buchschachen and Sigulda where TRINET was founded. They were all familiar with the topics and intentions of the new project and therefore technical discussions and analysis took place about the main problems, such as the decrease of meadows and grasslands on good soil and the problems with the EU hygienic regulations.

2.2 Phase II: Build up the internal communication – collect information

2009												2010												2011				
1	2	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5

Horizontal activities:

Design of the TRINET-Logo (Brigitte Gerger as main responsible) and its adoption after partners and coordinators had 'voted' on different models.

Initial design of the webpage dedicated to the TRINET project (Association Traditional Rural Landscapes).

Set-up of the intranet interactive web chatroom on www.wetpaint.com for the partners in the DBU project, for better communication within the project team.

Activities at country level (EE, LV, SK, HU, RO, BG):

Focus of phase II was on activities at country level (EE, LV, SK, HU, RO, BG), **c**ollecting basic information on the situation in each country:

- what grasslands are there and what are the trends and threats, which grasslands are the most critical requiring the most urgent attention
- what sort of Rural Development Programmes exist which could support using high-nature value grassland use
- any problems and gaps which are already known when it comes to supporting high-nature value grasslands

The country information collected by each partner was compiled and edited into draft reports, which were sent to the secretariat for checking and editing by the coordinators. All drafts had been received by summer 2009 (see appendix 1 of this report).

In addition, the Central Balkans National Park Directorate, which has a specific work programme in its partnership agreement, carried out an analysis of available information on grazing in the park for the period 2001 to 2009. As a result of the analysis were defined several groups of used pastures.

The entire database for the permissions for pasturing in the park and the corresponding number of animals from 2001 till now was integrated within the Park's GIS. The data for 2009 with pasture areas, name and address of the farmers, number and type of the animals were prepared as a layer with the corresponding database in the Geographical Information System (GIS) of the park. The database was completed by the end of 2009. It now allows different type of references to be done electronically including all the data available until now for the type of the habitats, biodiversity, monitoring, tourist flow etc.

2.3 Phase III: Collecting of country information, scoping of possibilities for concrete projects

2009												2010												2011				
1	2	3	4	5	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5

Horizontal activities:

Collecting the country information on grasslands compiled during phase 2 and adapting them into coherent information files by the coordinator, in consultation with the partners, who were asked when necessary to better explain certain parts or to add information about relevant matters.
These reports were ready in their final edited versions by August 2009 (see annexes for copies of these reports). They are available to the public via the TRINET website (downloadable documents at http://www.tri-net.eu/grasslands.htm).

These reports cover Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, whereby the report for Bulgaria is split in two – one for the country as a whole and one for the Central Balkans National Park specifically.

Once the final reports were ready, the coordinators used them to draw some general conclusions which can be used to guide the further development of TRINET.

Documents presenting best practice in direct marketing (Veeakker) and in reviving hay mowing and generating biogas (Weideverein Ramsargebiet Lafnitztal) were also elaborated during this phase (they have been uploaded as downloadable documents to the website, and can be seen in the annexes 3+4).

The TRINET-intranet started, but it was not used very intensively. All members preferred the direct contact by email or phone.

Activities at country level (EE, LV, SK, HU, RO, BG):

Partners in each country did a scoping of the opportunities for starting concrete pilot projects in which the TRINET philosophy is put into practice (see the individual scoping reports in appendix 2). The scoping includes a rough survey of which local initiatives and stakeholder networks exist, and if there are already farms working in favour of landscape and biodiversity which can be supported/strengthened, or farmers interested in starting farming in favour of landscape and biodiversity.

The scoping reports are very important parts of the project work with the purpose to find out which local initiatives and stakeholder networks exist which can be used as starting points for projects.
The overall conclusions drawn, at a supranational level, from the reports made by partners during phase II about the grassland situation in their respective countries, were used by the coordinators to guide this process of scoping and formulating possible follow-up projects, so that the focus would be on the key problems.

The partners focused on which are the best regions in the country for supporting and developing farms working in favour of landscape and biodiversity, which initiatives of this type are known to exist already and where is there a realistic possibility to start work with reliable persons or networks to start new initiatives for using grasslands in favour of landscape and biodiversity.

The scoping reports were the basis for the next step, the preparation of the pre-implementation workshops, which started in November 2009.

The partner Central Balkans National Park Directorate, because it is only covering the territory of the park, did not do a nation-wide scoping report. Instead, conform to the programme in its partnership agreement, it developed a questionnaire for surveying local farmers' attitude. This questionnaire included 16 questions. The main questions relate to the type and number of domestic animals, the period during which grasslands in the park are used, condition of pasture areas, the realization of production, comments/recommendations on the existing procedure for grazing, state of infrastructure related to grazing – pens and shelters, water availability, existing problems. In total 50 paper copies of the questionnaires were handed out to the park rangers who interviewed farmers during their regular beat, meeting shepherds in the grazing ground, or at individual meetings down in the relevant local

residential places. Collected data was submitted to CBNP Directorate and served as one of the main tools for identifying farmers who show most interest and seemingly have most capacity to take part in the pre-implementation workshop.

Main findings from inquiry:

- Park Directorate received information about traditional users of pastures in the park. This helped the Directorate in developing the system of allocating grazing in the park.
- The majority of respondents claimed livestock is the main livelihood for their family.
- Most shepherds approved the procedure for allocation of pastures.
- Some of interviewed people indicate as a problem poor condition of infrastructure for mountain farming. This could be possible follow-up project for TRINET.
- Shepherds assess as positive the presence of National park

2.4 Phase IV: Pre-implementation workshops

2009												2010												2011				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	**10**	**11**	**12**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5

Horizontal activities:

Collecting information from the scoping reports in order to better understand the strategic issues for the future direction of TRINET, dialogue with the partners about the scoping reports and their contents (which included asking partners to examine specific topics in more detail), helping to organise the Pre-implementation workshops and attending these workshops, were the main activities from the Secretariat and Coordination in phase IV.

A coordination meeting was held in December 2009 in Frankfurt to take stock of the project's progress and guide the scoping and pre-implementation workshops.

Activities at country level (EE, LV, SK, HU, RO, BG):

The scoping (phase III) was followed by "pre-implementation workshops", one per country, at which farmers and representatives of the initiatives or networks identified during the scoping were invited. The purpose was to hear their opinion on what needs to be done and to formulate ideas for concrete projects on economically viable grassland use.

The workshops were held between November 2009 and April 2010. To each workshop interested farmers and representatives from the initiatives most likely to lead to concrete projects on economically viable grassland use were invited. Also the coordinators and experts from the TRINET network took part. Each of these workshops lasted 2 or 3 days and was located in rural areas or small towns:

Figure 5: Biele Vody, Slovakia, site of first pre-implementation workshop

Slovakia	Biele Vody	2-4/11/2009
Hungary	Türkeve	6-8/11/2009
Latvia	Apšuciems	19-20/11/2009
Romania	Odorheiu Secuiesc	26-27/1/2010
Bulgaria CBNP	Gabrovo	24-25/3/2010
Bulgaria Agrolink	Smolian	26-27/3/2010
Estonia	Vanaõue	15-16/4/2010

Mostly 20-30 persons took part: 2-3 persons from the partner organisation, 2-3 coordinators and experts (depending on the issues relevant to each country) and last but not least 10-20 people representing potential follow-up projects. Sometimes representatives of ministries, local authorities and national funding agencies also came.

Figure 6: Workshop in the offices of Nimfea, Hungary, Nov. 6-8 2009

Figure 7: Workshop in Vanaoue, Estonia, April 15-16 2010

The outcome of the workshops was different from country to country. Some workshops only generated new ideas for grassland use, so that it was the function of the TRINET partner organisation to design concrete projects. In other countries the local farmers and NGOs already had concrete project ideas.

Figure 8: discussion on the farm, Hungarian workshop, Nov. 2009

The agendas and main outcomes of the workshops are found in the annexes (appendix 2).

2.5 Phase V: Outline of follow-up projects, where possible starting of first projects

2009												2010												2011				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**10**	**11**	**12**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Horizontal activities:

During the spring of 2010, the coordinators and partner organisations evaluated the workshop results, in light of the aim to prepare one or more projects per country which have a real chance of succeeding on the ground, with genuinely motivated and reliable grassland users.

These evaluation conclusions about the objectives of TRINET were very valuable to prepare the **TRINET plenary workshop held in Fladungen, the Rhön (Germany) July 5-8 2010.**

Thus, responding to the conclusion that experience exchange between direct marketing initiatives is of vital importance, an important part of the Fladungen workshop programme was devoted to visiting and discussing with local initiatives and networks which seek to add value to grassland products and to build up direct links with buyers (private consumers, but also professional clients like restaurants and hotels). This part of the programme generated a great deal of interest from the side of the CEE partners.

Interesting to note was that quite simple, practical examples of how to get extra value and income from biodiversity-oriented grassland use, were often the ones that raised the biggest 'Aha! - Erlebnis' response. Why? Because these small but practical ideas are easier to transpose to other countries and grassland use contexts, and put into use quickly, than over-ambitious theoretical schemes to build up entire marketing networks and campaigns from zero. Yet these seemingly small steps can have broad and long-lasting results. A good example of such a small, practical, transposable step is the following: One of the most successful examples of added value in the Rhön has been converting meat from older sheep to salami. Mutton from older sheep is not favoured by customers, who prefer meat from lambs. Already in the 1990s shepherds whose flocks grazed the orchid-rich calcareous grasslands and the upland Nardus grasslands in the Rhön, began producing salami from sheepmeat which was not easy to sell directly to consumers as cuts of meat for home or restaurant cooking. This has been a success, and has been followed by souvenir 'walking sticks' made of salami which are sold to tourists as gimmicks.

Figure 9: a range of salamis from grazing HNV grasslands in the Rhön

In the plenary workshop, partner organisations presented the results of the earlier phases in their country and their own suggestions on how to follow this up. The debate used these presentations, and the evaluation conclusions made by the coordinators, to come to shared views about what should happen next.

Figure 10: Coordinators Eckhard Jedicke and Hans Krutzler with presentation on follow-up activities

Because, after the Fladungen plenary workshop, the focus of work shifted to the partners, who were elaborating and submitting national follow-up projects, the second half of 2010 and winter 2010-2011 were relatively quiet on the coordination side.

Nevertheless, three important activities were carried out:

1) The TRINET website (http://www.tri-net.eu) was elaborated further and stocked with descriptions of the DBU project, the documents produced and the main conclusions.

2) Partners provided the coordinators with their comments, conclusions and suggestions about what should be changed at policy level to support grasslands. The information and experience gained during the scoping and the internal workshops proved very helpful in this regard. The coordinators collected these main criticisms and suggestions for improvement of the Common Agricultural Policy, Rural Development Programme and other EU instruments relevant to high nature value grasslands. The result was a working document, "TRINET Suggestions and Comments on Grassland Policy" (see annex 5), which was completed in August 2010. The ARC statement can be found in annex 6.

   The basic principles underlying the many technical suggestions and conclusions of this document, which, as said, uses the practical experience acquired by the project through the scoping and pre-implementation workshops, are the following:

Political support for grasslands – conclusions from practical experiences

It is essential that policy tackles the underlying causes of land and farm abandonment in an effective manner! This can be done in two mutually supportive ways:

(i) The second pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy CAP must be reinforced:

- *by increasing budgets and scope of measures, to include positive measures now generally absent or under-utilised;*
- *by reducing the member states' margin of manoeuvre to escape from actions which clearly have a significant and beneficial effect on HNV grasslands and the ecologically sustainable rural development associated with them;*
- *by ensuring levels of payment which are attractive for farmers and compensate them truly for their effort, but which at the same time give a real targeted contribution to biodiversity – not just general basic reduction of inputs and environmental pollution.*

(ii) help farmers managing high nature value grasslands who want to decrease their reliance on subsidies by building up direct markets for niche products ('nature meat and milk')

- *giving adequate support to investments in small-scale processing (added value), effective distribution (farm shops, retail networks), advertising and promotion towards potential consumers (including coherent certification);*
- *removing or mitigating the many barriers which prevent farmers taking such practical steps towards getting a better economic return from HNV farming and so reducing subsidy dependence: EU regulations on hygiene, slaughter, carcass disposal etc (and their national interpretation).*

In a further step, the valuation of ecosystem services (building on the European Commission DG ENV's TEEB study) should be brought into the CAP – ecosystems services being considered as a product of agriculture just as much as raw materials are. The CAP and its second pillar should be used, where appropriate, to help achieve goals of other EU policies (Natura 2000, Water Framework Directive, Floods Directive).

Ultimately, why not consider replacing the complex mix of axis 2 or 3 support schemes by direct payments to HNV farmers for delivering ecosystems services and/or Natura 2000/Water Framework Directive outputs – i.e. service contracts for delivering a public good?

3) TRINET participated in the ARC process. ARC (see www.arc2020.eu) is a platform which wants to collect input from civic society about EU rural and agricultural policy and participate in the political debate about the future of the Common Agricultural Policy after 2013. After the plenary workshop in Fladungen had given a green light, TRINET sent its initial contribution to ARC in July 2010. This contribution used the contents being elaborated for the working document, “TRINET Suggestions and Comments on Grassland Policy”. Important parts of this contribution were included by ARC into its draft policy statement. Over the next months, TRINET actively engaged in commenting and suggesting amendments to ARC’s draft Civil Society Response to the European Commission’s Communication on the future Common Agricultural Policy. TRINET input was provided by the coordinators, aided by a small *ad hoc* working group from the project partners. This input, which was one of many inputs from a wide range of civil

society organisqtions, culminated in attendance and active participation by Anton Gazenbeek, on behalf of TRINET, at the ARC civil society conference in Brussels, Nov. 4-5 2010, where the final text of the Civil Society Response was elaborated and presented to the European Commissioner for Agriculture.

Summary of the shared views formulated by the TRINET meeting in Fladungen, July 5-8 2010

An appropriate follow-up of the DBU project would be a series of pilot projects where collaboration between nature conservation and grassland farmers is carried out and which, if successful, can act as beacons in their national context, models which others will copy. These pilot projects should be built around one or more of three main themes:

- *Production: which means the technical aspects of using HNV grasslands to produce meat and milk products in a manner which is beneficial for biodiversity. I.e. stocking density, grazing regimes, mowing times and frequency, breeds of livestock.... It also includes all the aspects linked to agricultural policy, support schemes etc.*
- *Processing: how to convert raw meat and milk from HNV grassland farming into products which can be sold to consumers, preferably with added value (i.e. cheese instead of milk, sausages or smoked hams instead of cuts of raw meat). This includes aspects like slaughter and hygiene regulations.*
- *Distribution: how to get the products to the consumers as efficiently as possible with a minimum of wastage, and how to increase the number of interested consumers (direct marketing). This includes the issue of labeling.*

The pilot project process of 'acting by example' should be supported by promoting these pilot projects to the right audiences, extracting the lessons learnt from the projects, formulating the parts of the projects that are transferable and replicable, organizing study visits and training sessions for experience exchange.

At the same time, there are common problems which should be dealt with at a supra-national level: the problems with EU support schemes and regulations, for instance. Here appropriate follow-up would be to collect information from the CEE countries and present this to the appropriate institutions (national ministries, EU), preferably by means of a trans-national network.

Besides seeking financial support for individual national-level projects, there should also be a horizontal TRINET follow-up project at a supranational level – in particular, because exchange of experience and best practice is a key element for the success of any national-level project. Furthermore, when it comes to influencing policy (especially the Rural Development Programme and EU hygiene and slaughter regulations), a joint effort will be more likely to achieve results.

Activities at country level (EE, LV, SK, HU, RO, BG):

Apart from attending the plenary workshop in Fladungen, the partners individually formulated follow-up projects as ready-to-finance proposals. These were submitted to potential donors and sources of funding – national funds, international funds like the Nordic Council grants or EU budget lines.

These follow-up project proposals were mainly formulated and submitted in the second half of 2010 or the very first months of 2011 (though some partners began much earlier – Daphne for instance was already discussing possible concrete projects with potential partners in 2009).

In some cases, partners working on a follow-up project asked help from others in TRINET – for instance, there was lengthy discussion between Agrolink and Veeakker from July 2010 to spring 2011 about the technical aspects of setting up a processing and direct marketing pilot project in the Bulgarian Rodopi mountains. There was also mutual contact between the Latvian, Estonian and Finnish partners about possibilities for transnational collaboration in the Baltic context.

By spring 2011 there had already been decisions from some potential donors on whether or not to approve funding for the proposal. In other cases, the donor decision was still being awaited.

Besides formulating its own follow-up project, the Central Balkans National Park Directorate continued with the specific work conform to its partnership agreement. Following on from the questionnaires to farmers, two meetings were held to discuss the proposed new procedure for grazing in the park (Karlovo, 2 February 2010, for the southern part, Trojan, 3 February 2010, for the northern part). This is necessary due to increased interest in the use of pastures. There were farmers/shepherds, representatives from Regional body of Ministry of Agriculture and Food. Discussed topics: maintenance of pastures, pens and shelters, grazing region, loading of pastures, problems with procedure for subsidies from Rural Development Programme.

Using the information gathered in 2009, in 2010 the Park Directorate applies a step system of assessing applications and allocating eligible pasture areas. The first priority group are farmers approved under sub-measure 5, measure 214 – „Traditional practices for seasonal grazing animals" (Pastoralizam) – Rural Development Programme, 2007 – 2013. These farmers are required to use the same areas for a period of 5 years. The next stage is deciding on requests of farmers, traditionally grazing in the park (Traditional breeders). Based on permits issued for grazing in the period 2001 – 2009, the Park Directorate prepared a list of farmers in this priority group, using the database built up in 2009 through TRINET.

The third priority group is local farmers/shepherd. These farmers live in settlements near to the park. At the last stage of the allocation, is the remaining vacant pasture land.

Work also continued with the development of methodology for monitoring the impact of grazing in the Central Balkans National Park:

- Selection of pilot grazing areas to study the impact of grazing on certain habitats.
- Analyzing the impact of grazing on target habitats in the pilot areas to study the impact of grazing on the status of the habitat. The purpose of this study is to discover the relationship between grazing and habitats.
- Develop methodology for monitoring the impact of grazing. The main aim is to propose a system for assessment of habitat which can be used by park employees.
- Workshop training for park staff to implement the methodology

2.6 Result safeguarding

2009												2010												2011				
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

In January 2011 a coordination meeting was held in Loipersdorf to take stock of the situation with national follow-up projects and to plan the last months of the (cost-neutral prolonged) project.

Comparison between the national follow-up proposals showed that there are ideas common to several or even all of the different national follow-up projects. For instance, testing various methods for grazing high nature value grasslands and identifying the most suitable, or helping farmers to process and market their grassland produce.

To facilitate mutual exchange of experience and transfer of techniques, it would be logical to supplement these national projects by a horizontal, supra-national 'umbrella' project. That way, a true network of pilot projects supporting each other and learning from the experience of others, would come into being. Such a 'roof' over the different national initiatives had already been proposed as one of the conclusions adopted by the plenary workshop in Fladungen (see above). There had been discussions between coordinators how to follow up this workshop conclusion, even with draft proposals, during autumn of 2010.

The January 2011 meeting however decided that such an umbrella or roof would start from the concrete national pilot projects, which would be the foundation, and create a network for mutual assistance and exchange which brings together these pilot projects. During the final phase of the TRINET project (spring 2011), the coordinators worked with the project partners to formulate such a project, consisting of concrete pilot projects on the ground in different countries, supplemented by common transnational activities.

A final update of the TRINET website www.tri-net.eu was carried out in April-May 2011.

3 Results

3.1 Results of the country-specific enquiries

Overall summary of TRINET findings from the grassland reports

The reports about the state of the natural and semi-natural grasslands in the six Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries which are partners in the DBU-funded TRINET project, show that in recent history there has almost everywhere been a dramatic loss and decline of high nature value (HNV) grasslands because of agricultural 'improvement', intensification, conversion to other land uses, drainage and hydrological regulation etc. Yet these same reports show that the dominant current problem facing grasslands in these six Central and Eastern European countries is abandonment of farming, followed by natural succession to scrubs and finally forest.

There appear to be two processes behind abandonment:

1. *The transition from a state-run economy to a market economy meant the closure of many state farms and the disappearance of large numbers of livestock (sheep especially, e.g. in Hungary, but also cattle) because they were no longer shielded against cheaper produce from the rest of the EU and the world. The decline in the numbers of livestock has been very dramatic during the early 1990s in many of these countries (see the individual country reports). Consequently, large areas of grassland are no longer being grazed or mowed and have been falling prey to succession.*

2. *Where there were traditionally many individual farmers (Romania for instance), they have continued farming but here there is a growing problem of 'farm succession': the older generation which still farms does not have a younger generation ready to take over the farm. Instead, young people in the rural areas prefer to emigrate to the urban areas or to other countries, where there are opportunities for careers and jobs. Once the older people who are still mowing and grazing the mountain grasslands in the Carpathians give up, the land will fall out of use. This threatens hundreds of thousands of hectares of HNV grassland in Romania alone.*

Abandonment is a horizontal, cross-cutting problem. HNV grasslands lying within National Parks, Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas should because of their legal status, be safe from intensification, afforestation, ploughing, drainage etc. … – but they are NOT protected against land abandonment. The cessation of grazing and mowing, leading to natural succession, is a threat facing all these protected grasslands as much as the unprotected ones.

Intensification of grassland use, or conversion from grassland to arable or planted forest, is also a threat, but a more localised one – linked to land which can be used intensively, such as in the plains of Hungary, or where there is a direct incentive to e.g. plant forest (for instance, because a biomass energy plant running on fast-rotation softwoods is being constructed in the vicinity of the grasslands). In principle, it should not be a threat to HNV grasslands in protected areas – but the reality is often different….

The core issue which action to preserve HNV grasslands should be focusing on is therefore a socio-economic one: how can land abandonment be halted or reversed? In other words, how can an ecologically appropriate use of HNV grasslands, where it exists, be secured for the future, and how can such farming be started again where it no longer exists? (this reasoning also applies to intensification and conversion of grasslands: how can ecologically appropriate use of HNV grasslands be made so attractive, socially and economically speaking, that farmers are not motivated to use the land in a different, less ecologically positive way?).

The **grassland reports** of the countries show the different grasslands, meadow and pasture types. The development and the problems of the conservation of HNV-grassland and the different subsidies are also discussed in these reports.

The **scoping reports** describe potential opportunities for practical work to bring together active farmers and NGOs in joint grassland projects. The pre-implementation workshop agendas, the conclusions and summaries of these pre- implementation workshops are added.

The reports, from the six Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries which are partners in the TRINET project, about the state of the natural and semi-natural grasslands in those countries, show that in recent history there has almost everywhere been a **dramatic loss and decline of HNV grasslands** (high nature value) because of agricultural 'improvement', intensification, conversion to other land uses, drainage and hydrological regulation etc.

Yet these same reports, and the debates during the pre-implementation workshops, show that the dominant current problem facing grasslands in these six Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries is **abandonment of farming**, followed by natural succession to scrubs and finally forest. There appear to be two processes behind abandonment:

(1) The **transition from a state-run economy to a market economy** meant the closure of many state farms and the disappearance of large numbers of livestock (sheep especially, e.g. in Hungary, but also cattle) because they were no longer shielded against cheaper produce from the rest of the EU and the world. The decline in the numbers of livestock has been very dramatic during the early 1990s in many of these countries (see the individual country reports). Consequently, large areas of grassland are no longer being grazed or mowed and have been falling prey to succession.

(2) Where there were traditionally many individual farmers (Romania for instance), they have continued farming but here is a growing **problem of 'farm succession'**: The older generation which still farms does not have a younger generation ready to take over the farm. Instead, young people in the rural areas prefer to emigrate to the urban areas or to other countries, where there are opportunities for careers and jobs. Once the older people who are still mowing and grazing the mountain grasslands in the Carpathians give up, the land will fall out of use. This threatens hundreds of thousands of hectares of HNV grassland in Romania alone.

Abandonment is a horizontal, cross-cutting problem. HNV grasslands lying within National Parks, Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas should because of their legal status, be safe from intensification, afforestation, ploughing, drainage etc. – but they are NOT protected against land

abandonment. The cessation of grazing and mowing, leading to natural succession is a threat facing all these protected grasslands as much as the unprotected ones.

Intensification of grassland use, or **conversion from grassland to arable or planted forest**, is also a threat, but a more localised one – linked to land which can be used intensively, such as in the plains of Hungary, or where there is a direct incentive to e.g. plant forest (for instance, because a biomass energy plant running on fast-rotation softwoods is being constructed in the vicinity of the grasslands). In principle, it should not be a threat to HNV grasslands in protected areas – but the reality is often different …

The core issue which TRINET should be focusing on is therefore a **socio-economic** one:

How can land abandonment be halted or reversed?

In other words, how can an ecologically appropriate use of HNV grasslands, where it exists, be secured for the future, and how can such farming be started again where it no longer exists? (This reasoning also applies to intensification and conversion of grasslands: How can ecologically appropriate use of HNV grasslands be made so attractive, socially and economically speaking, that farmers are not motivated to use the land in a different, less ecologically positive way?)

In this context, there is already one encouraging phenomenon: The transition to a market economy in the 1990s meant that among the ruins of the former state farms, **new, private farmers appeared**. These new farmers are committed to farming (it was their deliberate choice to become a farmer) and some of them have taken up grassland farming. This is particularly noticeable in Estonia, where even today new farmers are beginning livestock farms, or have only started livestock farming a few years ago. In Estonia, the amount of grassland being farmed has actually increased since the 1990s! However, these new Estonian farmers are asking for technical advice and help in how to successfully manage the specific breeds they are putting on the grassland, how to improve the slaughter and marketing side etc., because they cannot fall back on any local knowledge and tradition.

Such new farmers also occur in the other countries (Slovakia, Hungary for instance) and they are potentially very interesting partners for TRINET, because they are committed, often open to new ideas and hoping to expand and improve their farm.

So, the **objective for TRINET in the CEE countries** would appear to be: communicate and work with both traditional farmers (as in the Romanian Carpathians) and 'new farmers' to together find ways to render ecologically appropriate grassland farming socially and economically attractive for the farmers.

What, then, are the problems which make ecologically appropriate grassland farming socially and economically unattractive for the farmers, and which therefore ought to be tackled by TRINET follow-up projects?

An evaluation of the various country reports and scoping reports produced by the TRINET partners, and of the topics discussed during the various pre-implementation workshops, shows that a number of **problems occur across all six CEE countries**:

1. There is a **need for more technical knowledge and transfer of experience** of how to manage grasslands in the optimum way for biodiversity, how to manage specific livestock breeds, how to plan the grazing scientifically and practically – this is notably an issue in the Bulgarian Central Balkans National Park and in Estonia, but also in Slovakia there is a desire to try new methods for the follow-up recurring management of restored grasslands

2. The existing **support schemes** (mostly connected to the EU Rural Development Programme = CAP second pillar) are **not always adequate** – the levels of payment are too low, certain actions necessary for appropriate grassland use are not covered by any support scheme, the conditions for receiving support money are too restrictive or burdensome for the farmer, there are rigidities (e.g. mowing dates are fixed and can't be moved to take account of weather) etc.

3. Different national governments interpret and **apply the same EU legislation in different ways**. For instance, in some countries RDP funds can be used to clear overgrown grassland, in others they can't. This is illogical and means farmers wanting to restore grassland are handicapped in these countries.

4. There are problems with the **definition of 'grassland' itself**. Here LPIS, which determines which areas of land are considered 'farmland' and so qualify for CAP support and which areas do not, plays a major role. Rules and interpretations such as that only land in the CEE which was being used agriculturally in 2003 qualifies for CAP support, or that any land with more than x % per hectare of trees is not farmland, can make it impossible to restore overgrown land and get farmers to use the restored land, or to get support for wooded pastures and meadows.

5. Certain types of grassland, notably floodplain and fen grasslands, are not mowed any more because the **hay has too poor a quality** for feeding to livestock compared to other available forms of fodder, so that the management of these grasslands is a problem – unless alternative uses for the hay can be found.

6. Farmers wanting to market **produce from ecologically appropriate grassland use**, as a special product with a 'green' image, face several obstacles: **Demand from consumers in the CEE countries for meat and milk products from HNV grassland management is still limited.** Too many consumers are only interested in low prices! Exporting to countries where there are more consumers interested and able to pay for expensive quality products, requires capacities which the HNV grassland farmers in the CEE countries do not have.

7. The **distribution chain** – how to get meat and milk products from HNV grassland management in the rural areas (often remote!) to the consumers in urban areas – is generally non-existent, or very weak.

8. Among the people interested in directly marketing their meat and milk products from HNV grassland management as a special 'niche' product, there is a huge **lack of experience of how to manage the supply chain** so that no meat or milk is wasted yet customers are always supplied, of how to find new customers and keep the loyalty of existing customers, of how to add value to raw

meat and milk most effectively, of how to run a successful commercial business based on 'green meat and milk'.

9. In countries like Slovakia (and Poland) it has only been **permitted since a few months to sell directly from the farm**, in other countries (Latvia, Estonia) this has been allowed longer but direct marketing initiatives are very small. Here there is a **need for technical advice and exchange of experience in how to start and to improve sales from the farm**.

10. **EU regulations on food safety and hygiene** make some traditional products (such as cheeses made on the mountain pastures from raw milk) illegal and impose huge technical and financial burdens on any farmer wanting to process and sell meat and milk products on his own farm. Rules (national and EU) on slaughter effectively force farmers to go to the official **slaughterhouses**; in many countries these have been reduced to a few large slaughterhouses as a result of economic concentration. This increases costs and technical problems for farmers with small numbers of specialized livestock. The alternative – slaughter on the farm by means of a mobile slaughtering vehicle – is so difficult and costly to carry out, because of these rules that it is in practice impossible.

11. A crucial point in gaining a good income for farmers who manage HNV grasslands in an ecologically appropriate manner, is **labeling the meat and milk products** so that consumers recognize them as being different from standard products. Since ecologically appropriate grassland farming is not necessarily the same as organic farming, the organic ('bio') label is not pertinent. Apart from some local initiatives, there is a gap in the CEE countries when it comes to developing a suitable label for the products of ecologically appropriate grassland farming, and promoting this label.

Figure 11: Participants of the Fladungen workshop together with a cattle herd on a 106 hectare large pasture.

Looking at all this, the TRINET plenary workshop held in Fladungen in July 2010 considered that the **follow-up projects** should focus on one or more of these three main themes:

- **Production**: which means the technical aspects of using HNV grasslands to produce meat and milk products in a manner which is beneficial for biodiversity. This includes all the aspects linked to agricultural policy, support schemes etc.

- **Processing**: how to convert raw meat and milk from HNV grassland farming into products which can be sold to consumers, preferably with added value (i.e. cheese instead of milk, sausages or smoked hams instead of cuts of raw meat). This includes aspects like slaughter and hygiene regulations.

- **Distribution**: how to get the products to the consumers as efficiently as possible with a minimum of wastage, and how to increase the number of interested consumers (direct marketing). This includes the issue of labeling.

Given the huge areas of land and the numbers of people involved, one must be realistic. TRINET must focus on a **limited number of well-chosen pilot projects** where **collaboration between nature conservation and grassland farmers for production, processing and distribution** is carried out and which, if successful, act as beacons in their national context, models which others hopefully will copy. TRINET can, and should, help this process of 'acting by example' by promoting these pilot projects to the right audiences, extracting the lessons learnt from the projects, formulating the parts of the projects that are transferable and replicable, maybe even organizing study visits and experience exchange training sessions. Which means that **follow-up projects consist of two 'halves': the concrete activity on the ground of the pilot project itself, and the evaluation and dissemination of the results and replicable techniques of the pilot project to the right audience.**

At the same time, there are **common problems** which should be dealt with at a supra-national level: the problems with EU support schemes and regulations, for instance. Here TRINET ought to collect information from the CEE countries and present this to the appropriate institutions (EU) and advocacy groups (CEJA, EHF etc). There is also a widespread desire among the persons so far involved in the pre-implementation workshops organised by the TRINET partners, to learn from each other, and from examples in the 'old' EU member states (Germany, Austria, Belgium, Scandinavia …). This means mutual exchange visits and excursions, training workshops etc.

Both these activities imply a **supra-national structure** within TRINET above the level of the **individual national follow-up projects**, which takes care of these common activities. I.e. TRINET should function as a trans-national network with a coordinating supra-national structure overlaying concrete pilot projects in the different countries.

3.2 Networking

3.2.1 Exchange of experience

Considering the results described in chapter 3.1, the conclusion reached is that experience exchange with direct marketing initiatives which have existed for a longer time and have learned through trial and error, will be of great value, for any pilot projects in the CEE countries to improve the marketing of produce from high nature value grasslands.

It also became evident that experience exchange between practitioners is of outstanding importance for the following themes:

- Grazing concepts, especially for large-scale and very extensive grazing;
- Pasturing logistics;
- Hygiene issues;
- Implementation of the CAP in different countries;
- Alternative ways to keep grassland open, e.g. by means of biogas exploitation;
- Methods and financing for the initial management of former grasslands which have become impossible to graze because of succession etc.

Proof of the effectiveness of the networking within the TRINET project is provided by the international follow-up projects mentioned in chapter 3.3. Numerous experiences from other projects in other countries were woven into these follow-ups.

3.2.2 Participation in the ARC 2020 platform

Figure 12: Logo of the ARC2020-initiative

As mentioned in chapter 2.5, the TRINET project participated in the ARC2020 discussion platform. This was not originally foreseen in the project, but the establishment of ARC in the summer of 2010 offered a unique opportunity to engage in the political debate on CAP reform and disseminate TRINET positions at EU level.

All EU programmes and budget frameworks are laid down in seven-year cycles, with the next cycle lasting from 2014 to 2020. The political debate on the budget and content of the CAP for the period 2014-2020 began in earnest in 2010 (as all the legal and political texts and decisions for the CAP 2014-2020 must be approved before 2013). The European Commission was scheduled to publish its basic orientations for the future CAP in November 2010.
A new element was the on-line consultation of civil society by the Commission during the spring of 2010 (which meant that any individual or organisation was able to send comments and proposals about the CAP to a central DG AGRI e-forum). This was followed by a conference in July, convened by the Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Ciolos, at which the results of the on-line consultation were discussed.

Prior to this conference, civil society representatives, with support from within the European Parliament, set up a platform called ARC (Agricultural and Rural Convention). The purpose of this platform was to bring together civil society organizations with the aim of formulating common positions on the CAP and rural development. TRINET was one of the organizations invited to join ARC, and this invitation was accepted. A small working group was set up to handle TRINET's input into ARC, input which was based on the document "TRINET Suggestions and Comments on Grassland Policy" (see annex 5).

The central ARC Secretariat sent out draft policy documents to the ARC participants, who then commented; the comments were collated by the Secretariat; a new draft was prepared which was then sent out again for further comment. Controversial paragraphs where there was no agreement, were flagged up for discussion and final decision in a plenary session, held in Brussels Nov. 4-5 2010.

As it happened, the many organisations participating in ARC achieved consensus relatively smoothly – which itself is a major achievement, given that participating organisations covered a wide range: farmers' associations critical of the mainstream farmers' unions, nature conservation NGOs, rural development associations, animal welfare societies, sectoral associations such as Euromontana (lobby platform representing Europe's mountain areas), organic farming associations, NGOs active in public health and food policy ... (incidentally, by participating in ARC, TRINET was able to lay very useful contacts with similar groups).

Within the process, TRINET, besides supporting positions from other organisations or Secretariat proposals which coincided with its own policy vision, focused on topics which were not well-covered by others. For instance (this list is not exhaustive):

- Recognition and inclusion of extensive, nature-oriented HNV grassland farming as a form of 'green farming' which is distinct, and different, from organic (bio) farming, but just as valuable for sustainability
- Inequality between CAP and RDP payments to farmers in the 'EU 15' and in the 'EU 12'
- The problem that the current definitions of 'farmland' and 'farm holding' applied by the CAP, eliminate grasslands with partial tree or shrub cover, small subsistence farmers as in Romania and Bulgaria, grassland which was abandoned and overgrown in 2003 (= reference year for Single Area Payments in EU 12) but which ought to be restored ...
- Less rigidity in the technical terms of reference (such as mowing dates) of agri-environment schemes, so that local conditions (habitats, weather...) can be better taken into account
- The perverse effect of EU regulations on food hygiene and slaughter, when it comes to producing and marketing food from HNV grasslands directly by farmers
- The need for direct support from the CAP budget for initiatives allowing ecologically-oriented farmers and processors to exchange experience and transfer techniques (including successful business models for direct marketing of produce from HNV farmland)
- Etc.

About 80 % of the TRINET suggestions were adopted, albeit sometimes in modified wording. Nevertheless, this is a good result which shows that the policy vision formulated within TRINET, thanks

to the mutual debate and exchange which the DBU project made possible, is pertinent and acknowledged as such by peers at the international level.

The document produced by ARC at the end of the process ("Civil Society Response to the European Commission's Communication on the future Common Agricultural Policy", see annex 6), after the Brussels plenary of Nov. 4-5 and just before the Commission presented its CAP strategy document, is unique in the sense that it is the first time that other stakeholders in agriculture and rural development, besides the traditional agriculture ministries, mainstream farmers' unions and industry lobbyists, were presenting a united front and single position paper bringing together the views of so many organisations. In effect, it adds a major new player to the CAP political process.

The "Civil Society Response to the European Commission's Communication on the future Common Agricultural Policy" was formally presented to the EU Agriculture Commissioner, the president of the European Parliament's Agriculture Committee and representatives of the EU Council of Ministers, Regional Committee and Economic and Social Committee in November 2010. Since then, the ARC has continued to play an active role towards the EU policymakers, accompanied by lobbying campaigns at national level.

It is clear that TRINET must continue to be an active participant to ARC, as it offers a potentially very effective way to influence the future CAP. In fact, given that the detailed legislative proposals for the CAP will be submitted by the European Commission in October 2011, after which the political debate will enter its decisive phase, TRINET ought to invest a significant part of its future horizontal activities into this EU-level policy work through ARC.

3.2.3 Thesis paper on CAP reform in Germany

During the autumn of 2010, significant insights from the TRINET experiences in the different European countries were brought to the attention of a national working group in Germany, which was elaborating a paper about the requirements of extensive grazing in connection with the next CAP period, both in terms of EU level as well as implementation at Federal and Länder level.

The paper describes the (mainly EU policy-related) objectives and the positive effects which extensive grazing has on the promotion of biological diversity, climate change mitigation, hydrology and landscape esthetics. It presents the judgement of the European Court of Justice which legitimizes direct payments and subsidies to all agricultural surfaces on which nature conservation and landscape management are prime objectives. Above all, recommendations are formulated on how grazing should be fitted into the future CAP subsidy structure.

The paper was published in German (METZNER, J., JEDICKE, E., LUICK, R., REISINGER, E., TISCHEW, S., 2010: Extensive Grazing and Requirements for the new Agriculture Policy – Promotion of biological diversity, climate protection, hydrology and landscape esthetics, Naturschutz und Landschaftsplanung 42, (12), 357-366) . These guidelines will, in case the TRINET network is continued as intended, be communicated to the partner states and compared to the requirements and recommendations coming from these countries.

3.3 Follow-up projects

One of the main objectives of the DBU-subsidised project was to develop stand-alone follow-up projects, as outcome of the process of experience exchange and mutual advice in the partner countries, with the respective partner organization taking the lead. The current status is described in the following sections.

3.3.1 Agrolink, Bulgaria

After long discussion involving Agrolink and participants of TRINET seminar it was decided (May 2010) to continue with 2 follow-up projects:

- 1. Project focusing on common planning of biodiversity grassland management, set up an innovative model for nature oriented grassland management and Green products, building a network of farmers/consumers.
- 2. Project aimed to lobby at national or EU level to develop a new legislation or to amend the existence of existing Rural Development. In Bulgaria there are very big problems to motivate people to manage grassland in a nature oriented way even to keep farmers to manage grasslands, especially in mountain areas.

One of the follow-ups, "Biodiversity grassland management – benefit for the nature, farmers and consumer" was submitted to donors in March 2011. The TRINET partner Veeakker contributed its technical advice to help prepare the parts about processing and selling the green products and establishing a label. Decision is still pending.

Project (1)
Biodiversity grassland management – benefit for the nature, farmers and consumers

Background
The structure of Bulgarian agriculture has been transforming during the post-communist agricultural reform which began in the early 1990s. After de-collectivising and privatising the huge agri-industrial complexes that had previously dominated Bulgarian agriculture, thousands of small-scale private farmers have re-appeared and the agricultural landscape is changing again.

The impacts of post-communist reforms upon the environment are both positive and negative. For example, there has been a significant decline in the use of agro-chemical inputs and consequently an improvement in ground and surface water quality. This improvement in water quality is also likely to be related to the decline in livestock numbers and a reduction in the risk of pollution from the large animal breeding complexes.

On the other hand, one of the main emerging environmental problems has been the abandonment of farmland – especially in the mountain areas where the maintenance of grazing is essential for the conservation of the valuable semi-natural grasslands.

There also remains the risk of further environmental damage as economic circumstances improve and farmers intensify their production systems again.

While there have been many responses by governmental and non-governmental organisations to the environmental problems for the environmentally friendly grassland management, there remains a general lack of resources to fully and effectively address the problems observed. There are also a number of important deficiencies in existing response – for example:

- *relatively little environmental education or information for farmers and advisers*
- *few resources to address environmental problems at a farm level*
- *lack of effective nature protection measures outside of the protected areas*
- *no incentives for farmers to adopt more environmentally-friendly grassland farming methods*

The main problems what we can see is that the farmers in a village or a region do not coordinate their activities related to grassland management

***Processing** which means whatever is needed to convert hay, milk, meat from biodiversity-friendly grassland use into a product that can be put on the market:*

Problems:

1. *The existing quality standards for slaughterhouses and dairies do not include requirements concerning the whole process of production – place of origin, way of cattle breeding, etc. which makes a product a green one. The requirement for dairy and slaughterhouses focus rather on standards of house building then on quality of milk or meat or even animal welfare and origin of milk or meat.*

***Distribution** which means whatever is needed to sell the products from biodiversity-friendly grassland use at a good price and with enough customers, so that it is economically viable and interesting for the farmer to use grassland:*

Problems:

1. *the infrastructure of distribution does not correspond to the idea of selling products with local origin and green products*
2. *the existing products which can qualify as green are not on the market outside the village or region*
3. *there is a market niche in terms of demand for green products which is not taken yet*

Project objective:

To encourage Green Products network/movement setting based on the multifunctional and nature oriented grassland farming philosophy

Specific objectives:

1. *To encourage the local farmers' communities to plan and manage jointly their grassland plots in a biodiversity friendly manner*
2. *To attract local farmers and producers to the concept of Green Product*

3. *To raise awareness and demand of the consumers on green products*

***Types of activities**:*

- *Setting up of local councils at the village mayors consisting of grassland owners and grassland users. They will be representative for the local communities. We will select several villages – 5-6 to set up councils to establish a network of TRINET grassland farmers.*
- *Building the capacity of the councils to develop and manage plans for management of grasslands in biodiversity friendly manner*
- *Developing and implementing the plans for multi-funcionanal grassland management which will focus on:*
  - *to maintain landscapes which are typical of a region, which are traditional and which are considered attractive (thereby helping to bring tourists to a rural district)*
  - *applying certain methods of farming, preserve or enhance species and habitats which are connected to these landscapes and land use practices. In doing so, farmers contribute to preserving and improving biodiversity.*
  - *using low-intensity ("extensive") farming practices and/or by adjusting to ecological requirements and parameters, farmers avoid polluting groundwater or surface water, avoid increasing erosion, avoid emitting noxious gases (ammonia!) into the atmosphere, etc. They thus produce environmental goods.*
  - *Multifunctional grassland management means that farmers simultaneously deliver:*
    - *agricultural goods for the market,*
    - *public goods or services like landscape, biodiversity, environmental quality and opportunities for recreation.*
- *Exchange of practical experience with partners form other countries how to use grassland to produce nature value*
- *Developing of basic characteristics, self-regulations and procedures for production of green products, including internal monitoring rules*
- *Establishing a national (or TRINET) brand, a seal and a logo for Green product*
- *Building an innovative slaughterhouse and a dairy which can be used as a model for green products – in Eastern Rhodope*
- *Mobile refrigerator truck*
- *Green products' brand advertising*
- *Participation in fests, fairs, exhibitions with common facilities*
- *Public debates*

Results – outputs:

- *Increase of areas which are used in a biodiversity friendly manner*
- *Protect landscape, water and environment*
- *Attract young farmers not to leave rural areas and to continue to work with animal husbandry in the mountain*
- *Establishing a farmers/consumers network*
- *Develop a new brand – Green products with clearly characteristic and criteria*
- *Production of labelled Green products*
- *Marketing of Green products*

Role of TRINET in project:
TRINET will be asked for participation in common actions, lectures, evaluation of the project results, bilateral exchange experts/farmers, technical help, international workshops, political networking with EU

The second project, "Legislation with benefits to environmentally friendly grassland farmers", was ready in the second half of 2010. Decision on funding is still pending.

Project (2)
Legislation with benefits to environmentally friendly grassland farmers

Problems:

1. *Legal regulations which are contradictory and make it difficult to manage grasslands in a biodiversity friendly way.*
2. *Existing funding opportunities for biodiversity friendly farmers are scarce and/or with harsh requirements.*
3. *Natura 2000 legislation is still not operate and doesn't work.*
4. *Existing legislation doesn't make distinguish between grasslands in the mountain and plain areas which lead to disadvantage of mountain farmers.*

Project objective:
To develop policies for grassland biodiversity protection

***Specific objectives**:*

1. *To create legislative conditions for protection of the grassland biodiversity*
2. *To increase the opportunities for funding access of farmers who protect the grassland biodiversity*

***Types of activities**:*

- *Establishing of working groups from all stakeholders which have to review the existing legislation and regulations*
- *Drafting of suggestions for amendments in the legislation*
- *Advocacy actions for adoption of the amendments*

Measures:

- *Analysis of gaps in the Rural Development Programme and lack of adequate support for grassland management in farming for biodiversity.*
- *During this part, analysis of EU's policy documents is planned to identify best practice examples of biodiversity conservation in rural landscapes in other countries. Analysis will be carried out by experts from NGOs with assistance of attracted lawyer and rural development advisors.*
- *Recommendations for improvement of existing agri-environmental schemes and for elaboration of the next Rural Development Programme for Bulgaria will be prepared, using experience from other TRINET member states on how to improve agri-environmental schemes .*
- *After the seminar recommendations will be submitted to the ministry of Agriculture and to the ministry of Environment. Further co-operation with authorities is planned to develop quality of measures for grassland management. Further involvement in drafting of policy documents will*

ensure continuity of project results and participation of Bulgarian NGOs in integration of nature conservation interests in planning process of rural development of Bulgaria.

3.3.2 Central Balkan National Park Directorate, Bulgaria

Making a management plan for grazing mountain pastures, setting clear targets for grazing, is the main challenge discussed and identified by the TRINET pre-implementation project.

Hence the follow-up project:
"Grazing - tool for conservation management"

The overall idea of the project can be brought down to the following major activities:

- *Establishing contact with an organisation (NGO, farmers union, PA administration etc.) able to present already working good practices connected to long-term pastures management in mountainous areas*
- *Organising a seminar/field trip where Central Balkan NP staff would be introduced on-the-spot to all the specific details (preconditions, activities, techniques etc.) connected to the pastures management/maintenance*
- *Hiring an expert/experts in grassland management, who after visiting the Park, can determine a set of rules, regulations, grazing systems and monitoring methods adequate to the present state of the habitats in the Park*
- *Incorporating this set of regulations/rules in the new Management plan of the Park*

The cooperation within the TRINET network will play a major role in the project as it will rely exclusively on foreign experts experience and know-how in defining scientifically-based measures for managing the mountain habitas within the Park.

Results:

1. *Introducing the Park's administration to good practices concerning grazing in protected areas in other EU countries, by contacting organisations who have already achieved in applying such.*
2. *Creating a set of regimes and regulations concerning grazing mountain pastures and incorporating them in the National Park's next Management plan.*

This project application was finalized in January 2011 and submitted to national funding sources.
A decision about funding is still being awaited.

3.3.3 Daphne, Slovakia

After attempts to prepare a joint Interreg grasslands project with Czech colleagues and a LIFE+ Biodiversity project on sustainable management of Slovak grasslands failed, a LIFE+Nature project on the **restoration and management of saline grasslands in Southwest Slovakia** was submitted by Daphne to the EU Commission in Sept. 2010. The project was approved for funding by the EU in May 2011.

The LIFE project is focusing on the restoration of 2 groups of grassland habitat types – salt marshes and grasslands on sand dunes. Traditional grazing management is absent on both types, which are without any kind of management at the moment, and project try to re-establish it by the re-introduction of grazing activities on salt marshes and sand dunes.

Before re-establishment of grazing management or in paralell, necessary restoration activities shall be carried out (restoration, mowing, mulching, top-soil removal or artficial disturbances ...). Effective and sustainable grazing system shall be established. The project also tries to establish long-term partnership between farmers, NGOs and state agencies in the management of targeted habitats.

TRINET is to supply expertise & technical help, bilateral exchange of experts and farmers.

There were also contacts between Daphne and Jozef Bednar, manager of a large farm near Spisska Ves who attended the Nov. 2009 pre-implementation workshop and was interested in working with TRINET. Mr Bednar tried to obtain LIFE+Biodiversity funding for a project to make his farm a pilot and demonstration farm for agricultural land management supporting biodiversity. His application was however not funded in 2011, because the LIFE budget for that year had been used up by higher-scored applications.

3.3.4 Keskonnaamet, Estonia

Project (1)
Small project: **Producing an Estonian version of British technical manuals how to handle Angus, Hereford and other breeds of cattle** widely used since recently by Estonian farmers to graze semi-natural grasslands. The lack of such a manual was a problem raised by the farmers during the TRINET pre-implementation workshop (these breeds are new to Estonia). After the workshop this was pursued and funding from Estonian Beef Cattle Society was obtained in late 2010 to produce the manual.

Project (2):
Urban Cows

One large follow-up project was prepared: **Urban Cows**, which seeks to carry out removal of succession overgrowth to restore boreal coastal meadows near Pärnu (SW Estonia) and start management grazing with cattle. These meadows are near the urban area of Pärnu, in an area much visited in summer by holiday makers. Hence the name Urban Cows. The project was submitted to the EU Commission, LIFE+Nature, in Sept. 2010 and approved for funding in May 2011.

***Aims**:*

- *Restoring coastal meadow habitat by grazing and popularizing nature conservation*
- *Restoring coastal meadow that is overgrown with reed by grazing 220 ha*
- *Organizing public events to introduce the project site, sustainable agriculture and environmental protection*

***Funding donors**: LIFE+ and Estonian Environmental Investment Centre*

Expected beginning June 2011. Budget 1.2 million €.
Project directly contributes to TRINET by restoring semi-natural habitats and promotes and introduces beef-cattle to the people living in the city.
Some ideas from the Estonian TRINET seminar were used in the project application (issues involving beef cattle breeding in Estonia)

Project (3):
One international follow-up project was submitted to Nordic Council: "**Strengthening the cooperation of the Nordic-Baltic-Russian semi-natural grassland managers**".

Project aim is to strengthen cooperation between farmers who are managing semi-natural grasslands with beef cattle and between environmental specialists responsible for administrating the management. Project activities include field trips to the farms in North-West Russia, Finland, Sweden and Denmark where farmers can familiarize with technologies used by other farmers, make contacts and share experiences. Specialists who administer the restoration and management projects of the semi-natural landscapes from Estonian Environmental Board are also taking part of the fieldtrip to gain and share their experience about the effectiveness of managing semi-natural areas with beef cattle. The study trip lasts for 7 days for 25 people (17 farmers and 8 environmental specialists) and includes visiting at least 6 sites with 4 different project partners (Baltic Fund for Nature in North-West Russia, Karelia; Suomen Pihvikarjaliitto in Finland; WWF in Sweden; Birkelund beef cattle breeders in Denmark).

Semi-natural landscapes are high value habitats. Many of these habitats like coastal meadows and alvar meadows are only manageable by grazing. It is found that beef cattle are highly suitable for that purpose as they are durable and not demanding in food and living conditions. In Nordic countries the beef cattle breeding is traditional activity for decades but in Estonia and Russia it has started only recently. In 2003 there were only 8174 beef cattle in Estonia but by the year 2010 there was already 35130 animals. This rapid growth means that many farmers are switching from milk cattle to beef cattle and are inexperienced in breeding them. There is currently 23 500 ha of managed semi-natural landscapes on Natura 2000 network areas in Estonia and from these 15 100 ha are grazed. The Estonian Rural Development Plan for the years 2007-2013 sets the target of 35 000 ha for the year 2013. To achieve that target it is necessary to increase the areas grazed annually by cattle. One main result of the TRINET workshop in April 2010 was that study trips to the other beef cattle growing countries would be useful especially for the farmers.

Experiences can be shared and innovative ideas used and shared with project partners to improve the situation of semi-natural landscapes in all the countries included in the project. Technological issues like manure usage, fodder and slaughtering were are just few of the topics farmers are interested to discuss with other beef cattle breeders. There are currently 27 farmers in Estonia who are managing semi-natural landscapes in the area larger than 80 ha. This is the target group for the project. Estonian Environmental Board specialists are coordinating the managing of the semi-natural landscapes in Estonia. It is important for them to share and gain the experience with the project partners in order to improve the situation of the semi-natural landscapes.

Envisaged results: Innovative ideas and information is shared and put in use in order to improve the management of semi-natural landscapes in Estonia and in the countries that are participating in the

project. Farmers participating in the project are also communicating in the future with the farmers from the project partners countries. Environmental specialists are making suggestions for improving the Estonian Rural Development Plan.

The project was submitted to Nordic Council in April 2011 – funding decision is still pending.

3.3.5 Latvian Fund for Nature, Latvia

Three follow-up projects were prepared.

Project (1)
The project "**Participation of the Latvian Fund for Nature in integration of nature conservation interests in planning process of rural development of Latvia**" was prepared during two meetings with other NGOs and the Latvian Ministry of Environment in Dec. 2009. It was an immediate follow-up of the TRINET pre-implementation workshop (held in Latvia in Nov. 2009). The project was submitted to the European Social Fund in early 2010. Funding decision (early 2011) was negative.

The aim of the project is to increase the capacity of non-governmental organisations in the planning of the Rural Development Programme's (and other EU policy instruments) measures for biodiversity and nature conservation and restoration in Latvian rural areas.

It is planned that during the project close co-operation will be built with local initiatives and stakeholder networks identified during preparation of TRINET scoping report (e.g. Latvian Rural Forum, State Rural Network). Other environmental NGO's, such as Latvian Ornithological Society, Latvian Botanical Society etc., will be involved as well. All together it is expected to involve up to 20 non-governmental organizations.

During the project analysis of EU's policy documents is planned to identify best practice examples of biodiversity conservation in rural landscapes in other countries. Analysis will be carried out by experts from NGOs with assistance of attracted lawyer and rural development advisors.

In collaboration with the European Environmental Bureau study tour to the European Commission will be organized in order to get better knowledge on procedures of participation of the NGOs in policy design and the opportunities to use different EC support tools. European Environmental Bureau has agreed to admit project staff and support them during the study tour.

Another important task of the project is to organize a training seminar for project participants. During that seminar best practice examples of biodiversity conservation in other countries as well as co-operation with the European Environmental Bureau and the European Commission will be discussed.

Recommendations for elaboration of the Rural Development Programme for Latvia will be prepared during the project. Recommendations will be based on knowledge and experience obtained during the analysis of best practice examples, analysis of EU's policy documents, during the study tour to the European Commission, and during the seminar. These recommendations will be aimed to elaborate

existing schemes and to reduce gaps and problems in supporting high-nature value grasslands identified during preparation of TRINET grassland survey report.

It was discussed during the TRINET pre-implementation workshop in Apšuciems that failures in the Rural Development Programme and lack of adequate support for grassland management are problems in farming for biodiversity. During the workshop farmers also pointed the need to learn from best practice in farming for biodiversity. Therefore, second seminar is planned when recommendations for elaboration of the Rural Development Programme will be finished. It will be organised by inviting representatives from environmental NGO's, authorities of ministry of Agriculture and ministry of Environment, and farmer organisations. This seminar aims to spread obtained knowledge to policy makers and farmers. After the seminar recommendations will be submitted to the ministry of Agriculture and to the ministry of Environment. Further co-operation with authorities is planned to develop quality of measures for grassland management. Further involvement in drafting of policy documents will ensure continuity of project results and participation of the Latvian Fund for Nature and other NGOs in integration of nature conservation interests in planning process of rural development of Latvia.

Strengthening of international co-operation/networking is planned by attending at conferences on the biodiversity and rural landscape topics, and by participation in the European Environmental Bureau workshops.

Project (2):
"Meatball"
This project proposal, also a follow-up to the TRINET workshop, was under preparation in the spring and summer of 2010. Project activities are planned in cooperation with WWF Sweden. This project is planned as on-the-ground project to promote grassland farming which preserves a landscape, biodiversity and the environmental integrity in Dviete River valley (Natura 2000 site in South-East Latvia). Main idea is to promote extensive grazing (also by funding livestock purchase) and establishment of economically viable management of grasslands planned at the individual farm level. The project would be submitted to a Swedish private foundation. Finally, because of changes in the Swedish foundation, the project was not adopted for funding (decision end of 2010).

Project (3):
Strengthening Nordic-Baltic-Belarus partnership in farming for biodiversity
It was submitted to Nordic Council of Ministers. This project was already approved for funding in late 2009, and was thus included in the pre-implementation workshop in Apsuciems.

As part of this project, Latvian Fund for Nature established contacts with Belarusian NGOs EcoDom and Minsk Division of International Association of Ecologists. A study trip to Belarus was carried out in June 2010, and TRINET coordinator Anton Gazenbeek participated in this study trip. As a result, the foundation has been laid for any future networking, experience exchange and joint activities with reliable Belarus NGOs active in the field of land use and biodiversity.

3.3.6 Nimfea, Hungaria

Two follow-up projects were prepared and submitted.

Project (1):
Land acquisition and restoration of grassland habitats in Paszto (Türkeve) and establishment of appropriate recurring management of the grasslands in collaboration with farmers

Application to LIFE+, EU Commission, submitted Sept. 2010. This project was approved by the EU in May 2011.

Project objectives:

1. *The major aim is the restoration, preservation, protection and nature conservation development of Pásztói-legelő which is a SAC. The area is saline Pannonian steppe thus protecting its biomes with aspect of the ecological needs of the following species is the main priority:* Centaurea solstitialis, Cirsium brachycephalum, Lathyrus nissolia *and* Lycaena dispar.
2. *Establish a traditional sustainable extensive grassland management which preserves the Pannonian steppe as the habitat type*1530 of the Natura 2000.*
3. *Proper water management plan.*
4. *Increasing the public awareness.*

Actions and means involved:

- *organising board of landowners of the area,*
- *preparing Management Plan,*
- *procurement of shares of joint land property,*
- *renovation and expansion of the existing animal husbandry farm,*
- *procurement of livestock,*
- *establishment of sustainable extensive grassland management,*
- *establishment of Land Stewardship Advisory Service,*
- *insulate dangerous electric pylons,*
- *dissemination of nature friendly land management, introduction of livestock management and natural values of the area,*
- *wide range of communication including project web page and signboards.*

Expected results (outputs and quantified achievements):

- *Conservation of rare endangered habitat and species, increasing biodiversity.*
- *Management Plan of the Pásztói-legelő Natura 2000 site.*
- *At least 35 ha became the property of the Tiszatáj Public Foundation.*
- *Board of owners established, majority of the land will be involved in the co-operative management.*
- *Barn house renovated and improved also the stable is renovated to accommodate livestock in extreme weather conditions.*
- *100 sheep, 15 Hungarian cattle, 10 Hungarian grey cattle, 5 buffalos, 10 horses, will be purchased.*
- *Improved water management of the area.*

- *500 m ditch will be covered to provide easy access to the grassland for the livestock.*
- *42 electric pylons will be insulated to eliminate the increasing risk for electrocution.*
- *Better infrastructure will attract visitors to learn about the natural values of the Natura 2000 site.*
- *Report film for local TVs, two two-day conferences, three regional events, 20 articles for newspapers, 3 scientific publications, 4 scientific presentations on conferences, 1 poster in Hungarian language, 1 poster in English language.*
- *Introduction the best practices for large-scale audiences to understand that the traditional landscape management is a viable alternative to conserve biological diversity.*
- *Best practices are widely known at least in the surrounding of the area and similar sites.*

Project (2):
Organizing an international networking (mutual visits) to obtain best practice advice about grassland management
Application to National Civil Fund (Hungary), submitted Feb. 15 2011. Decision on this application is still pending.

3.3.7 Romania

Project "Demonstrating good grasslands management practice in the Meresti region"

The Green Agora follow-up project was a pilot project in Meresti region (Transylvania). Here there is 20.000 ha HNV grassland in the Homorodul Mic river basin. Local farming is dairy and mixed farms (average number of cows is low). The grasslands are in a good condition (no fertilizers or other chemicals, only organic manure). Approximately 1000 cows in Meresti shared by 110 farmers, but half of the milk production is made by 18 farmers (with more than 20 animals each).

Problems:

1. *abandonment of grasslands, which leads to diminution of livestock and thus to lack of grazing of HNV grasslands, which fall prey to natural succession*
2. *burning of grasslands is a practice which causes damage to the grasslands*
3. *manure management techniques now used (storage of manure and spreading in the fields) cause surface and groundwater pollution*
4. *socio-economic context. There is an aging rural population: young people are leaving agriculture (abandonment), they don't have a perspective. In other words, they are missing good local examples of how rural life can be rewarding!*

There is a lack of small scale (family) production – farmers sell milk as raw material to big factories, there is no added value for the farmer and the dairy factory often pays the farmers very late …
*This is a local traditional society (Meresti is one of the Szekler districts) which needs good **local** examples ("if my neighbour is doing, I will do also").*

Core idea of the pilot project:
Set up a local demonstration farm to test new manure management techniques and produce added value on the farm by making quality products for direct sale. This will be an 'open farm' to be visited by other farmers, universities, schools etc.

The pilot farm would Kálmán Sándor's farm. Mr Sandor is volunteering to act as a demonstration farm. His farm is a mixed family farm with 48 cows and calfs. The farm has 80 ha pasture, 40 ha natural hay meadow, 20 ha arable (mainly fodder crops). There is a small scale biogas unit.

Figure 13: Kálmár Sándor (left) explains his small scal biogas unit on a dung pile (see gas collecting vessel on the left side and gas main to the citchen)

Measures *(three main components):*

- *biodiversity and water protection through manure management*
  Manure management will be achieved by proper storage (concrete basement) and by using a spreading machine to put manure on the land (quantity can be controlled).
- *organic certification of the farm*
- *small scale production unit to produce organic cheese varieties and to supply a milk automat in Vlahita.*
  The cheeses will be made in the traditional way, using the local salt spring's water and medicinal plants.

The project would be a partnership between AGORA – Fenntartható Fejlesztési Munkacsoport and RIKA – Microregional Association. Its total budget is in the order of magnitude of 32.000 €, mostly going to investments in the necessary equipment and machinery, plus promotion towards stakeholders.

Green Agora is currently waiting for the replies from various national Romanian funds it has applied to.

4 Discussion

4.1 Target achievement

The targets of the 2.5-year project were fully achieved. An international partnership was built up between initiatives in which nature and water protection organizations collaborate with farmers to maintain or restore high nature value grasslands in order to preserve biodiversity and landscape, but in such a way that this nature-oriented land use is economically viable for the farmers.

By means of two international workshops as well as one national workshop per partner organization in the six CEE countries, each with international TRINET experts participating, experience was exchanged reciprocally, suggestions given and ideas for follow-up projects developed. This capacity building was supplemented by intensive bilateral contacts, a common website with centralized information (www.tri-net.eu) and on-going direct feedback by the coordinators. The result was that many professional and practical impulses were given, which were able to improve and render more effective, existing forms of cooperation at national level between agriculture and nature conservation, as well as leading, above all, to the development of new projects and forms of cooperation.

The elaboration of the national scoping reports laid down the professional and argumentative foundations for the project partners' further efforts. The respective overviews of the grassland situation and the dynamics of their use, often determined by the changing economic situation, allow a professionally valid listing of priorities to be made and supply arguments for the applications for follow-up projects in the six CEE countries. In addition it became clear how the EU's Common Agricultural Policy and its varied national implementation influences the usability of HNV grassland, and which consequences must be drawn for the future shape of agriculture support in this sector. And finally, regulatory options, but also opportunities for a (primarily regional) marketing of nature conservation-oriented produce from grassland use, were extracted.

As a result, diverse options and necessities for action became apparent, essential parts of which were taken up in the follow-up projects developed as a next step. All partner organizations in the six CEE countries of the Danube basin and the participating Baltic States developed corresponding project concepts and applications for grants. Furthermore, material is thus already available for continued work in the coming years, work which both at national and at EU level represents a key to halting and reversing the loss of biodiversity as well as providing many additional positive environmental effects.

4.2 Problems and deviations of the target results

There were no fundamental problems arising during project implementation, so that the goals could be achieved. The following general conclusions can be made – details, which could be improved, but which, in hindsight, would not have significantly reduced the project success:

- There were insufficient means available for the overall project coordination. Efficiency could certainly have been still greater, if the time budget for the coordination had been larger.

Because the project is cofinanced to a large extent through contributions in kind, the DBU funding rate of 50 % proved in practice to pose difficulties. For future projects it would be desirable to either involve more donors (in the sense of providing financial liquidities) or to receive a higher funding rate from the DBU.

- The partner organisations could have been given more differentiated instructions, in terms of content and of time allocation, for the necessary steps in implementation. Especially the scoping reports could have been elaborated according to a more unified scheme, so that transnationally a more systematic overall evaluation could have been done. Finally however the primary purpose was, on the one hand, to generate basic data at the national level for the conception and justification of follow-up projects, on the other hand to obtain, in a European overview, exemplary results from which the dynamics and threat levels of grassland (especially HNV grassland), as well as factors counteracting their use in conformity to nature conservation, can be extracted. For these objectives the procedure was effective.

- Within the project coordination, a better thematic division of competence and responsibility between the three coordinators and the project secretariat, which was executed on an hourly basis, could have been foreseen. The spatial separation between Germany, Austria and Belgium proved to be somewhat of an obstacle. On the other hand, it was an advantage that it was possible for the coordinators to take turns in visiting the various pre-implementation workshops in the countries concerned – in general, two of the three coordinators attended each workshop.

- The idea of an intranet to discuss specific questions bilaterally or in small groups, as originally planned, proved to be not viable. The platform was hardly used, and so it was terminated again. It turned out that – after the project participants had gotten to know each other personally – they preferred to use direct contacts by phone or e-mail.

- In contrast, the website which is open to all plays an important role, because the most important project documents can easily be found here. All the same, it would make sense to expand this website further, through the exploitation of the partners' project results during the coming years, as a tool for concrete implementation projects, by making more detailed subdivisions and inserting more information.

- For the Belgian marketing initiative Veeakker, project partner with a successful track record spanning many years, the exchange of knowledge with the CEE partners did not go far enough up to now. It would have preferred that the concrete establishment of marketing projects by the partner organizations already took place during the project. However, the project duration of barely 2.5 years proved to be too short for this, the more so because marketing only makes sense in combination with corresponding grazing projects. Such connection of projects requires longer preparation time.

- All in all, it can be concluded first and foremost that the project should have had a substantially longer duration of at least five years, and, in view of the number of participating partner organizations which each in their turn have, or built up, a network of partners in their own country, it would have positively benefited from a higher financial volume.

4.3 Cooperation with the national partners

Cooperation with the partners went well and without friction. The key factor for this is certainly that the project coordinators and the persons responsible for the project in the partner organizations largely knew each other personally thanks to two workshops held before the beginning of the project.

A special case is the Central Balkans National Park, which unlike the other partners does not have a national perspective and therefore did not elaborate a corresponding scoping report. Nevertheless, its inclusion in the project was meaningful for all participants, because, as became evident during the project, in contrast to other countries overgrazing of many areas was the central problem here.

Details of the cooperation with the partners which could have been improved were already mentioned in chapter 4.2. None of these however significantly reduced the success of the project.

4.4 Continuation of the project

The continuation of the TRINET network is without doubt useful and it is indeed explicitly wanted by all participants. To do this, new project grants must be sought for, because the already prepared (but not yet approved) follow-up projects generally do not include any (or any significant) budget for this. However, professionalism in network activities can not be had for free.

At the beginning of the year 2011, a general objective was defined for a new, transnational umbrella project, based on the transnational collection and evaluation of problem situations, targets and knowledge gaps requests for increased exchange of experience. This project shall complement the national follow-up projects and render them more effective through continued and intensified international dialogue and expert exchange (hosting).

The following framework data were agreed between all participants in the TRINET project:

Theme:
Grazing to keep HNV grassland open in Europe – multifunctional farming supports ecosystems services and regional development

Ex ante situation:

- Grassland farming is retreating, particularly in central and eastern European countries (Latvia, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria…), especially from the areas with high nature conservation value
- Abandonment leads to succession overgrowth and loss of biodiversity
- Possibilities for locally adding value to primary production are no longer used

Principal objectives:

- Keep open high nature value (HNV) grassland in Europe by supporting pastures and hay meadows as multifunctional farming
- Accompanied by supporting diverse ecosystem services: preserving and promoting biodiversity, reducing neophytes, producing high-quality foodstuffs, securing jobs in the rural environment,

reducing greenhouse gas emissions, protecting water resources, attractive landscapes with recreational functions, etc.

- Securing also the economic sustainability of grassland use by building up a viable marketing (developing high quality produce and distributing it) as spin-off projects

Subsidiary objectives:

1. **Exchange of know-how:** collecting and exchanging experience and best-practice examples of multifunctional grassland use with high significance for nature conservation goals
2. **Models for implementation:** practical demonstration of multifunctional grassland use in various European countries with cooperation between farming and nature conservation
3. **Monitoring:** observing the ecological and economic impacts, to be able to define the framework conditions within which grassland landscapes in European countries can best fulfil the aforementioned ecosystem services and simultaneously be economically viable.

Measures:

- **Selecting pilot projects** in various countries:
  - … on the basis of different themes:
    - Keeping open riverine landscapes and floodplains by using grazing animals or mowing hay, thus helping to revitalise watercourses as required by the EC Water Framework Directive
    - Marginal sites and peripheral areas
    - Mountain regions combined with 'soft' tourism
    - etc.
  - … exhibiting different conditions for grazing:
    - Extensive grazing with different species and breeds of livestock
    - Open-air grazing year-round or summer grazing with stabling in winter
    - Meat or milk production and processing
    - Different types of fencing or employing a herdsman
    - Grazing exclusively, or combined grazing-mowing systems
    - etc.
- **Implementing pilot projects** :
  - Possibly, providing a financial kick-off subsidy to pilot projects, backed up by national funding
  - Mutual coordination of implementation phases and framework conditions across borders
  - Accompanied by continuous exchange of know-how and experience:
    - Provision of contacts to experts, who can advise if required with any issues of implementation
    - Trans-boundary hosting/excursions, for instance concerning techniques and effects of grazing, product development, marketing
- Building up **processing and marketing structures** in the pilot projects:
  - Advice with elaboration and implementation of (preferably regional) processing and marketing strategies (cheese, sausages, meat, derivative products)
  - Support in overcoming technical and bureaucratic obstacles, such as lack of abattoirs, hygiene regulations

- Definition of trans-boundary quality criteria for grassland products with award of a quality label
- Creation of an internet platform which transcends the individual projects, for trans-regional marketing of products which can be preserved longer (cheese, smoked or salted wares)
- Offering technical advice from experts from the international network, hosting and excursions

- **Evaluation** of project results
  - Monitoring of ecological and economic impacts with standardised indicators and methods
  - Where necessary, adjustment of the grazing regime if results are not optimal
  - Regular meetings between experts and excursions to exchange knowledge, where relevant establishment of working groups on specific themes
- Tracking the **national implementation of EU agri-environment policy:**
  - Comparison between national implementations of EU provisions which are relevant for the implementation of the project objectives/pilot projects
  - When necessary, assisting project partners to communicate with the competent national officials, to remove those obstacles to grazing which can be avoided
  - Communication and dissemination to the broader public

5 Publication of results

5.1 Website

Key information about the TRINET project can be found under www.tri-net.eu which has illustrated text and links where more detailed publicly available reports may be downloaded. The home page (figure 14) has a short overview of the project with links inside the page to descriptions of the eleven partners as well as a summary of the project. The other main items on the site menu contain the following information:

- Background: origin and philosophy of TRINET with links to the Workshop Concluding Documents of Buchschachen/Austria and Sigulda/Latvia, the first and second workshop preparing the current project)
- DBU Project: description of Financing, a short introduction to DBU, links to the partner organization descriptions and links so the subpages with the main topics of the six phase of TRINET project
- Grassland Status: an overview of grasslands and their problems as results of the project, link to the grassland surveys of the different countries and an overall summary of the findings
- Grassland products: hay, milk and meat as farmers products from HNV grassland – summarized findings of the project, downloads of presentations auf the Belgium partner Veeakker and a best practice study of Weideverein

Figure 14: Start page of www.tri-net.eu

Lafnitztal

- Grassland Policy: overview of the experiences of project partners with the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) of EU and its Rural Development Program and their affects to conservation and use of HNV grasslands and consequences for the future CAP-reform; summary of comments of the TRINET working group to des ARC process in summer and autumn 2010 (Agricultural and Rural Convention , ARC2020) and the following process; downloads: TRINET comments to ARC2020, ARC statement of principles from 19-20 July 2010, final statement of ARC2020 from November 2010
- Publications: reports and presentations
- Links: webpages of the partner organizations, ARC2020 and DBU

5.2 Print publications

A presentation of the project contents and/or results in the printed media did not yet occur. A short summary of the outcomes, presenting the requirements for action connected to the 2014 CAP reform in particular, is foreseen for the German-language publication 'Naturschutz und Landschaftsplanung'. Furthermore, a publication in an international English-language magazine is planned. The partner organizations will try to publish the results, notably those relevant to their own country, in appropriate fora.

The workshop in the Rhön was extensively covered by several regional newspapers as well as by the media service of the Rhön Biosphere Reserve. Here the prime objective was the regional communication, to underline the international interest in the grazing and direct marketing projects in the Rhön Biosphere Reserve and therefore their significance for the region.

5.3 Green Days in Bulgaria

The Bulgarian TRINET partner Agrolink already gave a presentation of the TRINET results to a national forum. From the 28th of April to the 1st of May the second Green Days event organised by the Bulgarian Association for Alternative Tourism, was held. Agrolink was responsible for a side event:

- to present the TRINET project
- to show best practices of HNV grassland management in the Rhodope mountains, with lectures by TRINET participants from the region on sustainable milk and meat production
- to give the first feedback and response from farmers in Bulgaria to the new legislation on direct marketing (with invited officials from the Ministry of Agriculture to answer questions from farmers about direct marketing opportunities and challenges in Bulgaria)
- to demonstrate to visitors of the Green Days good grassland management in Rhodope and Europe (TRINET partners from Rhodope exhibited their products)

6 Conclusion

6.1 Assessment of the procedure

The chosen working method was effective: at the initial workshop in Austria, the formal procedures and aims of the cooperation and the planned implementation phases were discussed with all partners. On that basis, bilateral partnership agreements were concluded between the partners and Rhön Natur, responsible overall for the project, in order to settle the individual tasks and fees, including the own contribution. More in-depth assessment of the themes and justification of the requirements for action were provided by the scoping reports about the situation at national level. These were discussed at the national-level pre-implementation workshops (attended by other experts and the TRINET coordinators) and first ideas for follow-up workshops were formulated.

Next, as implementation phase of the project, came the development of possible national follow-up projects. With an eye to experience exchange, these were presented at the second international workshop, in the Rhön (Germany), enhanced by excursions to inspect grazing of HNV grassland and direct marketing initiatives. Simultaneously, the need for continued international collaboration was debated. This in turn led to new incentives to the partners for the further development of projects, for which the international coordinators were able to give helpful tips during the on-going work in the partner organizations.

The effects of the international network which has been formed, are hard to gauge. Nevertheless it is clear that, if there had been no TRINET, the partner organizations would not have been able to develop their own follow-up projects at all, or at least not to the scale and quality in which they were finally submitted. The exchange of experience, especially in the framework of excursions, and the bilateral contacts between individual participants, proved to be of especial value.

6.2 Necessary changes of the procedure

Direct changes to the working method, applied to a follow-up project or to generally similar projects, do not seem necessary. Specific options to improve efficacy have been presented in chapter 4.2, to which the reader is referred.

6.3 Transferable results

(i) Grassland status and problems

The reports about the state of the natural and semi-natural grasslands in the Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries which are partners in the DBU-funded TRINET project, show that in recent history there has almost everywhere been **a dramatic loss and decline of high nature value (HNV) grasslands** because of agricultural 'improvement', intensification, conversion to other land uses, drainage and hydrological regulation etc. Figure 15 shows main reasons and based processes.

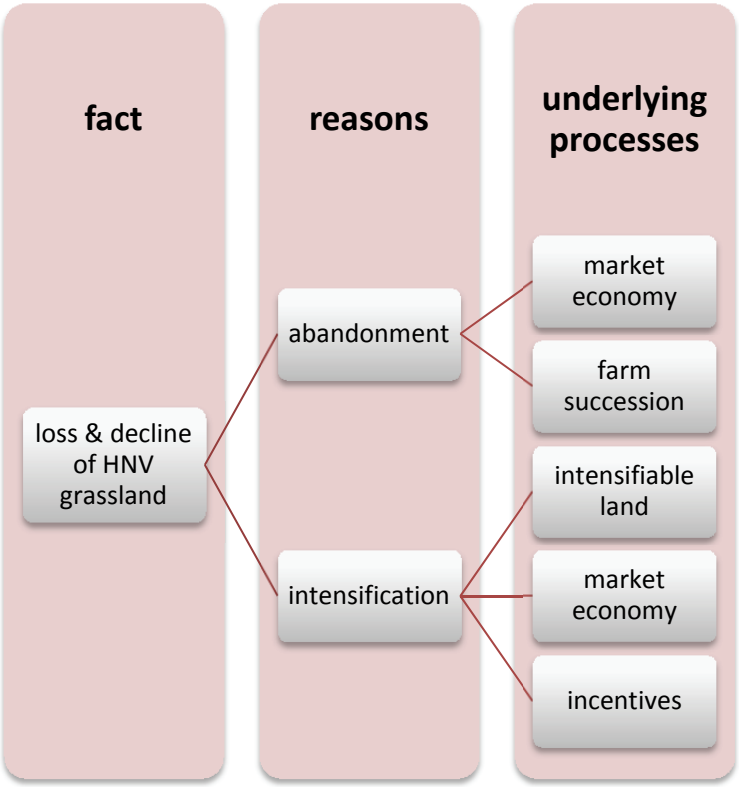


Figure 15: Main reasons and underlying processes of loss and decline of HNV grassland in Europe (for explanation see following text)

Yet these same reports, and additional information provided during the internal workshops held in the second phase of the DBU TRINET project, show that the dominant current problem facing grasslands in these Central and Eastern European countries is abandonment of farming, followed by natural succession to scrubs and finally forest.

There appear to be two **processes behind abandonment**:

1. The transition from a state-run economy to a market economy meant the closure of many state farms and the disappearance of large numbers of livestock (sheep especially, e.g. in Hungary, but also cattle) because they were no longer shielded against cheaper produce from the rest of the EU and the world. The decline in the numbers of livestock has been very dramatic during the early 1990s in many of these countries (see the individual country reports). Consequently, large areas of grassland are no longer being grazed or mowed and have been falling prey to succession.
2. Where there were traditionally many individual farmers (Romania for instance), they have continued farming but here there is a growing problem of 'farm succession': the older generation which still farms does not have a younger generation ready to take over the farm. Instead, young people in the rural areas prefer to emigrate to the urban areas or to other countries, where there are opportunities for careers and jobs. Once the older people who are still mowing and grazing the mountain grasslands in the Carpathians give up, the land will fall out of use. This threatens hundreds of thousands of hectares of HNV grassland in Romania alone.

Abandonment is a horizontal, cross-cutting problem. HNV grasslands lying within National Parks, Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas should because of their legal status, be safe from intensification,

afforestation, ploughing, drainage etc. – but they are NOT protected against land abandonment. The cessation of grazing and mowing, leading to natural succession, is a threat facing all these protected grasslands as much as the unprotected ones.

Intensification of grassland use, or conversion from grassland to arable or planted forest, is also a threat, but a more localised one – linked to land which can be used intensively, such as in the plains of Hungary, or where there is a direct incentive to e.g. plant forest (for instance, because a biomass energy plant running on fast-rotation softwoods is being constructed in the vicinity of the grasslands). In principle, it should not be a threat to HNV grasslands in protected areas – but the reality is often different.

The core issue which action to preserve HNV grasslands should be focusing on is **therefore a socio-economic one**: how can land abandonment be halted or reversed? In other words, how can an ecologically appropriate use of HNV grasslands, where it exists, be secured for the future, and how can such farming be started again where it no longer exists? (This reasoning also applies to intensification and conversion of grasslands: how can ecologically appropriate use of HNV grasslands be made so attractive, socially and economically speaking, that farmers are not motivated to use the land in a different, less ecologically positive way?).

In this context, there is already one encouraging phenomenon: The **transition to a market economy** in the 1990s meant that among the ruins of the former state farms, new, private farmers appeared. These new farmers are committed to farming (it was their deliberate choice to become a farmer) and some of them have taken up grassland farming. This is particularly noticeable in Estonia, where even today new farmers are beginning livestock farms, or have only started livestock farming a few years ago. In Estonia, the amount of grassland being farmed has actually increased since the 1990s! However, these new Estonian farmers are asking for technical advice and help in how to successfully manage the specific breeds they are putting on the grassland, how to improve the slaughter and marketing side…because they can not fall back on any local knowledge and tradition.

Such new farmers also occur in the other countries (Slovakia, Hungary for instance) and they are potentially very interesting partners for TRINET and any other initiative in favour of grasslands, because they are committed, often open to new ideas and hoping to expand and improve their farm.

So, in conclusion, the surveys and workshops funded by the DBU reveal that the objective for TRINET is: Communicate and work with both traditional farmers (as in the Romanian Carpathians) and 'new farmers' to together find ways to render ecologically appropriate grassland farming technically, socially and economically attractive for the farmers.

In consequence, TRINET also ought to examine which, then, are the problems which make ecologically appropriate grassland farming technically, socially and economically unattractive for the farmers, and which therefore ought to be tackled.

Examination of the obstacles facing ecologically appropriate grassland farming

An evaluation of the various country reports and of the topics discussed during the internal workshops, shows that a number of technical problems occur across all six CEE countries (figure 16):

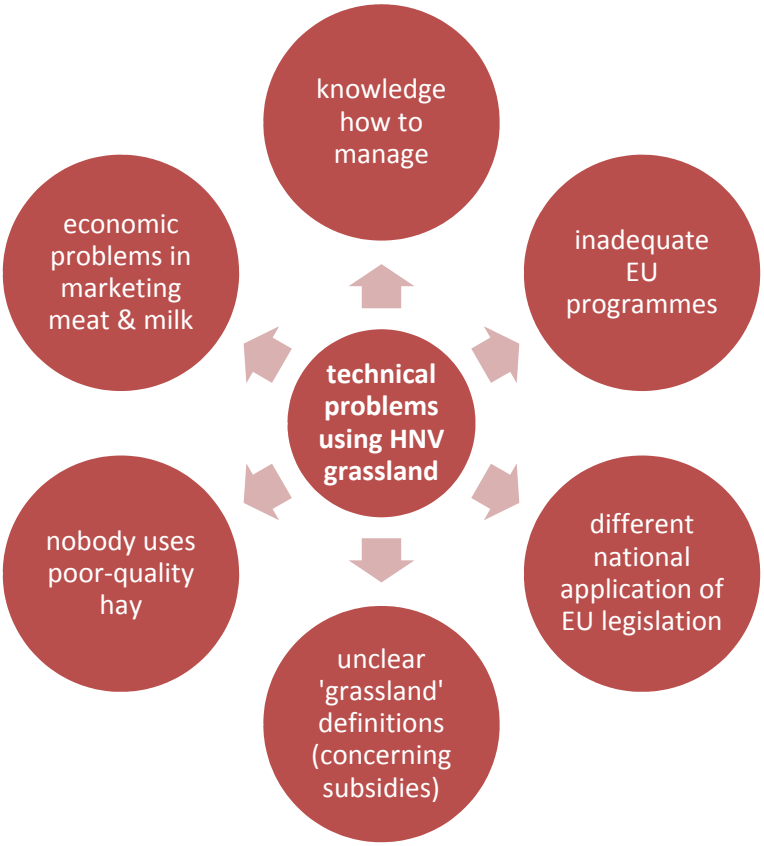


Figure 16: Technical problems using HNV grassland

- There is a need for more technical knowledge and transfer of experience of how to manage grasslands in the optimum way for biodiversity, how to manage specific livestock breeds, how to plan the grazing scientifically and practically - this is notably an issue in the Bulgarian Central Balkans National Park and in Estonia, but also in Slovakia there is a desire to try new methods for the follow-up recurring management of restored grasslands
- The existing support schemes (mostly connected to the EU Rural Development Programme = CAP second pillar) are not always adequate – the levels of payment are too low, certain actions necessary for appropriate grassland use are not covered by any support scheme, the conditions for receiving support money are too restrictive or burdensome for the farmer, there are rigidities (e.g. mowing dates are fixed and can't be moved to take account of weather) etc.
- Different national governments interpret and apply the same EU legislation in different ways. For instance, in some countries Rural Development Programme funds can be used to clear overgrown grassland, in others they can't. This is illogical and means farmers wanting to restore grassland are handicapped in these countries.
- There are problems with the definition of 'grassland' itself. Here LPIS, the CAP registry which determines which areas of land are considered 'farmland' and so qualify for CAP support and which areas do not, plays a major role. Rules and interpretations such as that only land which

was being used agriculturally in 2003 qualifies for CAP support, or that any land with more than x% per hectare of trees is not farmland, can make it impossible to restore overgrown land and get farmers to use the restored land, or to get support for wooded pastures and wooded meadows.

- Certain types of grassland, notably floodplain and fen grasslands, are not mowed any more because the hay has too poor a quality for feeding to livestock compared to other available forms of fodder, so that the management of these grasslands is a problem – unless alternative uses for the hay can be found.
- There are also common problems related to the economic and commercial aspects of producing and marketing meat and milk from high nature value grasslands – for these, please refer to the webpage 'Grassland Products'.

(ii) Grassland products

The workshops and meetings with farmers carried out in Estonia, Latvia, Slovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria, revealed that farmers wanting to market produce from ecologically appropriate grassland use, as a special product with a 'green' image, face several obstacles:

1. Demand from consumers in the CEE countries for meat and milk products from HNV grassland management is still limited. Too many consumers are only interested in low prices! Exporting to countries where there are more consumers interested and able to pay for expensive quality products, requires capacities which the HNV grassland farmers in the CEE countries do not have.
2. The distribution chain – how to get meat and milk products from HNV grassland management in the rural areas (often remote!) to the consumers in urban areas – is generally non-existent, or very weak.
3. Among the people interested in directly marketing their meat and milk products from HNV grassland management as a special 'niche' product, there is a huge lack of experience of how to manage the supply chain so that no meat or milk is wasted yet customers are always supplied, of how to find new customers and keep the loyalty of existing customers, of how to add value to raw meat and milk most effectively, of how to run a successful commercial business based on 'green meat and milk'.
4. In countries like Slovakia (and Poland) it has only been permitted since 2009 to sell directly from the farm, in other countries (Latvia, Estonia) this has been allowed longer but direct marketing initiatives are very small. Here there is a need for technical advice and exchange of experience in how to start and to improve sales from the farm.
5. EU regulations on food safety and hygiene make some traditional products (such as cheeses made on the mountain pastures from raw milk) illegal and impose huge technical and financial burdens on any farmer wanting to process and sell meat and milk products on his own farm.
6. Rules (national and EU) on slaughter effectively force farmers to go to the official slaughterhouses; in many countries these have been reduced to a few large slaughterhouses as a result of economic concentration. This increases costs and technical problems for farmers with small numbers of specialized livestock. The alternative – slaughter on the farm by means of a mobile slaughtering vehicle – is so difficult and costly to carry out, because of these rules, that it is in practice impossible.

7. A crucial point in gaining a good income for farmers who manage HNV grasslands in an ecologically appropriate manner, is labeling the meat and milk products so that consumers recognize them as being different from standard products. Since ecologically appropriate grassland farming is not necessarily the same as organic farming, the organic ('bio') label is not pertinent. Apart from some local initiatives, there is a gap in the CEE countries when it comes to developing a suitable label for the products of ecologically appropriate grassland farming, and promoting this label.

Considering this, the conclusion reached by the TRINET project is that experience exchange with direct marketing initiatives which have existed for a longer time and have learned through trial and error, will be of great value, especially for any pilot projects in the CEE countries to improve the marketing of produce from high nature value grasslands.

Thus, during the TRINET workshop held in the Rhön (Germany) in July 2010, an important part of the programme was devoted to visiting and discussing with local initiatives and networks which seek to add value to grassland products and to build up direct links with buyers (private consumers, but also professional clients like restaurants and hotels).

iii. Grasslands and EU policy

Within the EU, grasslands are strongly affected by the evolution of policy: the Common Agricultural Policy and its Rural Development Programme, but also rules on the slaughter of livestock and the hygienic processing of meat and milk. The main comments and suggestions about what should be changed at policy level to support grassland farming in favour of biodiversity are the following basic principles:

It is essential that policy tackles the underlying causes of land and farm abandonment in an effective manner! This can be done in two mutually supportive ways:

(1) The **second pillar** of the Common Agricultural Policy **CAP** must be reinforced:

- by increasing budgets and scope of measures, to include positive measures now generally absent or under-utilised
- by reducing the member states' margin of manoeuvre to escape from actions which clearly have a significant and beneficial effect on HNV grasslands and the ecologically sustainable rural development associated with them
- by ensuring levels of payment which are attractive for farmers and compensate them truly for their effort, but which at the same time give a real targeted contribution to biodiversity - not just general basic reduction of inputs and environmental pollution

(2) **help farmers managing high nature value grasslands** who want to decrease their reliance on subsidies by **building up direct markets for niche products** ('nature meat and milk'):

- giving adequate support to investments in small-scale processing (added value), effective distribution (farm shops, retail networks), advertising and promotion towards potential consumers (including coherent certification)

- removing or mitigating the many barriers which prevent farmers taking such practical steps towards getting a better economic return from HNV farming and so reducing subsidy dependence: EU regulations on hygiene, slaughter, carcass disposal etc (and their national interpretation)

In a further step, the valuation of ecosystem services (building on the European Commission DG ENV's TEEB study) should be brought into the CAP – ecosystems services being considered as a product of agriculture just as much as raw materials are. The CAP and its second pillar should be used, where appropriate, to help achieve goals of other EU policies (Natura 2000, Water Framework Directive, Floods Directive).

Ultimately, why not consider replacing the complex mix of axis 2 or 3 support schemes by direct payments to HNV farmers for delivering ecosystems services and/or Natura 2000/Water Framework Directive outputs – i.e. service contracts for delivering a public good?

iv. The need of pilot and follow-up projects

The analyses led to the conclusion that an appropriate follow-up would be a series of pilot projects where collaboration between nature conservation and grassland farmers is carried out and which, if successful, can act as beacons in their national context, models which others will copy. These pilot projects should be built around one or more of three main themes:

1. **Production:** which means the technical aspects of using HNV grasslands to produce meat and milk products in a manner which is beneficial for biodiversity. I.e. stocking density, grazing regimes, mowing times and frequency, breeds of livestock etc. It also includes all the aspects linked to agricultural policy, support schemes etc.
2. **Processing:** how to convert raw meat and milk from HNV grassland farming into products which can be sold to consumers, preferably with added value (i.e. cheese instead of milk, sausages or smoked hams instead of cuts of raw meat). This includes aspects like slaughter and hygiene regulations.
3. **Distribution:** how to get the products to the consumers as efficiently as possible with a minimum of wastage, and how to increase the number of interested consumers (direct marketing). This includes the issue of labeling.

The pilot project process of 'acting by example' should be supported by promoting these pilot projects to the right audiences, extracting the lessons learnt from the projects, formulating the parts of the projects that are transferable and replicable, organizing study visits and training sessions for experience exchange.

At the same time, there are common problems which should be dealt with at a supra-national level: the problems with EU support schemes and regulations, for instance. Here appropriate follow-up would be to collect information from the CEE countries and present this to the appropriate institutions (national ministries, EU), preferably by means of a trans-national network.

Appendices

(1) Surveys of status of grasslands – reports produced in 2009

(2) Scoping reports and reports about pre-implementation workshops

(3) Marketing meat from grassland farming in support of nature and landscape – the experience of Veeakker Cooperative

(4) Grassland Products Best Practice Case Study: Using hay as basis for successful meat cattle farming (Weideverein Ramsargebiet Lafnitztal)

(5) Remarks and suggestions from TRINET about HNV grassland use, the CAP, and notably the RDP – paper of TRINET working group, July 2010

(6) ARC Agricultural and Rural Convention – "A Communication from Civil Society to the European Union Institutions on the future Agricultural and Rural Policy" – declaration, Nov. 2010

SURVEYS OF STATUS OF GRASSLANDS – REPORTS PRODUCED IN 2009

Grasslands in Bulgaria

Grasslands play an important role in the formation of the plant cover of the country. They form specific habitat types, which are characterized by a high biological diversity. They have an important function for the local inhabitants as a source of fodder. Unfortunately, no clear or precise data exist on their total area in Bulgaria.
According to some data, the area of meadows and pastures in the country declined from 1.8 million hectares in the first decades of the 20th century, to a total quoted area of 1.2 million hectares by the middle of the 20th century, and now, according to data supplied by CORINE - Landcover (1991), the grassland area without the high-mountain zones amounts to about 850 000 hectares (however the map legend contains some unmarked and unspecified legend categories like “grasslands with considerable presence of forest and farm cultures”).
These considerations resulted in an approximate estimation of 10% natural grasslands in Bulgaria at this moment.

A part of the grasslands in Bulgaria is of a primary or autochthonous origin (natural grasslands). They occur in places where forests fail to develop due to unfavourable ecological conditions. These are mainly high-mountain areas, at altitudes above 1800 (2100-2200) metres.

In the lower parts of the mountains, absence of forest cover and the presence of the primary herbaceous vegetation may be due to climatic and soil conditions. The strong winds and the shallow eroded soils at the tops of the lower mountains and on the mountain crests limit the development of trees. In the lowlands and foothills of mountains, the natural grasslands, as a rule, are due to edaphic conditions, for example by a presence of over-humid soils, saline soils, or sand substrates, which obstruct the development of woody vegetation. Although strongly affected by anthropogenic impact, the dispersed localities of steppe grasslands of Bulgaria should be also included in the group of natural grasslands.

Most grasslands in Bulgaria, with the exception of alpine zones, are semi-natural and have taken the place of natural grasslands of another type after the destruction of the latter by natural or anthropogenic factors. The so-called “park pastures” have a special status. They represent thinned-out tree communities with a well-developed grass cover, used for grazing by domestic animals. Their distribution is rather limited in the country.

Rather confusing is the status of the so-called “uncultivated lands”. This category covers the abandoned arable lands which, depending on the length of their abandonment and on environmental conditions, as well as on the manner of their management, form a mosaic of various successions between pioneer ruderal communities and stable pasture or meadow communities. And while the end phases of this category are quite distinctly defined both from a scientific and from an economic viewpoint, the intermediate succession phases require some more detailed scientific analysis.

Under the impact of human activities, the species composition and the structure of natural grasslands can change. Going back from intensive land use, the semi-natural grasslands tend to form a species composition and structure which is close to the natural grasslands. For these reasons, it is often difficult, or even impossible, to judge whether a specific grassland is natural or semi-natural.

Trends and threats

After the socio-political changes in 1990, the former cooperative farms have been disrupted and the remaining animals were distributed among the cooperative members. However, in the meantime most of these people had lost their private facilities (cattle sheds, haylofts, etc.) which are needed for livestock breeding and thus the number of domestic animals was once again reduced (this time sharply).

At present, livestock breeding in Bulgaria is mainly based on private households with a couple of sheep, goats and cows reared by their owners as subsistence farming. The importance of natural fodder resources has been reduced very much and many grassland communities which could be mowed for hay, currently have no function for fodder production. The hay meadows have been ploughed up and most of the pastures have been practically abandoned. This resulted in economic impacts, as well impacts on the status and the type of natural grasslands in the country.

Traditional practice has shown that one of the main forms of protecting the natural heritage treasures is their

inclusion into a system of protected natural territories. Although the national environmental network of protected areas has been designed well and has developed a good coverage, it can not be claimed that it covers to a satisfactory extent the entire diversity of grasslands and areas with grassland which should be protected. .

The national parks and reserves are located mainly in the high mountains and probably already ensure the protection of most subalpine and alpine grasslands in the country. In the flatlands and mountain foothill zones, as well as in the lower parts of the mountains, however, this network is less developed and represented by protected territories with a less restrictive regime. Yet these are the zones under the highest anthropogenic pressure and with the most dynamic changes.
Along with the challenges and difficulties arising from the delayed Natura 2000 sites designation, Bulgaria has received a unique chance to put important natural sites under a proper protection regime, both nationally and internationally. The Biological Diversity Act gives the possibility to create zones under a special regime of protection in conformity with European standards.

2. Rural Development Programme measures which could support high-nature value grasslands

General Description of the Schemes
– Basic management. Voluntary 5-year agreements.
– Can apply online – still not available!
– Guaranteed entry if scheme requirements can be met
– Annual payments
– Agreement checked by paying agency when also inspecting Pillar 1 payments (for compliance with Single Area Payment)
Overview of agri-environment achievements
• Arable farmland: schemes can reverse the decline in the range of wildlife
More problematic:
• Habitat re-creation: especially complex semi-natural habitats

Organic Farming Scheme (OF)

Specific aims related to HNV grassland:

To encourage more “balanced” organic farming systems based upon crop rotations and the integration of crop and livestock production;
• To maintain local and regional balances and protect soil and water using the natural resources and energy;
• To improve rural landscapes by maintaining biodiversity and protecting natural habitats, which also helps to attract and retain population.

The following annual payment rates are defined (EUR/ha/annum):
• Arable crops, including fodder crops:
- organic – 155 EUR/ha;
- during the conversion period – 181 EUR/ha*
• Pasture and meadows:
- organic – 82 EUR/ha;
- during the conversion period – 82 EUR/ha

Scheme 2: Management of High-Nature Value Farmland Scheme (HNV)

HNV 1 and 2:

Restoration and maintenance of HNV grasslands

Environmental objectives:

• To avoid the further loss of high-nature value grasslands and associated species through abandonment, conversion to arable land and other crops, or over-grazing;

• To conserve and maintain high-nature value grasslands and associated species through the continuation or re-introduction of traditional management practices on semi-natural grasslands;

• For grasslands in protected areas - to contribute to the implementation of protected area management plans and the achievement of protected area conservation goals, including the achievement of favourable conservation status for Natura 2000 sites, before statutory requirements in their management plans enter into force;

• To contribute to the achievement of favourable conservation status for Natura 2000 sites outside protected areas before the statutory requirements in their management plans enter into force;

• To protect biodiversity and to ensure protection, maintenance and/or recovery of favourable conditions for habitat and bird populations;

• Promotion of traditional mowing methods without heavy machinery.

Geographical Scope: Permanent grasslands category in HNV areas

There are two packages:

HNV1– Restoration and maintenance of undergrazed HNV grasslands

HNV2– Restoration and maintenance of overgrazed grasslands

HNV1 – Restoration and maintenance of undergrazed HNV grasslands

• Clearance of all unwanted vegetation

• Use of mineral fertilizers and application of pesticides is prohibited except those defined in Regulation (EEC) 2092/91

• No new drainage and ploughing

• Free grazing on meadows after the last mowing (except for meadows in the forests, because they are a habitat for plant species of European conservation importance where the grazing might not be of benefit, moreover the forest meadows are used for grazing by wild fauna and human presence might disturb them).

• Maintenance of minimal and maximum density of livestock depending on natural climatic and soil conditions in order to assure a good ecological state of the meadows and pastures and keep permanent grass cover. The minimum and maximum levels should be as follows:

1. 0.3-1.5 LSU/ha outside protected areas
2. for a protected territory, minimum and maximum animal density has to be according to the territory's management plan (if such a plan is not existing, then the density should be between 0.3-1.5 LSU/ha).

• The farmer should keep the minimum and maximum stocking density in the whole grazing area within the farmer's block. Respect of stocking density will take into account all grazing livestock kept on the farm.

• Mowing should be later than 15th of June for lowlands and between 30th of June and 15th of July for mountainous LFA as defined in Measure 211 (Annex5).

• The mowing may be done manually, or if it is done with a slow grass-cutting machine it must be done from the centre towards the periphery of the meadow and at low speed. (This will allow the ground-nesting birds and other animals to escape).

HNV2 – Restoration and maintenance of overgrazed HNV meadows and pastures

• Re-seeding with approved native species* – preferably with seed of local provenance.

• Use of mineral fertilizers and application of pesticides is prohibited except those defined in Regulation (EEC) 2092/91.

• No new drainage, ploughing or cultivation.

• Free grazing on meadows after the last mowing (except for meadows in the forests, because they are a habitat for plant species of European conservation importance where the grazing might not be of benefit, moreover the forest meadows are used for grazing by wild fauna and human presence might disturb them).

• Maintenance of minimal and maximum density of livestock depending on natural climatic and soil conditions in order to assure a good ecological state of the meadows and pastures and keep permanent grass cover. The minimum and maximum levels should be as follows:

1. 0.3-1.5 LSU/ha outside protected areas
2. for a protected territory, minimum and maximum animal density has to be according to the territory's management plan (if such a plan is not existing, then the density should be between 0.3-1.5 LSU/ha).

• The farmer should keep the minimum and maximum stocking density in the whole grazing area within the farmer's block. Respect of stocking density will take into account all grazing livestock kept on the farm.

• Mowing should be later than 15th of June for lowlands and between 30th of June and 15th of July for mountainous LFA as defined in Measure 211 (Annex5).

• The mowing may be done manually, or if it is done with a slow grass-cutting machine it must be done from the centre towards the periphery of the meadow and at low speed. (This will allow the ground-nesting birds and other animals to escape).

• Grazing on sandy dunes is not allowed

Expected Environmental Impact:

Improved conservation status of HNV grassland habitats;

Anticipated improvement in the conservation status of over 200 000 ha high-nature value semi-natural grasslands

Payment Rates: The methodology for payment calculations is presented in Annex 5 (*Attachment 3 to Measure 214*)

Payments per year per ha:

• HNV 1 – 97 EUR/ha

• HNV 2 – 155 EUR/ha

HNV 4 – Maintenance of habitats of protected species in arable lands of Important Bird Areas (IBAs)

Environmental objectives:

To protect biodiversity and to ensure the protection, maintenance and/or recovery of the favourable condition of habitats and bird populations during the breeding season, on migration or during winter.

Arable lands included in IBAs in Bulgaria account for around 4.6% of the territory of Bulgaria.

They concern important migratory routes like the Via Pontica and are very important for feeding of the birds. However the farmers in these areas may suffer significant losses caused by the birds.

Geographical Scope: All arable UAA (Utilised agricultural area – Area with cultivated or managed land - the rest is not managed, or abandoned, land) classed as HNV (around 360,000 ha).

If more than 50% of the arable land within a physical block is classed as HNV, the whole block is eligible for support as HNV arable land. If less than 50% of the physical block is classed as HNV arable land the physical block is not eligible for support.

Management Requirements:

The farmer may choose one or a combination of the following activities:

• Leave small (4 x 4m) pieces of land with bare soil, ploughed but not sowed, amongst the autumn-cropped areas (4 such square pieces per hectare) – applicable to areas with intensive agriculture where wintering geese feed, or to support other target species such as larks (Alaudidae);

• Retain winter stubbles on fields selected for spring-grown crops;

• Leave uncultivated and un-ploughed areas ("wildlife-friendly set-aside") for a period of 2 years on a 5-year rotational basis in intensive agricultural land with monocultures (10 to 20% of the area, but not less than 1 ha, as a single, non-fragmented block of land; with a 1 metre sterile strip around the perimeter that should be ploughed 2-3 times a year [but not between March and July] to prevent the spread of weeds into adjacent crops);

• No cereal harvesting before 31st July in areas with nests of Montagu's harrier (*Circus pygargus*);

• No use of pesticides (including second generation rodenticides) and mineral fertilizers - other than 'localised treatment' of invasive weeds, i.e. selective use of some herbicides such as fluazifop-P-butyl or similar in March to suppress rank grass swards on grass margins or wildlife set-aside areas.

Expected Environmental Impact:

• Stabilization or increase of farmland bird populations in SPAs and IBAs;

• Maintenance of the ecological conditions (food base, shelter, breeding substrate, etc.) for breeding or foraging imperial eagle, pallid harrier, Montagu's harrier, Saker falcon, red-footed falcon, roller, red-backed shrike, for staging and wintering red-breasted and lesser white-fronted geese;

• Maintenance or recovery of the breeding populations of imperial eagle, Montagu's harrier, white stork, Saker falcon, red-footed falcon, roller, masked shrike, red-backed shrike;

• Maintenance or recovery of migrating and wintering populations of wildfowl, especially red-breasted goose and lesser white-fronted goose;

• Protection of habitats and biodiversity.

The actions will be implemented until equivalent statutory management requirements enter into force in designated SPAs under the Birds Directive in Bulgaria

Payment Rates: Payments per year per ha:

• Areas of land with bare soil: 20 EUR/ha;

• Retain winter stubbles on fields selected for spring-grown crops: 61 EUR/ha;

• Leave uncultivated and un-ploughed areas ("wildlife-friendly set-aside") for a period for 2 years: 102 EUR/ha;

• No cereal harvesting before 31 July in areas with nests of Montagu's harrier (Circus pygargus): 31 EUR/ha;

• No use of pesticides: 58 EUR/ha.

Scheme 5: Traditional Livestock Breeding Scheme (LB)

LB 1 Preservation of Local Breeds in danger of being lost for farming

Environmental Objectives:

• To maintain genetic resources by increasing the numbers of breeding animals of specified local traditional breeds which are in danger of further decline in numbers and in some cases could be lost for farming;

• To support those local traditional breeds which are well-adapted to the poor conditions of mountain agriculture and have the potential to play an important role in the maintenance of traditional grazing systems in mountainous and semi-mountainous areas;

• To preserve genetic resources naturally adapted to the local and regional conditions.

Geographical Scope: Whole territory of Bulgaria

Management Requirements:

The livestock breeds in danger of being lost for farming fall within one of these livestock species:

• Cattle
• Buffalo
• Sheep
• Goat
• Horse
• Swine

The list of endangered breeds is presented in an Annex to this scheme. Support will only be given to animals which have a “certificate of origin” issued in accordance to the Animal Husbandry Act.

Expected Environmental Impact:

Increase the populations of the endangered breeds and preserve the purity of their breed characteristics.

Payment Rates:

Payments per year per LU:

• Cattle and buffalo – 200 EUR /LU
• Sheep and goats – 165 EUR/LU
• Swine – 122 EUR/LU

• Horse – 200 EUR/LU

LB 2: Traditional Shepherd Systems (Mountain Pastoralism)
Environmental objectives:
• To support traditional patterns of seasonal grazing of high-nature value natural and seminatural pastures in specified mountain regions using national breeds and methods;
• To apply grazing as a tool for the conservation and maintenance of habitats and species in the high mountains;
• To promote the use of traditional breeds which are capable of grazing in the harsh mountain conditions;
• To promote the use of Karakachan dogs as an efficient and environmentally-friendly method of protecting domestic livestock from attack by large carnivores (wolves, bears, jackals and lynxes);
• To enhance biodiversity in the pastures in specified mountain regions.
Geographical Scope: Pirin and Central Balkan National Parks will be the first pilot areas.

- LEADER support
Support is now only available for the following types of activities:
 Feasibility studies, market research, surveys, etc;
 Technical planning (planning sessions, elaboration of joint action plans, etc.);
 Partnership meetings.
Available from 2010 for supporting farmers and Local Initiatives:
B. Implementation of joint actions, which bring tangible benefits to the rural areas. The joint projects must aim at:
 Development of new products or services such as tourism products based on shared heritage; development of a range of traditional craft products inspired by shared traditions;
 Establishment of facilities for joint production of goods or services;
 Joint marketing of local products (local labels, shared tourism packages, development of new market outlets for local products, etc.);
 Preservation of shared natural or cultural heritage;
 Capacity building: sharing of experience, good practice and lessons learnt about local development through e.g. shared publications, events, twinning arrangements (exchange of programme managers and staff), and joint or coordinated development work.

3. Problems and gaps which are already known when it comes to supporting high-nature value grasslands

General problems:
• Intensification (Single Area Payments, food prices/security, biofuels)
• Abandonment
• Land consolidation (most of the grasslands belong to different owners, including municipalities)
• Water shortages
• Soil degradation
• Climate change
• Biodiversity decline, loss of landscape quality and cultural heritage

CAP and grassland support
• Many HNV farmers are excluded from support, are not registered or lack the technical capacity to meet new requirements and standards
• Most funds are concentrated on the most intensive farmers

Key concerns:

The RDPs for 2007-2013 focus on 'increasing competitiveness' and 'diversification' with few environmental safeguards and a lack of integration with Axis 2 objectives.

Only 25% of the total budget is allocated to Axis 2, with no guarantee that sufficient funds will be targeted to adequately conserve and enhance biodiversity resources. Many existing agri-environment schemes have barely been improved, some beneficial ones actually abandoned or weakened, with funds directed at basic 'entry-level' type schemes that require little change in practices and deliver few benefits.

Those few effective schemes which do exist will continue to suffer from lack of uptake due to phased introduction, no 'ring-fencing' of funds, competing objectives, low payment rates, lack of advisory support and inappropriate targeting. Natura 2000 sites are at risk due to delayed introduction of 'effective' agri-environment schemes or management plans, and inadequate funding.

Delay of implementation for the designation of Natura 2000 sites, and question of how any subsequently designated sites will be supported – BUT also the existence of large areas of unprotected HNV farmland.

Effort needed to gain farmer support of agri-environment objectives by explaining why management for biodiversity is a priority and how their businesses can benefit

- Where agri-environment schemes are targeted at birds or biodiversity, expert environmental advice should be sought and followed by everyone to ensure the schemes' effectiveness (scheme designers, advisory staff, farmers, paying agencies)
- Some flexibility should be allowed to delivery staff to adjust management requirements to the needs of particular species or to regional differences in farming systems, climate and habitats.

Targeted and coherent packages of measures from Axes 1, 2 & 3 are needed to address the social and economic problems facing HNV farming sustainability.

- Investment and diversification aid for low-input farming systems should be directed at value-adding production increasing economic profit for farmers; accessing new markets; finding modern alternatives to labour-intensive practices; helping farmers access the economic benefits of biodiversity conservation.

Future challenge: paying for the positive externalities of HNV farming; rewarding positive traditional management which is not economically viable.

- Current agri-environment system based on income forgone & additional costs, but is not effective if farmers already have very low incomes or are engaged in the right practices
- LFAs and direct payments maintain farmers in farming, but not in traditional management practices
- Need to retain the 'principles' of these practices, whilst allowing for technological advancement

Farmers

There is an extremely high share of subsistence and semi-subsistence farmers. Typically they are old people, living in poor conditions, with little scope to set up a viable farm business. Their numbers can best be revealed by comparing the figures of agricultural land in use and the land registered in the Land Parcels Identification System (LPIS), which shows land eligible for CAP support. On average less than one fifth of all grasslands are in farms claiming support (which are the more commercially oriented farms). Even worse, only 8 % of all arable land is registered in LPIS. Furthermore, this excludes long-term abandoned land which is statistically registered separately.

Nowadays there is little left of the **old transhumance traditions**, and few farmers take their flocks for summer grazing to the mountain pastures. The abundance of free, unused pastures is in some cases being used extensively (low stocking densities) by established or by new market-oriented family farms.

The problem is that every year the number of animals declines (in 2007 vs 2005 the decline is 3.7% for cattle, 6 % for sheep) because of the migration to urban areas, the low price of animal products, old age of the population in

rural areas. Therefore the non-officially used grassland areas tend to decline, because of low numbers of animals. It could be said that the trend of abandonment is still continuing.
Most sheep and goat farms are semi-subsistence with limited marketing opportunities for their products. The scope for livestock keeping, and especially dairy farming, is quite limited in the region due to the aging population, the harsh climate with the subsequent need for large amounts of expensive fodder, and the increasing legal requirements such as hygiene standards. Subsistence farms also raise pigs, poultry and rabbits. Honey production is another semi-subsistence activity, with a number of farmers registered as bee-keepers and honey producers.

National Policy

Bulgarian farmers managing HNV grasslands and/or situated in mountain areas can apply for the **single area-based payments** (63 EUR/ha) as well as for **LFA payments** (90 EUR/ha) and **agri-environmental schemes for high nature value farmlands** (131 to 155 EUR/ha). Logically, this support is only provided to registered farmers and land. However, in many areas with grasslands only a small part of arable land (between 10 to 20%) and about 20-30 % of the grasslands are officially registered. In practice this leaves huge areas of land without any support and thus threatens to lead to further abandonment and the resulting loss of biodiversity and habitats.
It should be pointed out that small farms are managed extensively and do not fit to the paradigm of the well-structured market-oriented farm for meat and milk production.
At the same time farmers willing to start using abandoned grasslands or arable fields will face serious difficulties as the clearing of unwanted scrub encroachment is not supported by any of the payment options. **The Bulgarian Rural Development Plan** 2007-2013 does not include such measures for non-productive investments either. Any restoration of overgrown and abandoned fields is the responsibility of the land manager.
In the **Bulgarian Rural Development Plan** 2007-2013 there is a measure to support "Semi-Subsistence Farms Undergoing Restructuring". The aim of the measure is to restructure semi-subsistence farms into viable commercial holdings, but only for farmers who either cultivate at least two types of agricultural crop, or at least one type of agricultural crop and breed one animal species. There is no support for restoration of overgrown land.

The overly strict **hygiene requirements** (as compared to other EU member states) do not allow small- and medium-scale enterprises to sell end products, which brings about a reduced scope for direct sales in the region. So far the only option for small-scale producers is to sell milk to milk collection points, an unfair situation in which middlemen make most of the profits without providing any support or engagement with the farmers. Financial support, as well as tailored legislation for small and semi-subsistence farmers, is a precondition for the creation of markets and local brands for end products and for the revival of the livestock keeping sector.
In addition to the harsh natural conditions and the economic and policy obstacles, **social factors** further affect the overall situation:

- Emigration from rural areas and a high percentage of ageing population
- Lack of knowledge and skills: less than 5 % of the population has specialised farming education, while traditional ways of managing land were not supported for more than 50 years during the socialist era
- Unattractiveness of farm work and general lack of labour force in the rural regions
- Preference to make profits quickly and/or develop tourism

All of these factors require adequate government and regional policy as well as targeted and specific financial support aiming at conservation and restoration of HNV grasslands, which are threatened by extinction if the current rates of abandonment and land degradation are allowed to continue.

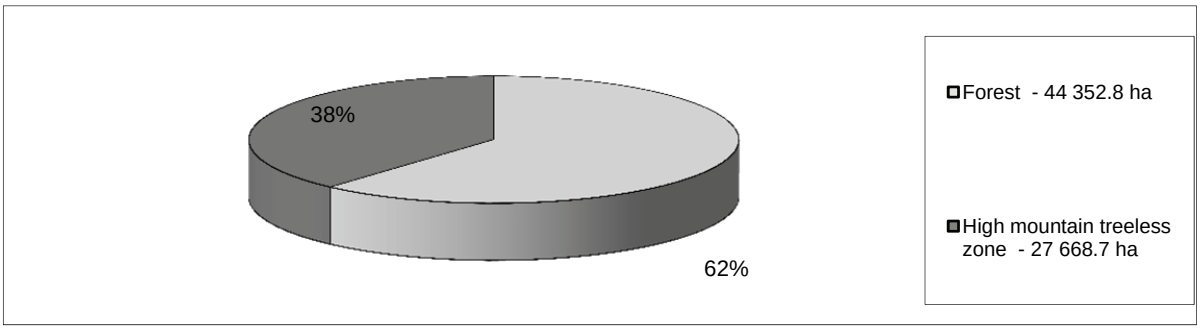
Grasslands in Central Balkans National Park (Bulgaria)

I. Overview:

The total area of the Central Balkan National Park is **72 021.07 ha**

About 62 % (44 352,5 ha) of the total park territory is woodland – mainly broad-leaved, less frequently conifers.

The remaining 38% (27 668,7 ha) is treeless area – sub-alpine and alpine belt occupied mainly by grass communities.



The following habitats of Annex 1 of Directive 92/43 EEC establishing Natura 2000 are present in the treeless area of the park:

3160 – Natural dystrophic lakes and ponds

4060 – Alpine and boreal heaths;

4070 – Bushes with *Pinus mugo*;

6110 - Rupicolous calcareous or basophilic grasslands of the *Alysso-Sedion albi*;

6150 – Siliceous alpine and boreal grasslands;

6170 – Alpine and subalpine calcareous grasslands;

6230 – Species-rich *Nardus* grassland, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas;

62D0 – Oro-Moesian acidophilous grasslands; 6520 – mountain hay meadows and others.[1]

During the first phases of the TRINET project, a detailed mapping of the habitats is being carried out by the Central Balkans National Park (CBNP). A specialist from the Bulgarian Academy of Science, Institute of Botany, will do a preliminary evaluation of the status of the grassland formations and communities. A GIS layer will be constructed.

[1] Map of habitats of Central Balkan NP

II. Uses in the past:

Widespread herbaceous semi-natural habitats and the biodiversity which they contain, are the result of long-practiced extensive grazing and depend on traditional pastoral systems, such as seasonal grazing with changing altitude according the season (transhumance). On the Balkan Peninsula many pastoral families have moved along with their flocks, traditionally spending the summer in the mountains and winter in the coastal lowlands, migrating hundreds of miles with their animals. On the ridges of the Central Balkan Mountains, the territory of today's park, around 120 000 sheep, 12 000 - 15 000 cattle and about 2500 - 3000 horses used to graze annually .

During this period the territory was held "open, clean" through the initial clearing and burning down of the shrub communities of the juniper. Subsequently, this condition was maintained by the grazing flocks. At the beginning of the communist period in 1945 migration grazing was entirely lost to Bulgaria. Livestock became settled and situations of overgrazing and undergrazing occurred. After communism, the situation is even worse. Without measures for their conservation, the (semi-) natural grasslands will lose their natural value.[2]

III. Current use:

Currently the treeless area is defined as large pasture regions, each consisting of several pastures[3]. The total effective area used for grazing is about 13 000 ha. In the adopted National Park plan the following norms for the grazing intensity in different pastures and functional areas of the park are given. In the multi-functional zone: for cattle and horses - min 1 ha / capita; sheep - min 0,25 ha / capita; in the zone of limited human impact: cattle and horses - min 0,8 ha / capita; sheep - min 0,4 ha / capita.

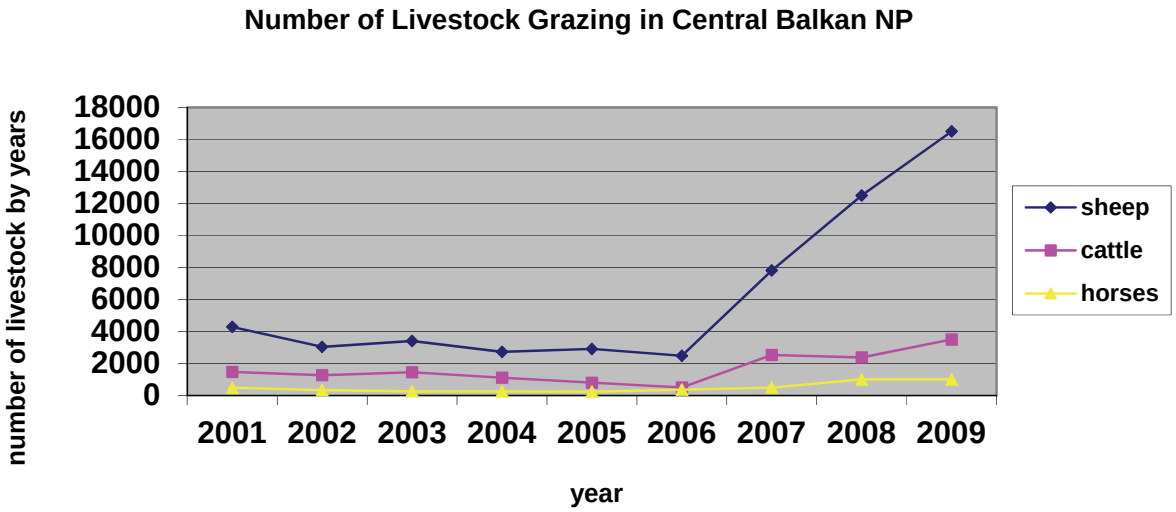
Each year, under the Protected Areas Act, CBNPD prepares an annual plan for the use of high mountain pastures. Applicants (owners of animals, shepherds, farmers) make written submissions to whichever park branch

[2] Velenturf, Anne, Bachelor Thesis on Wildlife Management, **Transhumance Revival in Bulgaria,** Leeuwarden, January 2009

[3] Map of pasture regions with indicated areas for conservation of flora and fauna species.

office is nearest to their place of residence about the number and type of animal they want to graze in the park. With the application, farmers sign a declaration that they will comply with the norms and rules as these are set out in the management plan of the protected area, the conditions for maintaining grassland and pasture areas in good condition in the CBNP and the rules for fire safety. Applications are considered by a committee, which provides, in its meeting minutes, the proposals to the Park Director to authorize or prohibit grazing by the candidate.

Information on the number, type and location of grazing stock began to be recorded in 2001:



	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Sheep	4286	3033	3406	2725	2910	2480	7817	12 500	16 500
Cattle	1476	1270	1454	1115	799	500	2532	2380	3 500
Horse	475	335	257	252	238	365	493	1000	1000

As part of the first phases of the TRINET project, the CBNP is elaborating a survey of the influence of livestock grazing on the natural habitats. It is analysing the use of the pastures in the period 1999 – 2009.

IV. Key Issues:

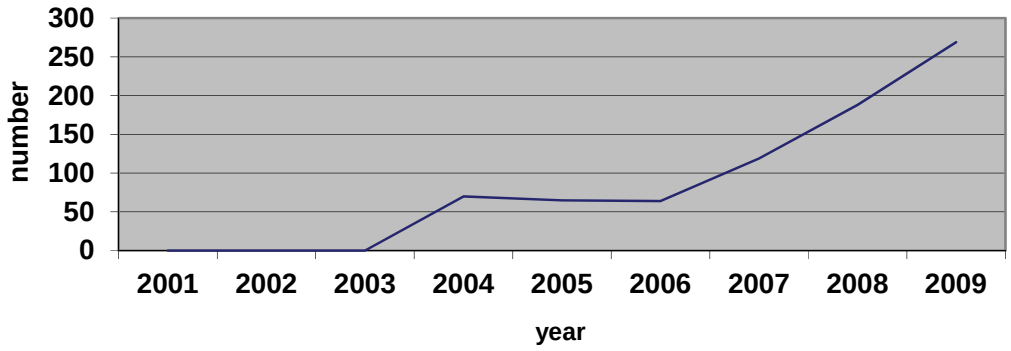
1. Current situation: Unclear ownership of infrastructure for livestock in the park: huts, shelters, animal pens are in very poor and dilapidated state. Due to this unclear ownership situation, the park as a state institution is unable to take steps and procedures for constructing new infrastructure of good form, fitting in the landscape and tradition, or for restoring the existing old infrastructure. Many of these existing structures are used the way they are, as shepherds live primitively, although some of the herdsmen carry out minimal improvements themselves. There are about 50-60 such sites - dilapidated and tumbled down - used by shepherds. Shepherds produce, for their own family needs, milk and cheese which have excellent gustatory qualities and are a desired product. Conclusion: there is consumer demand and potentially the shepherds could earn money from selling it, which would make grazing the treeless pastures more attractive.
2. However, the production takes place in improvised containers and dairies, where hygiene is not meeting the standards of the EU. On the other hand, these are very small dairies, which face a financial and capacity impossibility to comply with the high hygiene requirements set by the Bulgarian relevant legislation (harmonized with that of the EU) targeted at large, extensive and industrial producers of dairy products. There is a need to revise the concrete hygiene norms, especially for small-scale producers of dairy products. In particular

mountain dairies– thus enabling a sustainable trend in the long-term development of the sector. Also, there is a need to establish a clear and fixed definition, description and technical parameters on what a high mountain dairy should be. In other words, if the hygiene issue could be solved and definitions of high mountain dairy established (so that it is possible to make quality labels of origin and protect the high mountain dairies against dishonest competitors), there would be a favourable opportunity to make a commercially successful sale of products from the treeless pasture.

3. Free-grazing animals - some of the farmers leave their livestock in a pasture without a shepherd or herdsman. On the one hand these animals sometimes become victims of predators, on the other hand, uncontrolled cattle enter the reserves and/or pastures which are used by other farmers. Horses have traditionally been left free to move around the territory of the park.

4. After the start of the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 (PDRD) in Bulgaria, the number of applications and, consequently, the pressure on the use of pastures increased:

Number of Applications for Grazing Submitted to CBNP



	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Number of applications	to be added	to be added	to be added	70	65	64	119	188	269

5. When the measures under the Rural Development Programme 2007 – 2013 in Bulgaria were launched, there was a request by the controlling body at the Ministry of Agriculture and Food to carry out, jointly with the CBNP Directorate, field verifications on whether the requirements were being kept. Last year such joint inspections were not carried out. Instead, at the end of the year the Park Directorate provided to the Ministry of Agriculture and Food information on its own checks.

Of the measures from the Rural Development Programme (PDRD) which can be used by the farmers in the treeless pasture, the pilot submeasure 'Transhumance' is of particular interest:

LB 2: Traditional Shepherd Systems (Mountain Pastoralism)

Environmental objectives:

• To support traditional patterns of seasonal grazing of high-nature value natural and seminatural pastures in specified mountain regions using national breeds and methods;

• To apply grazing as a tool for the conservation and maintenance of habitats and species in the high mountains;

• To promote the use of traditional breeds which are capable of grazing in the harsh mountain conditions;

• To promote the use of Karakachan dogs as an efficient and environmentally-friendly method of protecting domestic livestock from attack by large carnivores (wolves, bears, jackals and lynxes);

• To enhance biodiversity in the pastures in specified mountain regions.

Geographical Scope: Pirin and Central Balkan National Parks will be the first pilot areas.

IV. Positive Developments:

1. A favourable side of the implementation of the pilot sub-measure "Transhumance" (part of Measure 214 - agri-environment in the RDP) is that shepherds during the year 2008 observed the procedures and norms of the protected area more closely.
2. Interested young farmers have been identified who want to work to develop sustainable farming.

V. Tasks to be undertaken

As part of the process of updating the current park management plan 2001-2010:

The status of several model areas delineated by the CBNP Directorate which are part of the grassland areas as defined in the Park's management plan 2001 - 2010, will be examined, including:

- Comparison of data from a study of the Bulgarian-Swiss Biodiversity Conservation Programme with the current status of habitats;
- Analysis of the density of domestic animals and the extent to which a favourable status of habitats has been reached. Recommendations to be elaborated for updating the standards for the loading of grassland areas to achieve and maintain favourable status of the habitats. If necessary, different standards of carrying capacity for different types of habitats will be recommended;
- Estimated violations in recent years (type, number of hot spots) associated with the use of treeless areas, will be compiled.

In the new Park management plan 2011-2020:

Standards will be developed for grazing domestic animals, according to a provisional unit / rate equation of the density (number) of animals per unit of pasture area - livestock unit (LU);

The description of grassland areas and their appropriate maintenance activity will be updated / revised, providing the types and number of animals, according to conservation objectives.

Under the TRINET project, the emphasis is on stakeholders. As part of the first, preparatory, phases of the TRINET project, the CBNP Directorate has prepared a questionnaire for farmers, shepherds, etc, asking them about their grazing activities, the produce they make, their opinion of the Park, how they compare the past situation with the current situation, their wishes and expectations for the future, etc. This questionnaire is distributed among the park rangers, who will do the interviews with the stakeholders.

The replies to the questionnaire will play a key role in the next phases – information campaigns towards stakeholders, preparation of concrete grazing-related projects.

Grasslands in Estonia

The main types of semi-natural grasslands in Estonia include wooded meadows, wooded pastures, open dry meadows, alvars, alluvial meadows, and coastal meadows.

Up to the middle of the 20th century, grass fodder was mainly obtained from semi-natural grasslands. According to the data of the agricultural census of 1939, cultivated grasslands made up only 3,4% of the whole grassland area. In addition to their high aesthetic value, the semi-natural habitats of Estonia have one of the most diverse flora and fauna in the world, compared to other regions north of the 57th parallel. The transition to large-scale production, discarding of traditional management methods, and leaving the lands with lower productivity out of use has significantly decreased the total area of semi-natural habitats in Estonia during the last half a century.

Considering the high conservation importance of semi-natural grasslands, it is surprising that the knowledge of their distribution or condition in Estonia is not sufficient. The most recent inventory of Estonian grasslands was carried out in the early 1980s. During the past decade, several inventories have been made in order to improve knowledge about the situation of the Estonian semi-natural grasslands. The results of most of these inventories have been used to compile a GIS-based database of semi-natural communities (compiled by the Estonian Semi-natural Communities Conservation Association). Another extensive database was compiled by the Ministry of the Environment during the process of selecting habitats for the Natura 2000 network.

However, the estimated area of **wooded meadows** in Estonia is up to 8000 ha, of which about 1500 ha are mowed at present. Due to the complexity of wooded meadows (abundance of different species, presence of bird nests etc.) the importance of working manually when it comes to mowing and other activities is significant in order to maintain their favourable status. Currently there are about 22 000 ha of **alvars** left in Estonia. There are possibly 15 000ha of maintained **coastal meadows** and possibly 3000 ha of **wooded pastures** in Estonia. In particular, the **wooded pastures** distribution is poorly studied. There are approximately 51 000 ha of **alluvial grasslands** and 17 500 ha **open dry meadows** in Estonia

The protection of semi-natural habitats is regulated by several conventions – Estonia has joined the Biodiversity Convention, the Bern Convention and the Ramsar Convention and is about to join the Bonn Convention and the related AEWA Agreement. Natura 2000 areas (pSCIs and SPAs) are protected areas of European significance.
For alvars in particular, protection levels may not be sufficient in practice.

Concerning current trends, some of the larger types of grassland – the coastal meadows and alluvial grasslands - are stable or even slightly increasing. Alvars are stable or decreasing slightly and wooded meadows are decreasing. At least some thousands of hectares have been destroyed (by draining) and even more are abandoned.....

The supporting system

The maintenance of semi-natural habitats is supported by the Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board (EARIB). The objective of the support for their maintenance is to ensure the favourable conservation status of the semi-natural habitats located in Natura 2000 areas. Outside of Natura 2000 areas there are several other EARIB supports which fund the maintenance of grasslands, including semi-natural grasslands. At a small scale, the Ministry of the Environment also supports the maintenance of semi-natural grasslands located outside of Natura 2000.

The EARIB support for the maintenance of semi-natural habitats is available for farmers (natural and legal persons, civil law partnerships and other associations of persons without the status of a legal person) and other land managers. Thus NGOs can obtain EARIB support and they are in fact quite typical applicants. Municipalities can ask the EARIB support as well, but in practice they do not appear to be applying for it. .

Support requirements

No	Baseline requirement (support will be paid for requirements going beyond the baseline requirements)	Additional requirement for the support for the maintenance of semi-natural habitats
1	Damaging semi-natural habitats (i.e. destruction of vegetation (turf), fertilization, use of plant protection products, soil cultivation, afforestation, mining of natural resources, construction or development of facilities (incl. ponds or other water bodies) without a permit and the establishment of land improvement systems) is prohibited.	1) the semi-natural habitat must be mowed at least once before 1 October, using the methods of from-centre-to-rim or from edge-to-edge, or must be grazed. Mowing is allowed from 10 July if not foreseen otherwise in the protection rules, in the management plan, in the species action plan or in the regulation. If an earliest grazing date has been indicated in the protection rules, in the management plan or in the species action plan, the animals may be grazed starting from the date mentioned in the protection rules or plan. Animals can be grazed on wooded meadows only when the wooded meadow has been mowed and the mowed grass has been removed. By 1 October or the date mentioned in the protection rules, in the management plan or in the species action plan, the mowed grass must be removed, and by 1 May in the year following the application for support the mowed grass must be taken away. 2) vegetation chopping/mulching on the semi-natural habitat is allowed only with the permission of a relevant agency.
2	The animal keeper has to ensure the availability of food and drinking water for his/her farm animals in the economic unit.	3) additional feeding of animals is forbidden in the semi-natural habitat.
3	The destruction or spoiling of any single natural protected objects referred to in Art. 4(1) of the Nature Conservation Act is prohibited.	4) the applicant must include, in the map of the reference parcels, any valuable landscape elements established additionally by the legislation. These valuable landscape elements must not be damaged or removed during the commitment period.

In order to receive the support, the applicant must participate in training about the maintenance of semi-natural habitats. The training is arrange by EB. This training is 100 % theoretical and last 6 hours. EB uses its own specialists as teachers or invites outside experts as well.
The Environmental Board issues to the applicant detailed guidelines for the maintenance of semi-natural habitats, where, in addition to requirements arising from the legislation, individual suggestions concerning the maintenance of specific areas are described (i.e. area-specific number of animals per hectare, mowing dates etc.).

The support rate for the maintenance of a wooded meadow is 238,07 EUR (3725 EEK) per hectare annually, the support rate for the maintenance of all the other habitats is 185,98 EUR (2910 EEK) per hectare annually.

This support may be applied to any semi-natural habitat entered in the environmental register, providing it is located in a Natura 2000 area approved by Government Order. Areas partly covered with trees and shrubs or areas with traditional landscape elements such as stone walls, temporarily flooded areas, traditional wooden hay barns and animal shelters, are regarded as a part of the eligible area, if the existence of trees and shrubs or landscape elements is related to traditional agricultural activity or environmental objectives.
Support cannot be applied to land for which other area-based supports are being applied or have been applied for.

Grasslands in Finland

1. History of meadows and grasslands in Finland

During the period of more sustainable traditional agriculture, livestock farming was based on the exploitation of grasslands and wooded traditional rural biotopes. The centuries of repeating a regime of mowing, grazing, coppicing and aftermath grazing had created the unique biodiversity to rural areas of Finland. Some of the habitats were occasionally cleared, burned or flooded. Many species had adjusted to the managed regime and even benefited from it.

In the early 19th century animals in Finland were kept mainly for the sake of their pulling power and to produce manure; meat and milk production were still secondary reasons. In the late 19th century the total area of meadows in southern Finland was much larger than the total area of arable land. A popular saying was "a meadow is the mother of a field". The manure from grazing animals was namely taken to cultivated fields to fertilize them. Thus the direction of nutrient flow was from the meadows to the fields. This system included the mowing of winter hay which was stored in hay barns and fed to animals during wintertime.

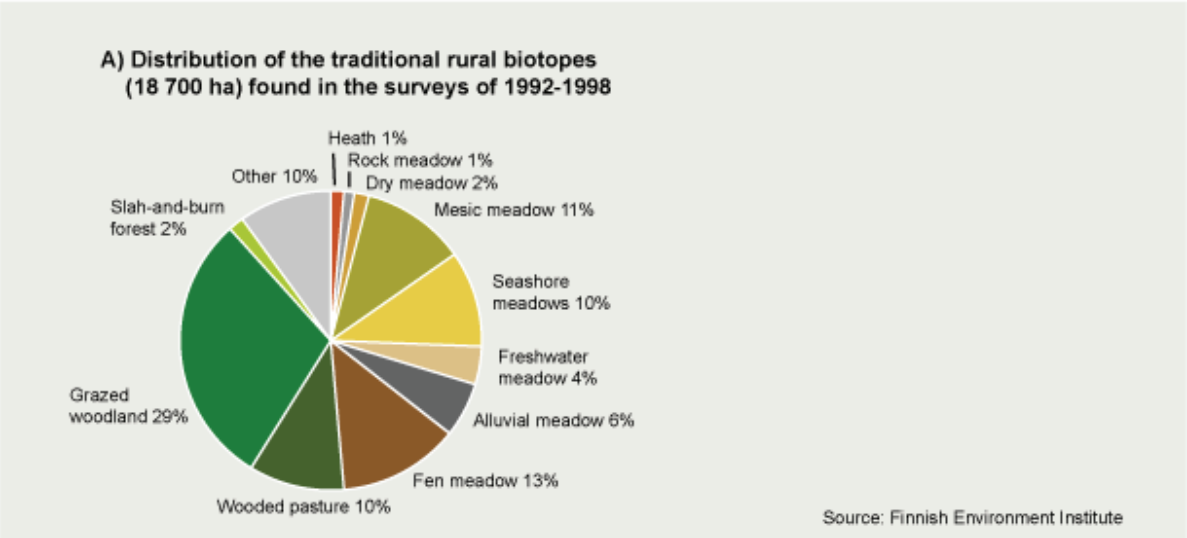
This regime was first interrupted by artificial fertilisers and changes to production systems during the late 19th century, in the peripheral regions a bit later. Flatland meadows were mainly turned into cultivated fields, wherever the topography would just allow it. The acreage of traditional rural biotopes continued decreasing in the 20th century, mainly through the clearing of fields and the abandonment of management. Some of the remnants with high biodiversity such as dry meadows, riverside meadows, flooded meadows, wooded pastures and grazed forests were still managed after World War II but management had largely ceased before the 1980s. Eutrophication is now playing an important role in accelerating the disappearance of traditional rural biotopes: the nutrient flow is from the field and air to the meadows and other traditional biotopes, weakening the quality of habitats.

During the different eras of traditional agriculture, the landscape looked quite different from today's landscape. Many things have changed under modern agriculture: Large open landscape entities have disappeared along with fences, open ditches, meadows, wooded pastures and coppiced and pollarded trees. As the landscape has become closed, many species have disappeared. Instead there are wider uniform fields, bigger roads, cultivated forests, garden trees and bushes, more diversity in the architecture of farmhouses… Also there is a huge number of new plant species - wanted and unwanted. At the moment, about 1/3 of all threatened species in Finland have traditional rural landscapes as their primary habitat.

Agriculture is much more intensive today than it has ever been in history. Society, including farmers, is hopefully becoming more and more interested in the maintenance of grasslands and landscapes with high nature value. Recently the introduction of beef cattle grazing (coupled to the sale of "meadow meat" products), with the help of the agri-environmental support system, has increased the amount of managed biotopes and is giving hope for a bigger change.

2. Geographical location and short description of meadows and grasslands which still exist

The representative biotopes in Finland are for example rocky dry meadows, dry meadows, wooded meadows, heaths (in the Southwestern Archipelago and Ostrobothnia), sea and lake shore meadows and grazed forests. The most threatened traditional biotopes are situated in the Archipelago, namely wooded meadows with pollarded trees. The basic inventory of traditional rural landscapes was carried out during 1992-1997. In this inventory, less than 19 000 hectares of valuable traditional biotopes were identified, of which 57 % was managed in a traditional way. The state of meadows, wooded meadows, heaths and slash-and-burn fields appeared to be especially weak.



Distribution of the traditional rural biotopes. Original source: Kekäläinen et al (2001).

Look at http://www.biodiversity.fi/en/indicators/farmlands/fa7-traditional-rural-biotopes

3. Protected areas (national/international)

In Finland one third of the high-value traditional rural landscapes are included in the Natura 2000 network, which means 500 sites and 6000 hectares. The largest traditional rural landscapes in the Natura 2000 network are the shore meadows of the Southwest Archipelago and Ostrobothnia. The nationally highly valuable 1000-hectare Natura 2000 site of Rekijokilaakso river valley on the mainland must also be mentioned: many important grassland and grazing-dependent species (vascular plants, dung beetles and butterflies) find their sanctuary there. The main part of the dry to mesic and moist grasslands along the Rekijokilaakso river is managed by grazing; previously their management consisted of mowing and aftermath grazing.

4. Description of special features and highlights

The Finnish traditional rural landscapes include a huge variation from hemi-boreal and Archipelago habitats to the grazed areas of Arctic Lapland**.** Some important types for the Nordic-Baltic biogeographical region are e.g. dry to moist meadows (Natura 2000 type 6270*, 6510, 6520)**;** fens and paludified meadows (Natura 2000 type 7230); dry heaths (Natura type 4030); flooded meadows (Natura type 6450*); coastal meadows (Natura type 1630*); salt marshes and salt meadows (Natura types 1310, 1320, 1330); wooded meadows (Natura type 6530*); wooded pastures (Natura type 9070), alvars (Natura type 6280*) and calcareous meadows (Natura type 6210*). Grazed forests are not included in the Natura 2000 typology but are an important type in Finland, including some typical moss species etc.

One detailed example: Fennoscandian wooded and coppiced meadows are types where tree stands and meadows form a mosaic. Although such areas are looking like parks, they usually have a very long management history covering a time span of hundreds of years. This type has arisen because of attempts to optimize the benefits (tree material, fodder, the benefit of shading tree cover during times of drought). As a side effect, such areas are also aesthetically beautiful and include the highest biodiversity of meadows. The type is rare in Finland, but there are many representative sites on the Åland Islands and the coastal areas of Finland. Good species include, for example, *Dactylorhiza sambucina*, *Gentianella*

amarella and *Gymnadea conopsea*. The amount of vascular plant species can in the most valuable wooded meadows in Finland be over 40 species /m². In Estonia there are areas where the number of species is over 70 /m²; these Estonian areas are usually not even aftermath grazed.

Wooded pastures and grazed forests are distinguished by means of tree crown coverage, management history etc. Grazed forest must have open patches, meadow species and typical mosses. Widespread from the 18th century until the land reform of the 1920s, wooded pastures and grazed forests have lost a lot of terrain. In the Kainuu region they covered 58,000 ha in the 1950s and only 1,000 ha in the 1990s. Where they are no longer economically viable for the farmers, they have been invaded by spruce or deliberately planted as forest. Most remaining grazed woodlands are dominated by spruce (which itself is often commercially managed as a forestry tree). In the olden times spruce was not favoured in Finland because there was no food for cattle in spruce thickets!
Important from a landscape view are the grey alder-dominated pastures (originally wooded meadows which were later given to grazing) and the grazed lands on the slopes of wooded hills.

Grazing in forests and wooded pastures (and the ceasing of such management in the 20th century) has had several biodiversity effects:

- Grazing decreases the bush layer, which is beneficial for several lichens and mosses
- Dust from manure increases the amount of epiphyte lichens
- Ground layer epiphytes are benefiting from increased light circumstances (Mitchell & Kirby 1990)
- Amount of fungi is higher in wooded pastures (Andersson 1993)
- Diurnal butterflies are benefiting from mosaic structures and small meadows inside the forest compartments (Warren and Fuller 1990).
- Some deciduous trees are growing bigger in wooded pastures and have thicker branches, light- and warmth –loving species are favoured.
- Trampled animal trails are increased by grazing (Koskinen 1960), these are beneficial for some species.
- Trampling increases bare ground, which is good for tree species. But: most of the shoots are usually eaten or trampled.
- Spruce, grey alder and juniper benefit from grazing because they are not eaten by cows (Heikinheimo 1915, Palmgren 1915-1917, Linkola 1916, Multamäki 1916, Hertz 1934, Lampinmäki 1939).
- Forest grazing might have decreased deciduous trees. Cattle favour for example lime trees (Hertz 1926, Nilsson 1997).
- In oak areas in Sweden, the distribution of oaks is concentrated near villages, to areas which were previously mown. In grazed areas there are less oaks, thus the effect of grazing can be traced (Nilsson 1997, Lindbladh 1999).
- Malus sylvestis is favoured by grazing, because seeds germinate best in manure (Buttenschoen & Buttenschoen).
- Some animals are stripping bark from the trees in forests, thus giving room for fungi etc. (Lahti 1941).

Nevertheless, the biodiversity effects of grazing in forests are still somewhat unknown. In studies, the importance of old deciduous trees and decayed trees is noticed.

All groves or grove-like areas in Southwest Finland have been grazed. This has had both negative and positive effects on some species (bush layer missing, effects on oak and lime and ash etc). When grazed by cattle, the effect of trampling on tree species is usually more significant than the effect of eating, and with grazing by sheep it is vice versa.

Problems of wooded pasture and grazed forest management:

- Competition from more attractive Rural Development subsidies for growing spruce
- Low grazing pressure (sheep are used only seldom)
- Timing of grazing
- Insufficient clearing of conifers and brushwood during restoration of overgrown wooded pastures

5. Current management – expected further development

Traditional rural biotopes are mainly managed on farms "on the side", parallel to other farming practices. Since 1995 the management of traditional rural biotopes has been encouraged by means of special contracts in the agri-environmental support scheme. Agri-environment support covers grazing and mowing of valuable habitats and enhancement of landscape and species biodiversity. All actions must be based on an approved plan. In 2006 these contracts covered 24 000 hectares altogether.

In the period 2007-2013 NGO associations can also apply for the 5-year agri-environment contract to manage traditional rural landscapes and gain subsidies in nearly the same way as farmers. The possibility for similar 5-year special support agreements is included in the Leader programme as a new action for 2007-2013, but this new possibility is not yet well advertised.

In addition, both farmers and NGO associations have the possibility to apply for basic restoration support (675 €:yr). This support can cover e.g. the clearing of some overgrown wooded biotope types and the restoration of coastal meadows (crushing of reed and ground). The costs of crushing in Finland were approximately 600 €/hectare in the recently awarded Lintulahdet LIFE –project

A photo of crushing machinery can be seen in:
http://www.ruoko.fi/uploads/pdf/Ruovikon_murskaus_Lintulahdet_Life.pdf

Traditional rural biotopes are also being managed by others than active farmers. Finnish state areas administered by the Metsähallitus Natural Heritage Service include ca. 3000 hectares of traditional rural biotopes. In 2008 nearly 2 500 hectares of the 3000 were being managed or restored.

Smaller areas are also managed on a voluntary basis by societies and private individuals. According to a recent estimate (2009), the present total area of all traditional rural biotopes in Finland is 40 000 hectares (which includes also new areas identified since the surveys of 1992-97), of which ca. 30 000 hectares are under regular management. The quality of management is a big challenge though: problems with under- or overgrazing, and fertilisation of the land, are common.

6. Formulation of problems/ risk potential

In Finland it has been suggested that there should be up to 60 000 hectares of well-managed traditional rural landscapes by 2010. This goal will not be reached. We face many challenges. A big proportion of valuable landscapes are located in SW Finland, where the number of grazing cattle has diminished a lot. There are difficulties to find people who are willing to manage the sites. We would need large blocks of land to be restored and then managed in different technical ways to maintain different compositions of species. Extinction risk of species is currently high, because managed areas are in general small and scattered.

The special support contracts of the agri-environmental schemes are one of the most bureaucratic contract types. This slows down farmers' interest in committing themselves to these subsidy types. At the moment the financial support level for the management of traditional rural landscapes is 450 €/ha/year,

and for the first year of basic restoration/fencing 675 €/ha. In small and laborious sites such as in wooded meadows, these levels of subsidy are inadequate.

7. Necessary measures

In the report on the results of the ex post evaluation of the Horizontal Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2000-2006 some improvements have been suggested. For example, the agri-environmental measures should be redesigned to make them more flexible and region/farm specific. The farmers should be able to choose measures which have a remarkable environmental impact potential and which are reasonable to implement. The measures could be re-designed to include more distinctive categories for ”basic compensation for environmental services” and ”special compensation for environmental services”. Political debate has started and will hopefully lead to new kinds of environmental investment supports and changes in the next programme period 2014-2021.

Needed measures in a nutshell:

- More advice to farmers about managing biotopes and landscapes
- Clearer and easier financial incentives to get subsidies to manage traditional rural landscapes
- More human resources and interdisciplinary and cross-border cooperation concentrating on the theme of traditional rural landscapes.
- New kind of planning and co-operation between farmers, NGOs and local, provincial and state organisations

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Grasslands in Hungary

The expanse and the value of the grasslands in Hungary:

Hungary is rich in grasslands, pastures and meadows, thanks to a thousand years of deforestation and grazing, but nowadays the area covered by these semi-natural grasslands is shrinking. The main reason is fragmentation and overuse. The losses started in the 1800s, when 30% of Hungary's territory was grassland, compared to the present 15%. And this quantitative figure does not reveal the qualitative intensity of the destruction of natural values such as species loss and impoverishment of once-rich associations, which is certainly even worse.

Today the total coverage is 1 056 900 ha. The decline is about 2,7% per year. Grasslands cover 13,7% of the productive area. 28% of this is managed by economically-oriented organizations like a farm company, 57% is in individual ownership and 15 % is in the hands of other organizations (national parks or partly state-owned foundations, because of special land ownership regulations).

Of the 1 056 900 ha, 164 466 ha (16%) is managed by National Parks – of which 122 356 ha (12%) is let on lease, 42 110 ha is managed by the National Parks themselves. From an economic point of view, 65% of all grasslands in the country are "useless", but from a botanic aspect these are the most interesting areas: the habitats of valuable relict and endemic species. (however, these areas could be used for extensive farming methods.)

Management from the Middle Ages up to the present

The degree of deforestation increased in the early Middle Age. Timber was needed to build a house, to make a wooden chair and – of course – for firewood. The last big tree clearance on the Alföld (Hungarian Plain) happened during the Turkish era: long wars and livestock-keeping made the puszta stable by preventing the trees growing back, as earlier the area had been covered with wood patches.

In the past century the fragmentation of loess steppes was completed. After river regulation and drainage, salt started to accumulate in the soil and salinization accelerated.

Until the turn of the 1800s to the 1900s, self-sufficient farmers worked in traditional farms following traditional land use patterns. The main points were: low intensity usage and the diverse treatment of the grasslands.

In the 20th century intensive, large-scale. monocultural farming became widespread. The number of agricultural machines was low, agricultural work was mainly done by animals which needed forage. Farmers started to use chemical fertilizers. A big change happened to the composition of species and also in the structure of the associations. Today we consider these areas as natural grasslands for the reason that these areas still show the potential vegetation and this kind of farming did not completely destroy the landscape.

After the changes in the political and economic structures at the end of the 1980s, unemployment and social decline spread rapidly in rural areas of Hungary. The system of cooperatives broke up, with a dramatic decline in the number of livestock - especially the number of grazing animals kept extensively fell, so that huge areas of pasture became abandoned and degraded. The results are multifaceted: amongst others social tensions, unemployment, young people fleeing to urban areas, and of course striking nature conservation problems such as the disappearance of several plant and animal species closely connected to these human-formed landscapes.

Nowadays the most widely spread farming method is intensive farming. Manure spreading, mowing with inappropriate kinds of machinery and methods (such as mowing with high speed or from the edges to the centre, closing the escape routes of animals) or not at the right time (during the night or in the breeding season of birds

nesting in the grassland), and overgrazing are typical. Feeding of livestock is based on forage as opposed to grazing. The effects are serious: brutal changes in the composition of species, decline and extinction.

The result of short-term and not strategic rural development measures is a distorted and unbalanced economy, heavily dependent on external sources, capital and markets. After Hungary's accession to the European Union rural development policies became too centralized; the principles of local decision-making and subsidiarity were not put into practice, so that the financial resources from the EU have not been wisely used for sustainability. On the contrary, they further strengthened large landowners – small farmers are clearly disfavoured by the current system of agri-environment schemes, partly due to disproportionately high bureaucratic burdens, partly because of the pressure towards larger land holdings by giving too much support to heavy machinery and other factors. The price of land is continuously increasing, although it is still far from the prices of Hungary's Western neighbours. Nevertheless all large land-owners who can afford it are still buying up any land they can put their hands on, foreseeing even higher prices in the near future. Further increase of land prices is a very realistic expectation, especially when the moratorium on foreign land ownership is ended (at the moment only Hungarian citizens, the state and government agencies can own land). With higher land prices, newly starting, but financially not strong enterprises, like a family farm will have practically no chance to survive, which would mean that the current ownership structure would be "set in concrete" - this scenario is an absolute contra-indication for the preservation of high-nature value grasslands.

Prevailing policies do not recognize or support sufficiently the idea that the needs of nature conservation - that is the preservation of high-value grassland and other habitats – go hand in hand with economic development and social betterment. The degradation of the grasslands is directly related to the change of living patterns, the disappearance of traditional and sustainable livelihoods (in the case of grasslands this primarily means keeping grazing animals) and the lack of employment opportunities. So the aim of rural development policies should be to (re)establish traditional land-use, create employment adapted to local circumstances and respecting the carrying capacity of the given area. Programmes building on local resources – including human and natural resources, such as inherent culture and tradition – could revive the rural economy, would increase and diversify the sources of income for the local community and consequently would contribute to the sustainable development of rural areas.

<u>Damaging factors</u>

- The result of the inappropriate use is the fragmentation and degradation of grasslands all over the country. On many farms further use of grasslands is impossible, because the number of 'worthless and harmful species' is too high.
- Farmlands are usually used for only one purpose and managed in only way. Therefore one population of plant species declines faster than another. Within a few years the fields grow poor.
- Fragmentation of grasslands, afforestation, fruit tree plantation, or flooding the meadows entails the devastation of the habitat. The remaining grasslands are isolated, and natural gene transport between them ended. This has happened with the loess steppes. Artificial plantations endanger sand steppes and rocky grasslands as well: the newly-planted trees are usually non-indigenous or often even invasive species. Furthermore they exterminate the original vegetation, and often spread out to other natural vegetations.
- River regulations and decreasing rainfall led to a drop in groundwater levels. As a result, the drying of the surface is still in progress, dominancy is changing in the associations. The solution could be a regional rise in water level, with an overall wise management of the available water resources, including the technique of having flood waters slowly expand over so-called 'retention areas' which are areas of land which are allowed to be flooded; the water stands there and slowly drains away, instead of fast drainage.
- Inappropriate use of manure led to a decline in the number of species, pollution in groundwater, and also influenced surface waters.

- Mowing is an important part of management. Without this, shrubs and trees conquer the landscape. Mowing is a good instrument against invasive plant species as well.

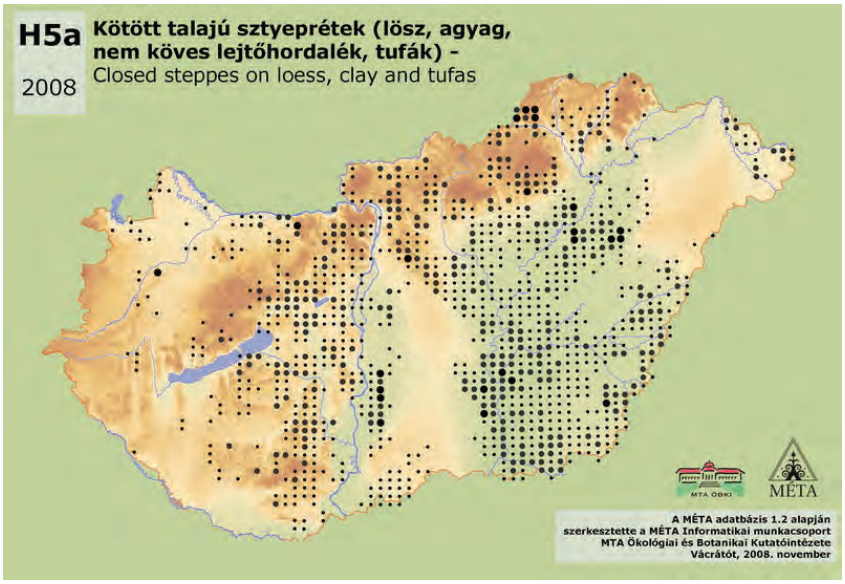
Types of grassland in Hungary

1) *Dry meadows*
a) loess steppes: natural occurrence is very rare and mostly secondary. From an agricultural point of view these places are worthless. These grasslands have reached full coverage with a more or less stable species composition, rich in species. Dominant species: Salvia austriaca, S. pratensis, Agropyron hispidus, Vinca herbacea.

b) more frequent is the degraded form: loess grazing fields with weed-type species and weeds, such as: Festuca pseudovina, Gallium verum, Cirsium sp, Carduus sp.

c) from the 20th century grazing declined (or totally disappeared), and the regular management of the meadows has ended. The result is that the steppes became shrubs, because frequent disturbing factors, such as burning, grazing, treading, etc have disappeared. Crataegus sp, Prunus spinosa, Pyrus sp are the main species.

Grazing with sheep can be useful against the development of shrubs. Cattle and geese are dangerous in this case, because the steppes are sensitive to overgrazing or an overcharge of organic matter (manure). Machine mowing is not possible. Manual mowing is suggested twice a year.



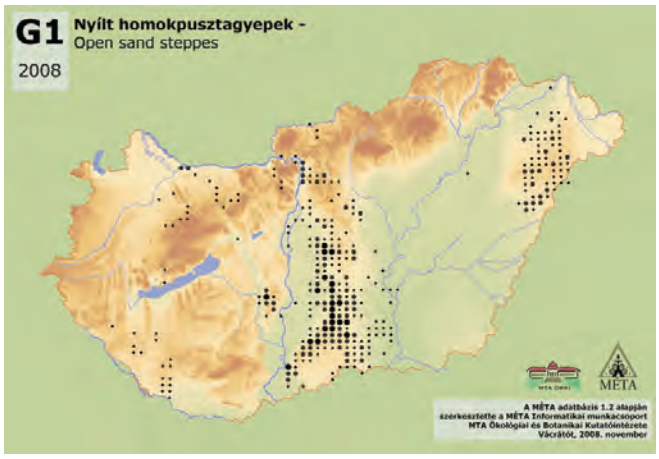
2) *Sand steppes*
Mainly in the Hungarian Plain (Alföld, Mezőföld, Nyírség, Kiskunság)
During and after the Turkish period, in the 16-17th century loose sand was being moved about (the exposure of the surface sand by removing plant cover allowed the wind to begin blowing sand about, creating wandering dunes and deserts of loose sand) because of deforestation and grazing. In the 19th-20th century this shifting sand was stopped by tree planting to increase the area suitable for agricultural cultivation. Unfortunately new, not indigenous plant species were introduced: Robinia pseudo-acacia, Pinis silvestris, P nigra. In some of the planted areas, indigenous trees could have been planted, but for economic reasons, the alien species were

chosen. The original grasslands were destroyed and the trees started to expand towards the natural vegetation as well. After this, natural associations became rare, but those which are still existing, are unique and truly valuable. The most beautiful dry sand grasslands are in Kiskunsági National Park.
The surface of the sand is very dry and this causes a strong abiotic stress. Those plants which can survive these conditions are rare, endemic species.

a) open sand steppes. Species of these areas typically prefer dryness and warmth, eg. Festuca vaginata, Colchicum arenarium. Mainly in Kiskunság.

b) wetlands which are drying up: these are closed sand steppes on the humid sand surfaces between the river Tisza and Duna. Here we can also find steppe species: Poa augustifolia, Imola sadleriana.

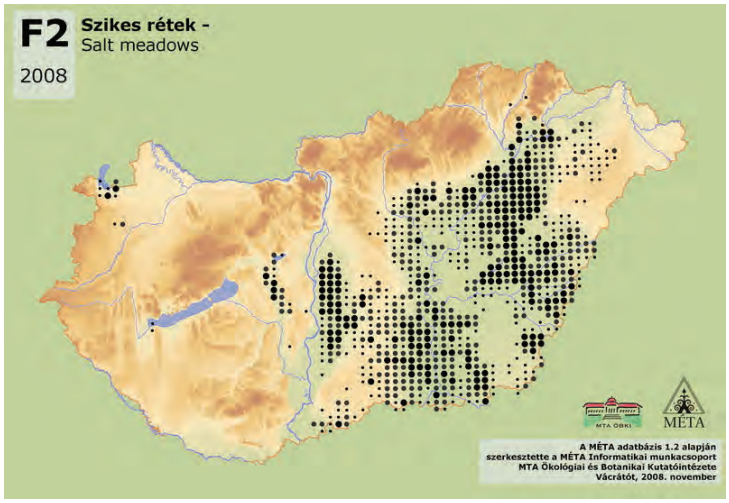
c) The degraded form of the sand steppes which is mostly weedy, species-poor. Typical plants are Bromus tectorium, Conyza canadensis.



River regulations, channeling and the reduction of rainfall generate a decline in the level of groundwater. This is a serious problem for flora and fauna as well, because all of the Pannonic grassland habitats (even the dry steppes) are characterized by the temporary presence of lakes and wetlands. To stop this process, a regional rise in water levels would be necessary, associated with the optimal use of available hydrological resources.

Optimal grazing helps to keep surfaces continuously open and maintain their diversity. Mainly grazing with sheep is advantageous. Numbers of cattle should be cautiously calculated and their grazing allowed just in certain patches. Mowing is useful once a year (in a rainy year twice).

3) *Salt meadows*
30% of the Hungarian grasslands are salt meadows. These occur mainly in the Great Hungarian Plain. Primary, original meadows are small and rare (just in some parts of Hortobágy), but they are rich in endemic species. The majority of these grasslands is a secondary development after the drainage and the river regulations in loess or sand areas (19-20th century). They are unique values for Hungary: the largest salt meadows in Europe can be found in Hungary. This habitat is stressed by several factors (including direct or non-point source pollution, such as artificial fertilizers and other chemical substances from precipitation, ground water or air pollution, not to mention direct interventions like road constructions or other “development projects”), and only a few species are able to adapt to it in the Carpathian basin. Regeneration is fast: the dominant species tolerate salt and disturbance well.



Associations, distinguished by their level of dryness:

Dry: secondary; truly salt tolerant species are missing. When there is more salt, and less humus, Plantago schwarzenbergiana, Trifolium angulatum, Aster tripolium ssp pannonicum appear.

Wet: high groundwater level round the year. In spring these areas are covered by water. E.g. Alopecurus pratensis, Eragrostis sp

To preserve the habitat, grazing is quite important - by the appropriate number and breeds of animals! Overgrazing leads to the hardening of the soil and the degradation of the pasture. Mowing machines can be used only when the soil is dry. Wet soil hardens easily and its structure is then damaged.

4) *Xeromesophile treeless vegetation types*
Secondary habitat, which has been formed by anthropogenic effects. Previously these areas had been pastures and meadows. Today livestock-keeping declines, technologies change and woods and shrubs become predominant.

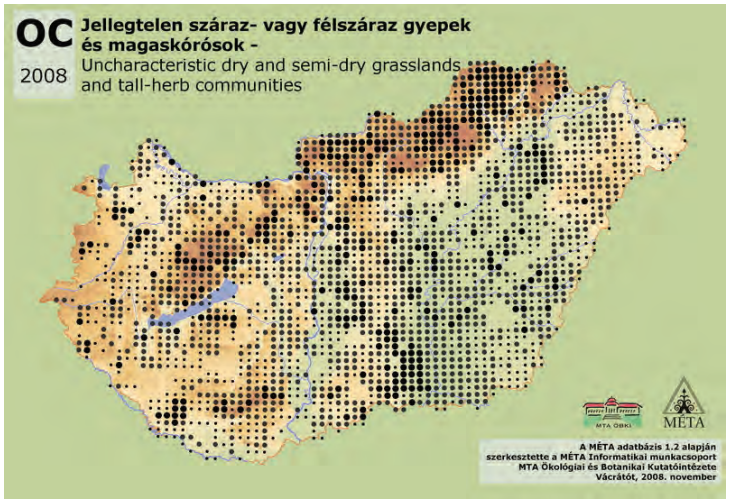
a) Nardus meadows: mountain dry grasses in higher mountains especially in the oak-zone.

b) Calluna-fields: in the beech-oak zone if the weather is rainy enough. Some rare species: Lycopodium clavatum, Vaccinum myrtillus, V. vitis.idaea.

c) half-dry meadows: on mountainous, hilly and flat landscapes. The number of species is high.

d) half-dry pastures: on the edges and in the clearings of the forest. Main grasses are: Bromus erectus, Brachipodium pinnatum, Doronicum hungaricum, Dictamnus albus, Polygata major.

Grazing, mowing and cutting the shrubs is recommended against succession to forest. In the half-dry types, invasive species can proliferate. Their spreading can be best stopped by regular mowing at least once a year (in rainy years twice). Rotation in the pasture is very important.



5) *Rocky and slope steppes*
In the middle high mountains the steep, rocky mountainsides are often treeless and bare. Thick soil can not develop here, because of water erosion. The southern sides of the slopes are extremely dry, which is a selective factor for the plants. In this habitat, relict and endemic species are frequent.
Main types can be divided by the host rock:

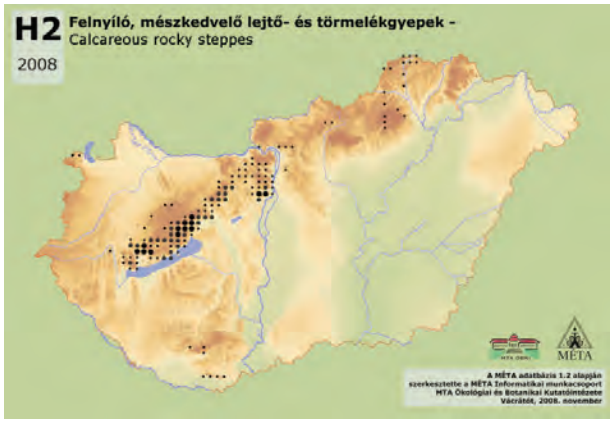
1) dolomite steppes easily degrade. The rocks crumble due to temperature changes or other conditions, so the surface is exposed to wind and rain, causing soil erosion. Some endemic species: Vincetoxicum pannonicum, Linum dolomiticum, Paronychia Cephalotes, Seseli leucospermum which are relict and endemic species at the same time.

2) chalk steppes can be easily overgrown by trees. Species: Sesleria heufleriana, Sesleria heufleirana ssp hungarica, Sesleria albicans, Poa pannonica.

3) on grit steppes acid-tolerant species are typical. Endemic and relict plants are rare: Pos pannonica, Minuartia frutescens, Sempervirum marmoreum.

4) silicate steppes: Melica ciliata,Festuca pseudodalmatica, Potentilla arenaria.

The most important threatening intervention is the plantation of non-indigenous trees (mostly Pinus nigra). Instead, indigenous species are suggested.(Quercus pubescens) – or nothing at all. Quarries and motocross riders are also serious problems.

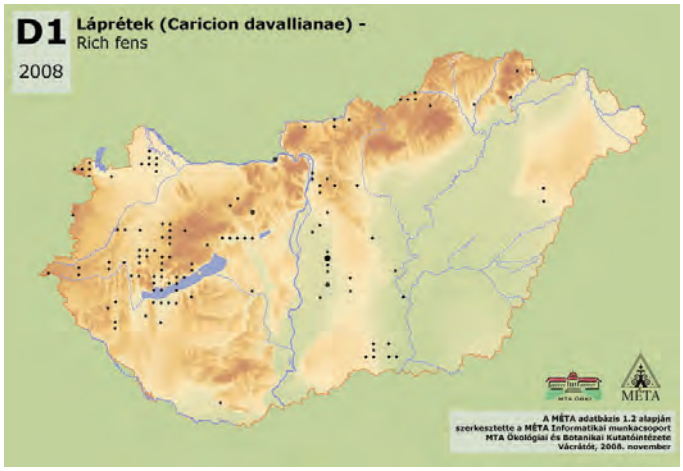


6) *Rich fens*

Alkaline, treeless fens whose centres of distribution are in the mountains and hills in Central Europe, however its associations occur from plains to high mountains. They originate from peaty fens after these filled up with soil. Their soil contains peat, which is filled with minerals (mainly calcium) and nutrients (calcium, phosphorus and nitrogen). The association's composition is very species-rich.

The wet fens are generally widespread in plains and hills where the groundwater is not too deep and where at the beginning of the vegetation period the water covers the surface.

Main species are: Carex davalliana, Juncus subnodulosus, Sesleria uliginosa, Dactylorhiza incarnata. Some relictums: Primula farinosa, Pinguicula vulgaris.



7) *Tall herb communities*

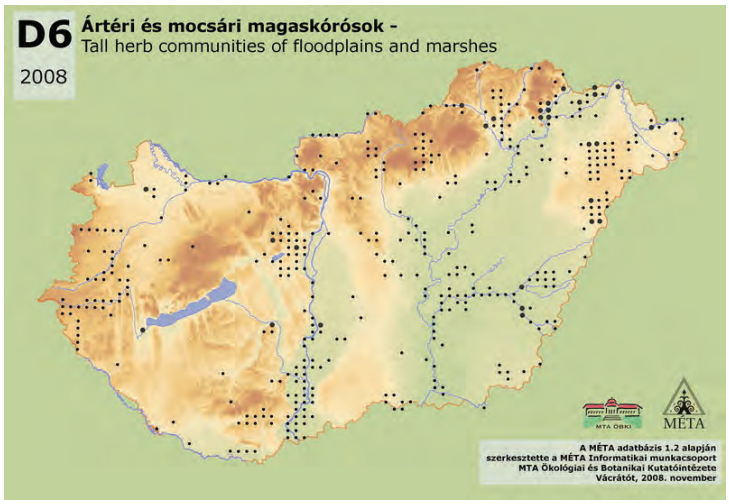
These associations occur on deforested areas of the forest belts, on mowed meadows and on floodplains. The composition of species slowly changes, usually along the slopes and following the groundwater level.

Besides the original species indicating natural conditions, there are many weeds, adapted to disturbance and grazing.

Typical species are: Alopecurus pratensis, Bellis perennis, Dactylis glomerata, Ranunculus acris, etc.

To stabilize the state of these habitats, the best way is traditional (manual) mowing, which doesn't compress the soil, and enables generative reproduction of the plants. Among the stronger disturbances such as grazing, manure-spreading, treading and sowing with different grass seeds, rational grazing is the least damaging. Horses and cattle are less harmful than sheep and goats. However grazing disturbs the nutrient-balance in the pasture, lessening diversity.

The most important for these communities is wet, undisturbed and clean surroundings, with mowing as management. Manure-spreading, grazing etc. all lead to degradation.

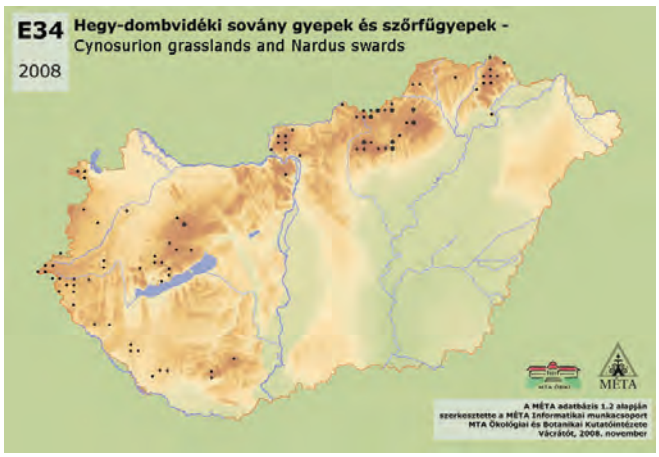


8) *Nardus meadows*

These grasslands usually like acid-humid soil, which is poor in nutrients and mostly wet. The centre of their distribution is Atlantic and Subatlantic Europe: north, north-west plains and medium- high mountains, the Alps.

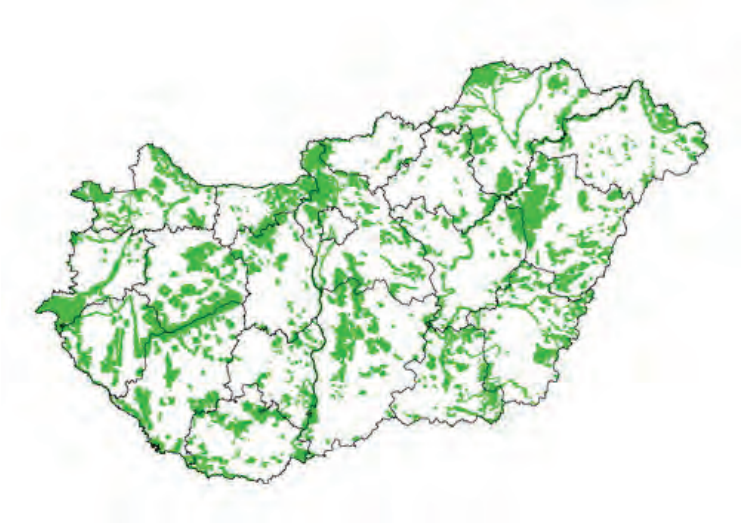
The associations are poor in species: Nardus stricta, Carex pallescens, Galium pumilum, Hypericum maculatum, Bithrychium lunaria.

Pastures in the mountains can be transformed into Nardus swards as the result of grazing. The main cause is that the phosphorus disappears from the soil because it is taken up into the bones of the animals and it doesn't circulate in the system any more. Besides this, part of the nitrogen can get into the soil again through the faeces of grazing animals, favouring the high representation of weeds.

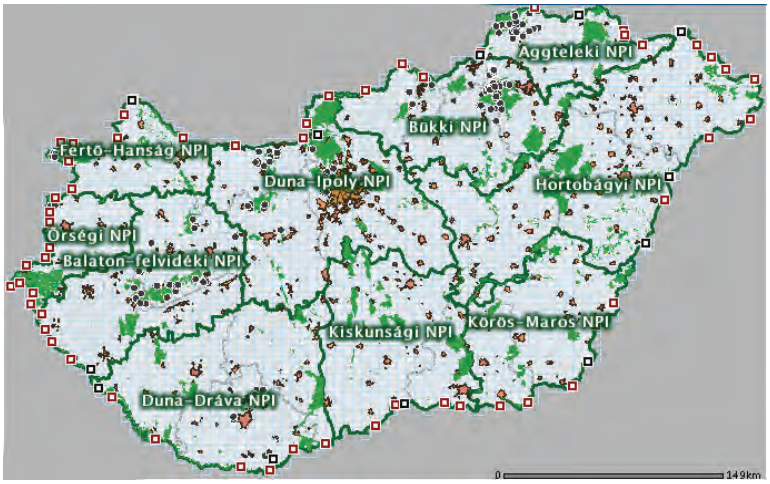


Natura 2000

21% of Hungary is under Natura 2000 protection. The map shows Natura 2000 areas in Hungary.



The picture below shows the 10 National Parks and the nature reserve areas.



Practical implementation of relevant legislation (Act on Nature Conservation, Act on Forestry, Act on Land Use and Land Ownership, Habitat and Birds Directive) unfortunately does not provide sufficient protection to these protected areas. This is partly due to unclear authority competences, partly to the lack of strong and dedicated nature conservation professionals, who in the case of conflicts between natural values and economic interests would take a firm position. Unfortunately EU complaint processes as well as national jurisdiction take a long long time, so there have been only a few precedents of legal verdicts condemning harmful investments or clearly favouring the interests of Natura 2000 sites.

Grasslands in Latvia

Latvia occupies a territory of 64 589 km², of which the inland waters take up 2543 km² and dry land 62 046 km², including agricultural land (24 710 km²) and forest (29 503 km²).

According to the land balance data of the Republic of Latvia as of 1 January 2006, the area of agricultural land was 2.47 million ha or 38.5% of the total area, of which arable land took up 1.8 million ha or 72.9%, orchards 29 thousand ha or 1.2%, meadows 226 thousand ha or 9.2% and pastures 410 thousand ha or 16.7% (Figure 1.) (In 2005 the arable land was 2% more than in 2006, but at the same time the pasture was 2% less). The total area of drained agricultural land is 1.6 million ha.[4]

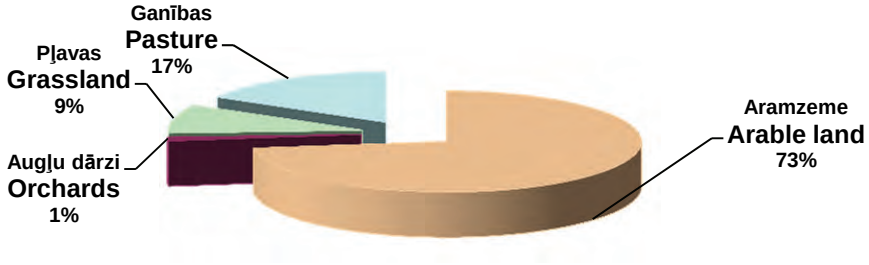


Fig. 1. *Agricultural lands by type of land use as at 1 January 2006*

1. High-nature value grassland types

Identification of high-nature value grasslands was done according to strict biological criteria. Most of the botanically valuable grasslands were selected by using a methodology based on the presence of indicator species for natural or semi-natural grasslands. Grasslands are also important breeding habitat for protected bird species - for example, Latvia holds one of the largest populations of the following protected grassland-dwelling bird species in Europe[5]: corncrake *Crex crex* (26000–38000 pairs or 24.5% of the corncrakes nesting in the European Union), white stork *Ciconia ciconia* (9500–10500 pairs or 9.2% of the European Union population of this species), lesser spotted eagle *Aquila pomarina* (2848–5180 pairs or 46.1% of the EU population), spotted crake *Porzana porzana* (500–1000 pairs or 6.3%) and great snipe *Gallinago media* (200–300 'pairs' or 8.5%).[6] Therefore, high-nature value grasslands were also identified by using ornithological criteria. This type of grassland is mainly located in existing IBAs or in natural or semi-natural grasslands with a high density of breeding populations of the aforementioned bird species (*e.g.* coastal and floodplain meadows).

The database of high-nature value grasslands maintained by the **Rural Support Service and** Latvian Fund for Nature **was used in the current analysis.**

Up to the present date, *ca.* 15 000 polygons of high-nature value grasslands were mapped during different projects. The minimum area of the plot was less than one tenth of a hectare and the maximum area was 208.30 ha. However, the mean area of high-nature value grassland polygons was 4.15 ha (+/- 9.24 ha SD) and the total area of identified high-nature value grasslands in Latvia was 63568.2 ha.

[4] Ministry of Agriculture. Rural development programme for Latvia 2007 – 2013.
[5] Council Directive 79/409/EEC
[6] Birds in Europe: Population estimates, trends and conservation status, 2004; Atlas of birds nesting in Latvia (2000-2004) Species distribution maps (cited in Rural development programme for Latvia 2007 – 2013).

The grassland habitat types can be divided into four main ecological groups reflecting soil moisture gradient. Grassland types from other ecological groups represent grasslands affected by various agricultural activities or grasslands on non-agricultural land (*e.g.* bogs, mires, fens and bushes) (Figure 2).

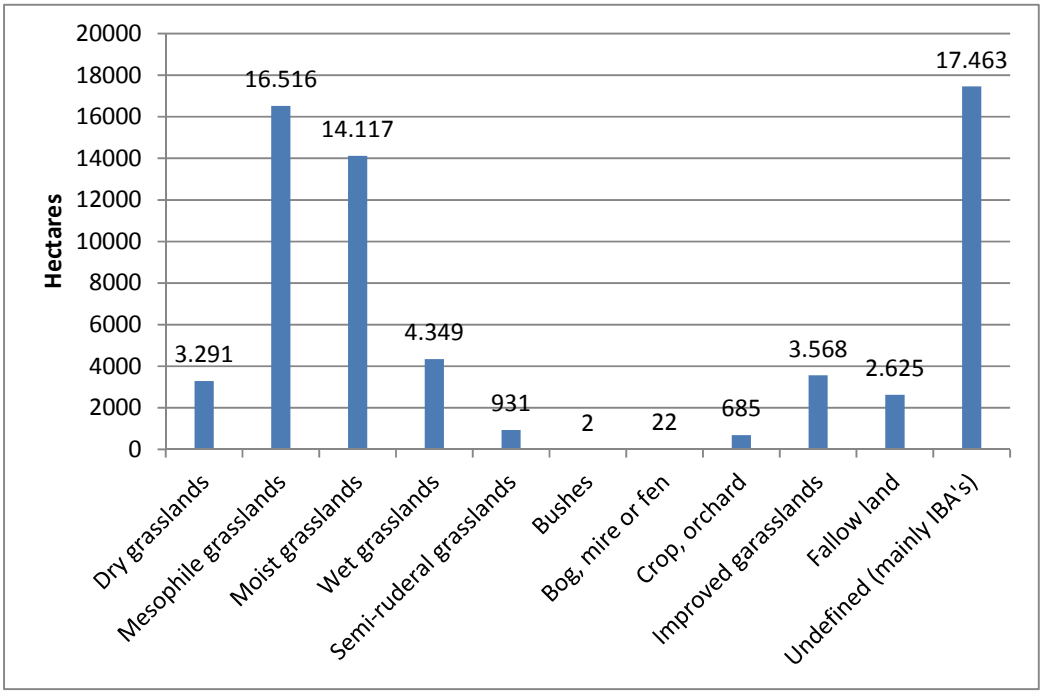


Fig. 2. *Ecological groups of high-nature value grasslands*

High-nature value grasslands in dry grasslands contain habitats of Community interest [7] such as:

- Rupicolous calcareous or basophilic grasslands of the *Alysso-Sedion albi* – 6110*;
- Xenic sand calcareous grasslands – 6120*;
- Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates – 6210,
- and also northern Boreal alluvial meadows - 6450 in some cases of mesophile fringes.

High-nature value grasslands in mesophile grasslands contain habitats of Community interest such as:

- Species-rich *Nardus* grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas (and submountain areas in Continental Europe) – 6230;
- Fennoscandian lowland species-rich dry to mesic grasslands - 6270;
- Lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*) - 6510

High-nature value grasslands in moist grasslands contain habitats of Community interest such as:

- Lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*) – 6510;
- Northern Boreal alluvial meadows - 6450 6410;
- Boreal Baltic coastal meadows – 1630*.

[7] Council Directive 92/43/EEC

High-nature value grasslands in wet grasslands usually are northern Boreal alluvial meadows – 6450, natural or semi-natural meadows with different sedge *Carex sp.* species or other humid tall herb communities.

High-nature value grasslands in semi-ruderal grasslands contain habitat of Community interest Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels – 6430.

High-nature value grasslands on land affected by various agricultural activities or on non-agricultural land (*e.g.* bogs, mires, fens and bushes) are a very heterogeneous group of meadows and may contain a variety of habitats of Community interest or indicator species.

Habitat type was not examined by special botanical surveys for most of the high-nature value grasslands qualified by using ornithological criteria, but the majority of them fulfill the criteria to qualify as habitat of Community interest northern Boreal alluvial meadows - 6450.

However, because in the current analysis polygons containing multiple habitats were not split between these habitats, the breakdown of grasslands given in Figure 2 should be rather seen as indicative and it is required to obtain additional data for the classification of these grasslands.

2. Main threats to the high-nature value grasslands

There are two main threats to biodiversity in grasslands: one caused by intensive agriculture and the other by land abandonment and the ensuing overgrowth by shrubs.

Degradation of grassland quality

After cessation of mowing or grazing, the grassland vegetation structure changes. Formation of a litter layer causes changes in moisture and light conditions. Plant species diversity decreases rapidly while some species (e.g. grasses or sedges) become dominant in the following years. The rare plant species (e.g. *Cnidium dubuim*, *Gentiana spp.*, *Centaurium spp.*, *Primula farinosa*, *Trollius europaeus* and most of the orchid species) are the first which become extinct in abandoned grasslands. Paludification starts in the wettest types of grasslands. Although these changes add to overall habitat diversity of the area in the short term, formation of large paludified areas dominated by *Carex* species is not welcome as they replace more floristically diverse meadows. In addition, formation of the large *Carex cespitosa* and *C. acuta* tussocks prevents the re-establishment of mowing without special meadow restoration measures.

In the driest meadow types, domination by one or a few species, like *Calamagrostis epigeus* or *Cirsium sp.,* starts and eventually ends with invasion by bushes. Presence of a litter layer also affects the vegetation structure in these areas and creates the risk of intense grass fires.

Decline of open grassland area, overgrowing with trees and bushes

Large areas of natural grasslands that formerly were regularly cut or grazed have been abandoned. Bushes and trees are invading these grasslands and are decreasing the area of grassland habitats as well as the area available to bird species requiring such habitats.

Fragmentation of grassland area

Drainage ditches have become overgrown with bushes thus creating dense shrub/tree belts intersecting the meadows into narrow strips. Although these belts themselves may not occupy large areas and may not significantly reduce the total area of the grassland, they cause fragmentation by reducing the effective grassland area or core area.

Changes in water regime

Drainage of meadows and dredging the rivers has caused annual spring floods to become shorter and to cover smaller areas. In areas which are no longer affected by floods, changes in natural vegetation occur: the typical spatial structure and typical species community changes, ecologically versatile mesophile species take over. It is easier for bushes to establish themselves in such areas. Soil in such areas becomes less fertile and harder.

Risk of ploughing up grasslands

Due to the complicated management conditions (soil moisture, small fields, uneven surface *etc.*) most high-nature value grassland payment rates in the agri-environmental scheme are non-competitive in comparison to more profitable conventional agricultural practices. This puts pressure on farmers to opt for more profitable uses of the land, such as turning grassland into arable land or increasing grass production using artificial fertilizer, activities which cause the loss of high-nature value grasslands.

Afforestation of grasslands

On abandoned land, very often cases of “natural afforestation” happen – when open land overgrows with bushes and gradually turns into forest, it is automatically transferred to the category “forest land” and henceforth classified as forest. This means that the land, now officially classified as forest, can never again be cleared of trees and used as grassland. In addition, in the Rural Development Programme for Latvia 2007 – 2013 there is a sub-measure ‘First Afforestation of Non- Agricultural Land’ which supports afforestation by planting trees on abandoned land.

3. Schemes in the Rural Development Programme which could support high-nature value grassland use

The agri-environmental schemes in the Rural Development Programme for Latvia 2007 – 2013 includes several obligatory and optional support measures. Most of these are aimed at reducing nutrient run-off from farms or at facilitating organic agricultural production, but only one is targeted at supporting biodiversity in high-nature value grasslands.

There are four sub-measures in the current agri-environmental scheme:

- Develop organic farming;
- Introducing and promoting integrated horticulture;
- Maintaining biodiversity in grasslands;
- Stubble field in winter period.

1. The sub-measure Maintaining biodiversity in grasslands is aimed at supporting the management of high-nature value grasslands.

The objective of the sub-measure is to encourage the conservation of grasslands rich in biodiversity and to maintain wild plants, wild animals, bird populations and landscapes within that part of the utilised agricultural land which is covered by grassland rich in biodiversity.

Eligible activities in this sub-measure are maintaining grasslands cultivated within the utilised agricultural land in an environmentally-friendly manner, by performing the following activities:

- extensive animal production

(in order to claim payment under the activity "extensive animal production", biologically valuable grassland shall be extensively grazed with 0.4 to 0.9 livestock units per 1 ha of biologically valuable grassland. Grazing intensity must be chosen within the permitted interval and according to grassland type, location, climate and other conditions to prevent grassland overgrazing);

- late mowing of grassland,

(in order to claim payment under the activity "late mowing of grasslands", biologically valuable grassland shall be mowed within the period from August 1 until September 15, and the mowed grass shall be collected and removed from the field, or chopped).

2. Developing organic farming.

The purpose of the sub-measure is to facilitate organic agricultural production by promoting the application of organic agriculture methods within the utilised agricultural land.

By supporting traditional farming and traditional rural lifestyles, this sub-measure has an indirect positive effect on grassland biodiversity, but it is primarily targeted towards improving the quality of food by reducing chemical use and pollution.

3. Introducing and promoting integrated horticulture.

The objective of the sub-measure is to facilitate the adoption of integrated production methods in horticulture. In integrated horticulture, by complying with the integrated production methods, there are additional costs and, because the limited use of pesticides and other 'agricultural chemicals' means productivity per hectare is lower than in conventional agriculture, loss of income. For instance, in the process of growing fruit trees, berry bushes and vegetables a reduced amount of plant protection products and chemical fertilisers is used, with the emphasis on mechanical elimination of the sources of infection and pest, disease and weed control (monitoring). In perennial plantations mulch, trichogrammas and pheromone traps are used. In order to preserve biodiversity, the opportunities to attract the natural enemies of the harmful organisms have to be used by providing them with a

favourable environment. By supporting traditional farming and traditional rural lifestyles, this sub-measure has an indirect positive effect on grassland biodiversity.

4. Stubble field in winter period.

The objectives of this sub-measure are to facilitate the reduction of erosion processes in agricultural land subject to erosion and to support the preservation of plant nutrients in the soil. The sub-measure is not targeted to high-nature value grasslands, but potentially has positive effects on wintering and/or migratory bird populations in rural areas.

4. Problems in supporting high-nature value grasslands

Linking agri-environmental schemes (especially the scheme 'Maintaining biodiversity in grasslands') with requirements under the Single Area Payment make land which is no longer agriculturally viable ineligible for any payment. Support payments may be granted only for those areas which are eligible for Single Area Payments – which means, only for areas that were in good agricultural condition in the reference year 2003.
There is therefore a lack of measures to promote the restoration of grasslands through the reoccupation of former agricultural land which has become afforested or overgrown by scrub.

As mentioned above, there is a problem in that the agri-environmental scheme ('Maintaining biodiversity in grasslands') payment rate (123 Euro per hectare per year) is not competitive with payments which support intensive production.

There are problems with the definition of "agricultural land in good condition". Many wooded meadows and calcareous meadows with a coverage of juniper do not qualify under this definition. As a result, there is no agri-environment support for farming in the priority habitat of Community interest Fennoscandian woodland meadows - 6530*, and a significantly reduced possibility to get subsidies for farming in habitat *Juniperus communis* formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands - 5130.

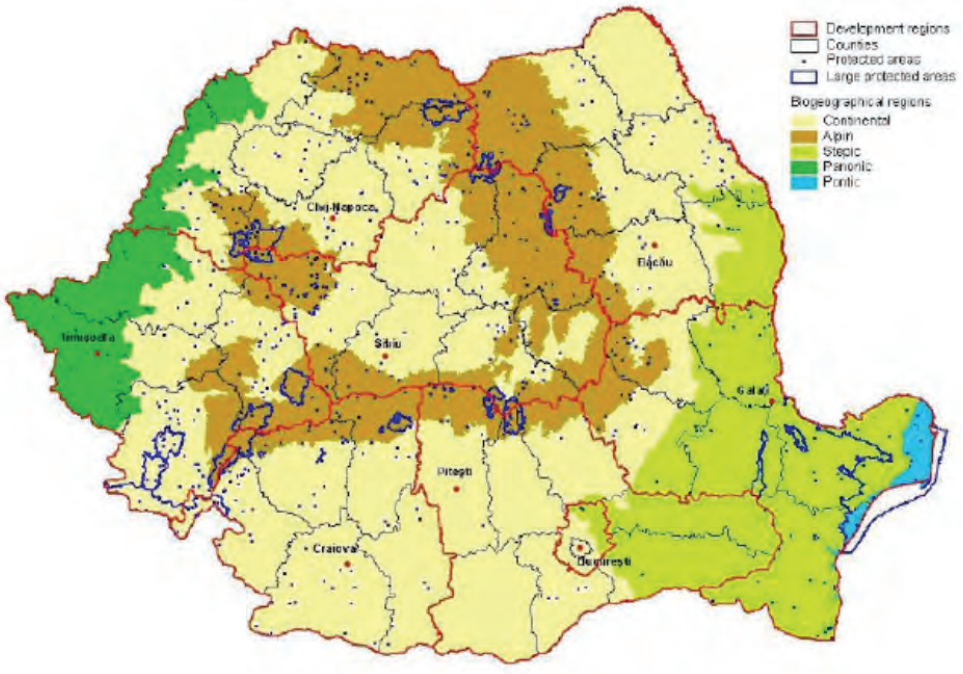
Finally, there is no support for specific project-based "agri-environment" measures. Different habitats and different species (plant and bird) need different management. As the current Programme has only one scheme targeting the support of biodiversity, applying 'one rule for all' makes its effectiveness controversial. There are no possibilities to take into account any regional differences (or even differences at farm level).

Grasslands in Romania

1. Basic data on Romania

1.1. Nature, climate and land

Romania is situated in the geographical center of Europe (south-east of Central Europe) on the north of the Balkan Peninsula at half of the distance between the Atlantic coast and the Urals, inside and outside the Carpathian Arc, on the lower course of the Danube (1075 km) with an exit to the Black Sea.
Romania is the twelfth country of Europe in size, having an area of 238391 km2.
Romania's relief consists of three major levels: the highest one in the Carpathians (the highest peak is Moldoveanu, 2544 m), the middle one which corresponds to the Sub-Carpathians, the hills and the plateaux and the lowest one in the plains, meadows and Danube Delta. The Danube Delta, the youngest relief unit and under permanent formation, has an average altitude of 0.52 m.
The main features of the relief units are their proportionality (31% mountains, 36% hills and plateaux, 33% plains and meadows) and the concentric display of the major levels in the relief.
Romania's climate is a temperate-continental transition, with oceanic influences from the west, Mediterranean ones from the south-west and continental-extreme influences from the east. Multiannual average temperatures differ according to latitude: 8°C in the north and over 11°C in the south.



Map 1. Biogeographical regions of Romania

Romanian territory is divided from the administrative viewpoint into villages, communes, towns, municipalities and counties. The village is the smallest administrative unit, as a rural settlement, and one or more villages form a

commune, which has a central village with administrative tasks. In total there are 320 towns and municipalities (urban settlements) and 12.951 villages forming 2854 communes (rural settlements).
As territorial (non-administrative) units, 8 'regions of development' were created, gathering several counties.
The total area of Romania is 238.391 km^2, with a population of 21,6 million inhabitants (55% urban and 45% rural).The agricultural land (14.731.000 ha) in 2006 had the following uses:

- arable 9.434.000 ha 64%
- **pastures 3.334.400 ha 22,6%**
- **hayfields 1.524.900 ha 10,4**
- vineyards 223.700 ha 1,5%
- orchards 213.400 ha 1,5%

2. Grassland types in Romania

Romania has various grassland types: dry grasslands, mesophilous grasslands, wet grasslands, and high mountain grasslands. About 11% of the national territory is covered by grasslands, most of them with a significant floristic diversity.
Romania is one of the most important HNV areas in the EU-27, extending across 5 European biogeographic regions.
Regarding the flora, 3,700 species of plants were identified in Romania, out of which 23 are declared as being under protection, 74 are extinct, 39 are endangered, 171 are vulnerable and 1,253 are rare. A significant number (approximate 60%) of the estimated taxa in Romania are represented by species which are typical for alpine and sub-alpine permanent grasslands, grasslands and mountain meadows.

The most recent research of the Romanian grasslands is older than 20 years; most of this research was done according to the Braun-Blanquet methodology and needs to be updated according to the European vegetation unit classification and taxonomical system.

In 2004 there was a grassland mapping project coordinated by Veen Ecology (www.veenecology.nl) and some Romanian research institutes, which covered almost 400.000 ha. As the main result of this newest project , the most important grassland types were mapped. The typology below was elaborated by the research consortium (Veen 2004).
Typology of grasslands:

Dry grasslands:
1. Continental dune grasslands
2. North-western Pontic dune grasslands
3. Pannonic and western Pontic saline meadows
4. Pannonic and western Pontic salt steppes
5. Hill and plateau xero-mesophilous grasslands
6. Xerophilous feather grass (Stipa) steppe grasslands
7. Hill and plateau xero-mesophilous grasslands
8. Hill limestone steppe grasslands from Dobruja
9. Pale fescue grasslands on limestone from hill-mountain belts
10. Alpine mountain calcareous *Sesleria rigida* grasslands

Mesophilous grasslands:

11. Hill-mountain mesophilous meadows
12. Hill-mountain mesophilous manured meadows
13. Mountain mesophilous manured meadows
14. Mesophilous oligotrophic mountain pastures
15. Mountain mesophilous tall herb meadows

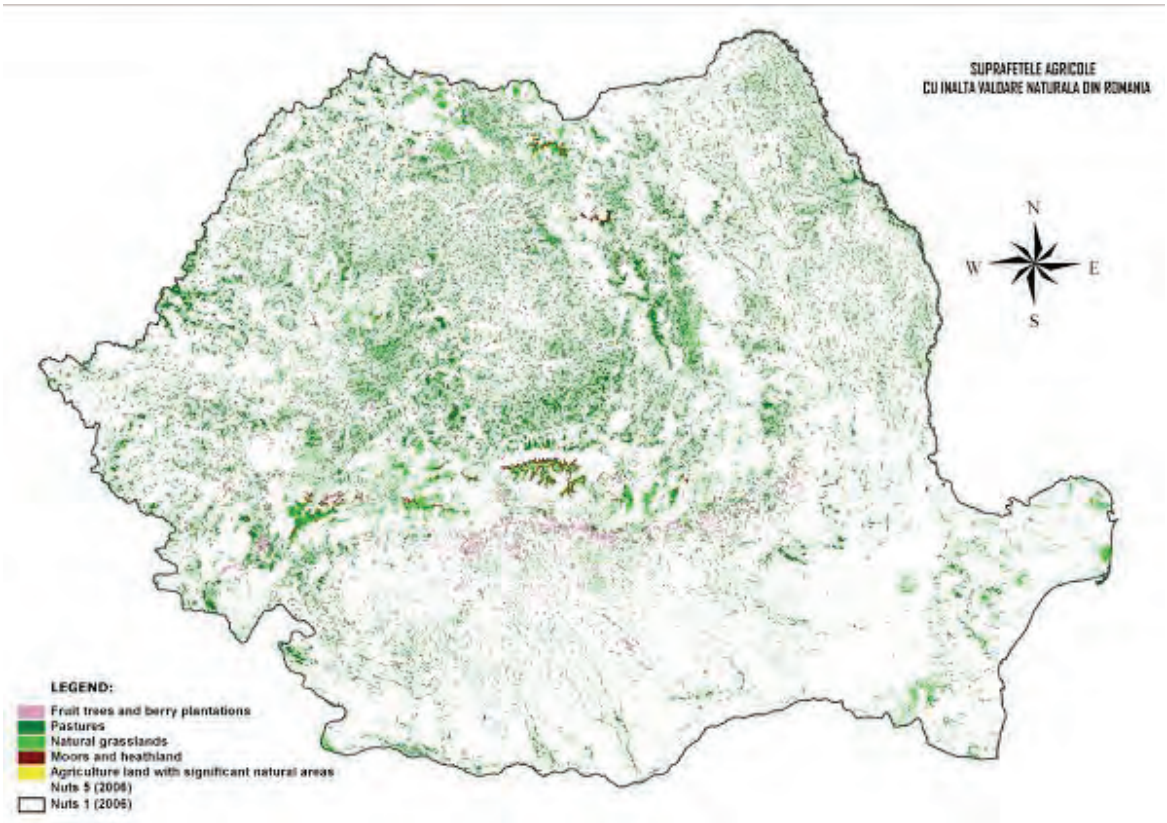
High mountain grasslands:

16. Subalpine mesotrophic pastures
17. Subalpine oligotrophic pastures
18. Basiphilous subalpine pastures
19. Subalpine acidophilous tall herb meadows
20. Subalpine calciphilous tall herb meadows
21. Acidophilous alpine pastures
22. Basiphilous alpine pastures

Wet grasslands:

23. Meso-hygrophilous flood plain meadows
24. Intramontane hygrophilous river meadows
25. Hygrophilous meadows in the intramontane low valleys
26. Marsh-fen tall Carex meadows
27. Water-fringe reed- canary grass meadows
28. Poor acidic fen meadows
29. Continental alkaline fen meadows

The geographical distribution of grasslands is shown in the map below.



Map 2. Geographical distribution of grasslands in Romania

3. Legal status of the grasslands

Some of the common grasslands (mainly those which are used as pastures) are not the property of the local inhabitants, but belong to the state and are given by various contracts to the local government. Many times there are conflicts between local government representatives (mayor or councillors) and the users of the grasslands (most of the time these are husbandry associations or individual persons). The main and central issues in these conflicts are the payments or subsidies from the EU and Romanian government, but also the rent which the users have to pay for the grasslands.

The subsidies are paid to those who are using the land – as said above, these are usually farmers. However, sometimes the landowners (e.g. local governments) obtain the subsidies because they pay the farmer to cut the hay, giving the hay for free. In this case the subsidy goes to the owner because he is 'using' the land.

This reveals a gap in the legislation: if the local government as the owner of the grassland gets any rent from the user of the grassland, then it should not get subsidies also. Getting both rents and subsidies is not correct. If the user of the land pays any rent, any subsidy should belong to the user of the land.

This legislative gap causes some problems:

- pasture management plans are missing;
- maintenance of the pastures is not solved;
- there is no long-term planning regarding the grasslands;
- etc.

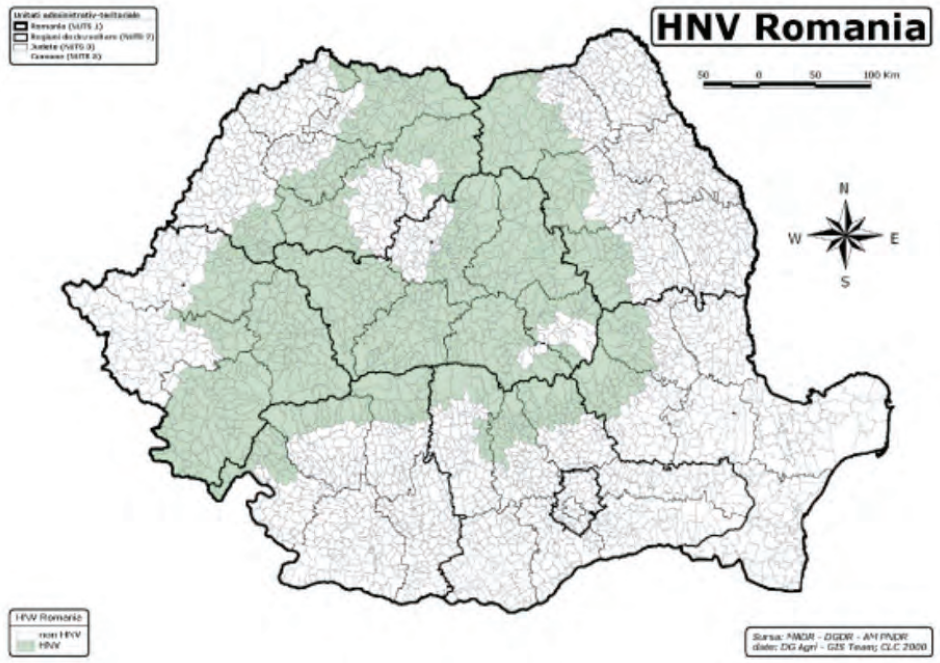
4. Subsidies and payments

In the National Rural Development Programme for the 2007-2013 period there are some measures which directly or indirectly can support the maintenance and use of high-nature value grasslands.
These measures are:

measure code	Measure	Amount	Beneficiaries
112	Setting up young farmers	**€**10.000 – 25.000	young members of the farming families
141	supporting semi-subsistence agricultural holdings	**€ 1500**/year	Farmers
142	Setting up producer groups	**€ 390.000**/5 years	producer groups
143	Providing farm advisory and extension services	**100% of the costs**	Farmers
211	Support for mountain areas	**€ 50**/ha/year	Farmers
212	Less-favoured areas (LFA) – other than mountain areas	**€ 60-90**/ha/year	Farmers
214	Agri-environment (AE) package 1: HNV grasslands	**€ 124**/ha/year	Farmers
	AE package 2: traditional farming	**€ 58**/ha/year	Farmers
	pilot package 3: grasslands supporting *Crex crex*	**€ 209**/ha/year	farmers, land users
	pilot package 3: grasslands supporting *Lanius minor* and *Falco vespertinus*	**€ 101**/ha/year	farmers, land users. Land users can be non-farming owners (see 3. Legal status). Also, in Romania there are several million subsistence or semi/subsistence farmers, who have no other income source.

In the elaboration process of the NRDP 2007-2013 the Agora association pointed out some of the main problems of this programme:

- the axis 2 budget in the Romanian NRDP is one of the lowest in EU27 (25% - the minimum set by the Commission),
- very low budget for the only compulsory axis 2 measure (agri-environment): only 40% of axis 2, 12% of the total rural development budget,
- a measure for organic agriculture is totally missing from the Romanian NRDP,



Map 3. HNV areas (available for AE measures, packages 1 and 2)

5. Grassland utilization

Most of the grasslands in Romania are used in an extensive way, with low stocking densities (less than 1 LU/ha), while the hay meadows produce 2-3 t/ha on average.
Almost no farmer puts chemical fertilizers on grasslands. Although some intensive livestock farms in hilly areas are using such fertilizers, in traditional practices farmers used about 5 t/ha of organic fertilizer in every 4th year. A serious problem is the burning of not mowed or uncut hay in springtime or in autumn.

5.1. Mowing

The majority of the grasslands are used for mowing in a traditional way: in the morning the cattle from the village are taken by 1-2 persons and kept on the common pasture till late afternoon, when they return to the village. In this system the families have one to six cattle, they produce milk mainly for themselves and sell only the surplus (subsistence and semi-subsistence farming).

5.2. Haying

In mountainous areas farmers are usually cutting hay 2-3 times. The first cut is at the beginning of June, depending also on the weather, the last one at the end of September. Most of the grasslands are hayed manually or with small-scale machines. This practice is also good for wildlife, mainly the birds such as the corncrake (*Crex crex*).

6. Gaps and problems

The majority of the semi-natural and natural grasslands are under an increasing pressure due to the abandonment or intensification of agricultural activities. The rural population is getting older and older, most of the young people are leaving rural areas, and those who stay are not working in agriculture.

There is a continuous decrease in livestock, which leads to the abandonment of grazing, causing the degradation of large areas of grassland due to the occurrence of ecological succession characterized by the encroachment of many invasive species.
On the basis of a grassland inventory carried out by Royal Dutch Society for Nature Conservation and Veen Ecology in collaboration with various national institutions, it was calculated that of the total permanent grassland surface, about 15% suffers from abandonment of agricultural activities. This figure is obtained by extrapolation, because this inventory was only carried out in 6 localities (representative from a biodiversity point of view) covering only 15% of the total national grassland surface.

The notion of HNV farmlands and grasslands is new in Romania. Probably farmers will learn about it in the next couple of years and hopefully the financing system will be finalized and transparent for everybody. Improving income for traditional and HNV grassland farmers through direct marketing to consumers of meat and cheese as a quality, nature product, has not yet been tried on any significant scale. Farmers are worried about the permits, the investments, and – certainly the older ones - can't imagine asking loans from the bank for a business plan.
A major problem is the issue of payments and subsidies from EU funds and national budget (see part 4 Subsidies and payments).
The LEADER axis is not functional yet in Romania, so the sharing of experience between micro-regions cannot be financed. TRINET could help in disseminating information about LEADER from other countries.
There is a serious need for training in the field of agriculture in general and grassland management in particular, as well as in economic and ecological issues (HNV farmland). The state agencies are not capable of organizing this and financing such training sessions and adult education courses, so there is a potentially important role for NGOs and local authorities in solving this problem.

Grasslands in Slovakia

Basic information about the situation with HNV grasslands in Slovakia

Introduction

Slovakia is a country with a high variety of different grassland types. This is mainly due to a geographical location in the centre of Europe on the transition between Carpathian Mountains and Pannonian lowland, but it is also a result of a traditional way of grassland management which has still been persisting in some areas.

However, grassland biodiversity has faced several threats in recent decades. During the time of the communist regime (1948-1989), collective use of the land through co-operative farms or by state enterprises was preferred by the government. The farmers were forced to enter the co-operative farms and the landscape changed dramatically after such collectivisation. Many grasslands were intensified, ploughed and re-seeded with commercial seed mixtures. Fertilizers were frequently used on grasslands to increase the yields. Some grasslands, especially at lower altitudes, were transformed to arable land. Traditional agriculture carried out by individual farmers persisted only in some remote mountain areas, where co-operative farming would not be effective, or because of a strong resistance from local people. Intensification was one side of the coin. The other side was land abandonment. Some remote areas, which were hardly accessible for the machinery of co-operative farms, were abandoned or afforested.

The situation changed after the political turn in 1989. Co-operative farms had to be transformed and small farmers got a chance to re-establish their farms. State agricultural enterprises were privatised. In spite of expectations, only a few of the small farmers started to farm again. Young generations lost the relationship to the land and did not have so much interest in agriculture. Therefore, most of the land is still managed by large enterprises (private companies or transformed co-operative farms). The amount of state subsidies has dropped dramatically after 1989. The positive effect was that the use of fertilizers decreased significantly. But this also had a very negative effect on the number of cattle, which dropped to less than half of their number in the 1980s. Many enterprises were caught up in the process of privatisation and transformation, with negative impact on land management.

All those facts together had a very negative impact on grassland management. Land abandonment accelerated in the 1990s to an enormous rate. Large areas of grasslands were abandoned, or managed only with a very low intensity. In the year 2004 only 4900 km² of managed grasslands remained in the country. If we compare this with the area of grasslands in the year 1920, which was 10 504 km² (Michalec & Jendrišáková 2006), we see a very negative trend in the last 80 years.

The situation has started to stabilise a bit after Slovakia joined the European Union in 2004. Massive support from EU funds has led to an increased interest in grassland management. Nevertheless, there is still more biomass being produced by grasslands than can be consumed by livestock, so the system is unbalanced and dependent on subsidies.

Semi-natural and natural grasslands in Slovakia

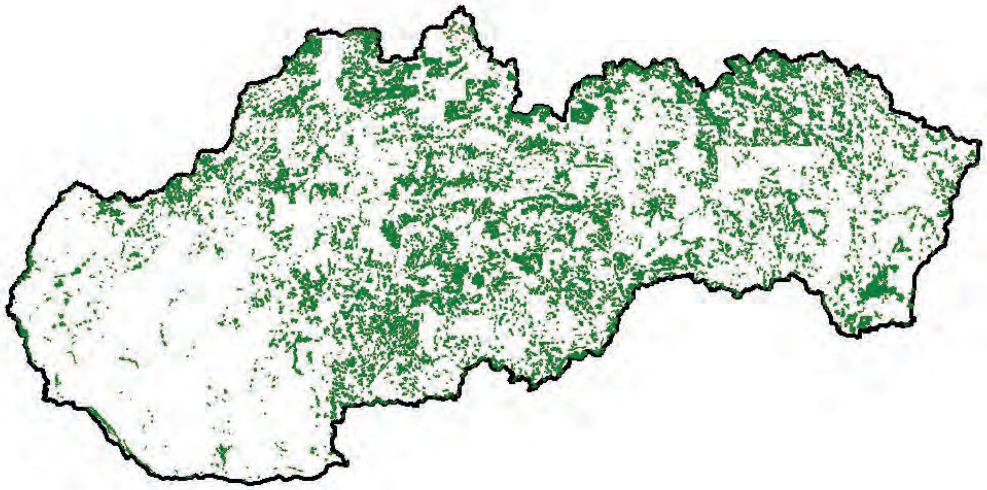
From the year 1998, DAPHNE-Institute of Applied Ecology started the National Grassland Inventory project. The aim of the project was to map grasslands with natural species composition across the whole country, and to record

their current state. At the moment, mapping has been carried out over an area covering 96% of the country and a geographical information system was established.

Overall area of semi-natural and natural grasslands in Slovakia is approximately 340,000 hectares. The most common are mesic grasslands, covering 62% of this area, 15% are wet grasslands, 8 % dry grasslands, 4% high-mountain grasslands and 11% of the mapped grasslands were not classified (Šeffer et al. 2002).

Another interesting fact is the information that more than one third of the mapped grasslands are located outside the LPIS (Land Parcel Information System), which is an integral part of the IACS (Integrated Agricultural Control System). This is due to various reasons, but the main reason seems to be that these grasslands are overgrown by trees and shrubs above the level which is eligible for EU subsidies.

Map: HNV grasslands in Slovakia according National Grassland Inventory (state in 2008, 96% of the country mapped)



Main habitat types

Mesic grasslands

The most widespread type of mesic grasslands are hay meadows of the *Arrhenatherion* alliance. They occur in all parts of the country, but mostly in the lower altitudes of mountain areas. They are very rare in lowland areas, because most of them were transformed to the arable land in the past. During the socialist era, a large portion of the hay meadows was heavily intensified. They were often ploughed and re-seeded with commercial seed mixtures and then regularly fertilized with mineral fertilizers. Species-rich hay meadows have persisted mostly in remote mountain areas, where the traditional ways of farming have not been destroyed. It is typical mostly for mountain areas, that hay meadows are not used only for mowing, but that their aftermath is grazed. Or grazing and mowing alternate from year to year. Therefore, it is very difficult to make a clear differentiation between mesic hay meadows and mesic pastures.
After the changes in 1989, the intensity of fertilizing declined rapidly and many intensified grasslands started to change back towards semi-natural grasslands. The process can be observed in many regions of Slovakia, but its speed and trajectory is very individual, depending much on local conditions (diaspore sources, the quality of soil etc.).

A very rare habitat type in Slovakia is mountain hay meadows of the *Polygono-Trisetion* alliance. In the past they were relatively widespread in mountain areas, especially on nutrient-rich substrates (limestone, volcanic rocks). Many areas were used in common by rural communities. They were usually mown once a year in summer; the hay was dried and then stored in wooden houses called „senníky“, so it was also a kind of cultural phenomenon. But this was changed by collectivization. Hay meadows in remote areas were not very interesting for newly established co-operative farms, because of long distances and because of the intensification of grasslands at lower altitudes. So they were changed to extensive pastures or totally abandoned and afforested. Only small remnants of mountain hay meadow survived, but they belong to the most threatened grassland habitat types within the country.

Mesic pastures of the *Cynosurion* alliance are also very frequent in Slovakia. They are represented by grasslands which are only grazed or where grazing is the dominant management and mowing is only occasional. We may find many valuable grasslands even in this habitat type, because the intensity of grazing in Slovakia is generally very low. Some types, especially on limestone, may be very rich in species. The main threat to this habitat type is abandonment and encroachment of trees and shrubs.

In Slovakia there are relatively large areas of *Nardus* grasslands (alliances V*iolion caninae, Nardo-Agrostion tenuis* and *Nardion strictae*). These oligotrophic habitats are very well preserved due to the fact that the level of grassland soil eutrophication in Slovakia is much lower than in some parts of western Europe. Nevertheless, large areas of *Nardus* grasslands were changed to intensified meadows or pastures in the past. Nowadays they are used mostly as extensive pastures; some of them, mostly at lower altitudes, are also mown. The main problem facing the habitat is the low intensity of the management. The numbers of domestic animals are very low; too low to ensure sufficient use of the grasslands in mountain areas. *Nardus* grasslands, especially in mountain areas, belong to the habitats seriously threatened by abandonment and afforestation.

Wet grasslands

They represent a very heterogenous group of grassland habitats, which occur from the lowlands to the high mountains.

In the lowest parts of the Pannonian lowland there are some localities of alluvial meadows of the *Cnidion venosi* alliance. These occur in the floodplains of big lowland rivers. The best-preserved complex of these meadows is in the border area with Austria, which was closed by the Iron Curtain during the socialist era. They are usually used as mown meadows, the hay production is extremely high, so they are often mown twice a year. Some localities may also be grazed. In the past they were surely covering much bigger areas, but due to drainage and to embanking large rivers, their area was significantly decreased. Some grasslands were also transformed to arable land, even in active floodplains. Some ploughed localities were restored at the end of the 1990s in the Morava River floodplain. Most of the grasslands of this habitat are regularly managed at the moment, but some localities are still threatened by abandonment, mostly in eastern Slovakia.

Floodplain meadows of the *Alopecurion* alliance may be found along smaller rivers. They were relatively widespread in nearly all floodplains of smaller rivers throughout the whole country. During the era of intensification, many of them were drained or transformed to arable land after drainage. Therefore, they belong to the threatened grassland habitats in the country and well-developed grasslands of this habitat type are relatively rare. Nowadays, they are usually mown once or twice a year, some localities are also grazed after mowing. Although grazing is not so frequent on wet grasslands, in some parts of the country, mostly in eastern Slovakia, we may find many localities with such management. Such wet grasslands of the *Potentillion anserinae* alliance are considered as grasslands with lower conservation value, but maybe it is too strict an opinion. The problem is that the knowledge about their value and dynamics is still insufficient.

The lowest parts of the floodplains, which are flooded for relatively long periods of the year, are occupied by tall-sedge or tall-grass grasslands of the *Magnocaricion elatae* or *Phragmition communis* alliances. From an agricultural point of view they are marginal habitat types which are mown or grazed only in drier years, when the upper part of the soil is dried out.

Extremely valuable, but also a very threatened habitat, are saline grasslands. Small patches of them occur in the southern part of the country i.e. in the northern part of the Pannonian lowland. They are usually in a critical state, many of them were drained and ploughed in the past and changed to arable land. Nearly all of them are without any management at the moment, or some management is irregularly organized by responsible nature conservation agencies.
Specific types of saline grasslands may be found also in the mountainous part of the country. They are mostly situated in the vicinity of extremely mineralized travertine springs which promote a higher content of sodium cations in the soil profile. Some localities are located in the area where the rainfall is relatively low due to the shadow effect of the Tatra Mts. They are regularly managed only very rarely, some localities are managed by nature conservation agencies.

Dry grasslands

Dry grasslands occur in Slovakia only in small patches, mostly on the slopes exposed to the south. In spite of the fact they do not cover too large an area, they are of high importance from a biodiversity point of view.

Open dry grasslands of the alliances *Festucion vallesiaceae* or *Seslerio-Festucion glaucae* occur mostly only on calcareous substrates in small patches. Only a small portion of them is managed somehow, usually they are grazed very extensively. Most of this habitat's surface area is abandoned at the moment, but due to the fact that secondary succession on such shallow soils is very slow, they are still very valuable from a biodiversity point of view. Large areas of the habitat were artificially afforested in the past, mostly by introduced *Pinus nigra* or *Fraxinus ornus.*

Sub-xerophilous grasslands of the alliances *Bromion* and *Cirsio-Brachypodion pinnati* are also mostly located on calcareous soils, but they cover larger areas than the open dry grasslands. They belong to the grassland habitats with the highest species diversity on a small scale. For example, in the National Park Slovenský raj in eastern Slovakia, 74 species were recorded on an area of 1m². Some localities are very important because of the occurrence of threatened orchids. In the past, the habitat was mostly mown, but after collectivisation many localities have been abandoned step-by-step or changed to extensive pastures. At the moment, only very small patches of the habitat are mown in Slovakia, more localities are grazed, and many localities are without any kind of management at all. Although secondary succession is relatively slow in this type, the localities are threatened by the expansion of trees and shrubs into grasslands.

High-mountain grasslands

Slovakia has a couple of mountains which rise to altitudes above 1500 m a.s.l., but the area covered by high-mountain grasslands is relatively small. Alpine grasslands are considered a natural habitat which is not dependent on regular human interventions. Most of them are without any management. This is due to the fact that there is

no interest in the management of grasslands at such altitudes, but also due to the fact that grazing is considered unsuitable for alpine grasslands because of erosion and is thus prohibited in some national parks. Small patches only are grazed, mostly by sheep.

There is a slightly different situation is with sub-alpine grasslands. They occur in all higher mountains in the country. They are usually moderately grazed by sheep or young cattle, some small parts are occasionally mown. Due to this fact that intensity of grazing is rather low, grasslands are threatened by the spreading of high grasses like *Deschampsia cespitosa, Avenula plniculmis, Calamagrostis arundinacea.* Some parts are being overgrown by trees and shrubs or they are afforested artificially.

Rural Development Programme and management of semi-natural and natural grasslands

Agri-environmental support

The Slovak RDP contains at the moment 10 schemes divided between three main sections: improvement of the environment (mostly reduction of fertilizers and chemicals), soil erosion prevention and biodiversity conservation.

The biodiversity conservation section has 3 schemes: Conservation of semi-natural and natural grasslands, Conservation of the habitats of protected bird species and Breeding and conservation of threatened livestock species.

The scheme for 'Conservation of semi-natural and natural grasslands' has been implemented from 2003 onwards (it started in the pre-accession period through SAPARD support). During the previous RDP period (2004-06), the conditions of the scheme were set up according to four principal ecological groups of grasslands (dry grasslands, mesic grasslands, wet grasslands, high-mountain grasslands). The restrictions imposed by the scheme to qualify for agri-environment payments were mainly the limited use of fertilizers and pesticides, special mowing dates and a special regime of grazing. The scheme was implemented only on grasslands which were certified as semi-natural or natural by a national certification authority. Such an authority was DAPHNE-Institute of Applied Ecology as holder

of the National Grassland Information System. The scheme was very well accepted by the farmers and introduced over an area of 101,000 hectares in the whole country. It has surely acted as a good incentive for farmers to manage species-rich grasslands.
However, some problems and shortcomings have been observed as well - mostly the fact that the conditions for different habitat types were scarcely differentiated. The scheme had one payment for all grassland types (approx. 180 EUR), which has not been motivating enough for the management of some problematic grassland types (e.g. fen meadows).
Therefore a re-design of the scheme was prepared for the RDP 2007-13. The grasslands are divided into 7 habitat groups (Dry grasslands; Mesic grasslands; Hay mountain grasslands; Wet grasslands in lower altitudes; Alluvial *Cnidion* grasslands; Fen, *Molinia* and *Calthion* grasslands; High-mountain grasslands). Payments are differentiated according to the type and they vary from approx. 60 EUR to 190 EUR. The initial proposal considered higher payments, but the Ministry of Agriculture did not accept this. Some conditions in the scheme are general, some are specific for a particular habitat type. Only limited organic fertilizing is allowed and only for some habitat types. The use of pesticides is very limited - to point application, with approval of an official authority. Date of mowing is generally set for July 15, but it can be shifted by the State Nature Conservancy if necessary. Fen, *Molinia* and *Calthion* meadows may be mown only by hand or by light machinery, and it is not allowed to graze them. Grazing of some other types which are dependent on regular mowing is also limited to grazing after the first cut. Sheep-folding is possible only in selected habitat types, and folds have to be removed daily. Use of fences for grazing is not allowed: the animals have to be supervised by the shepherd. The eligible load for grazed areas is between 0.3-1.0 LU/ha. This range is the same for all semi-natural grasslands in the whole country. No additional sowing, improvement and mulching of grasslands is allowed. We can generally assume that the conditions of the scheme meet the conservation requirements. They may be unsuitable in some situations, but this can normally be solved by the local management plan or through a statement of the local conservation authorities.
The main problem of the scheme is the very low level of payments at the moment. Current payments are not motivating enough for farmers and may lead to abandonment of some less-productive grasslands. The payments are especially low for the types which require special management measures (e.g. manual mowing on fen meadows, mowing of remote mountain meadows). For the RDP 2007-13, the State Nature Conservancy has become the certification authority for the localisation of semi-natural and natural grasslands suitable for the scheme. The grasslands certified by DAPHNE in 2004-06 were re-classified into the new typology and some other localities have been added upon the request of the farmers. Certified localities are plotted into maps which farmers receive as an annex for their subsidy application. They can also be found on the website of the Soil Protection and Research Institute (www.podnemapy.sk).

The scheme for 'Conservation of the habitats of protected bird species' is a new one which was not implemented in the previous RDP period. It can be implemented only inside officially proclaimed SPAs. It is oriented towards 3 groups of threatened bird species: the birds of prey (group 1), great bustard (*Otis tarda*) (group 2) and small species nesting on the ground or related to diversified agricultural landscapes (group 3). Group 3 is mostly connected to grasslands. Some conditions are common to all, some specific for a particular group. Use of mineral fertilizers is prohibited, the use of chemicals is restricted (some products are even prohibited). Mowing can be done only from the middle of the block towards the edges, or in stripes from one side of the block to another. The mowing machines have to use equipment which makes noise. On the blocks where birds from group 3 are present, only 80% of the block can be mown at the normal date according to GAEC, the rest may be mown only after August 15. Nesting areas should be delineated by the State Nature Conservancy.
The scheme should compensate the constraints in SPAs. However the design of the scheme is very problematic, as activities are unclearly defined and require a lot of field work by the State Nature Conservancy. The first proposal for the design of the scheme was proposed by an expert group of the State Nature Conservancy. The Ministry of

Agriculture accepted the proposal only partly: some parts were changed without further consultations with SNC experts. In addition, the scheme is available only for proclaimed SPAs and in Slovakia only about 50% of SPAs are officially proclaimed so far (due to which, Slovakia is facing an infringement procedure from the European Commission). The rest of the SPAs has not been proclaimed officially so far because of the protests of stakeholders and obstacles from the side of the Ministry of Agriculture.
The payments under the scheme are differentiated into 4 categories according to altitude and land use. The payment for grasslands is approx. 50 EUR for lowlands and 55 EUR for mountains. It is very difficult to estimate what will be the real impact of the scheme, because its implementation only started in 2009.

The third scheme, called 'Breeding and conservation of threatened livestock species' is oriented towards the breeding of selected threatened breeds e.g. the Slovak Valaska (sheep) or horse breeds like Hucul, Norik etc. The payment for one animal is approx. 235 EUR. The scheme is not used massively, but there are some farmers who have such breeds and may use the scheme.

In the agri-environmental programme there is some possibility to combine several schemes at one locality and thus to increase overall support for this locality. Unfortunately the two main biodiversity schemes (semi-natural grasslands and threatened birds) can not be combined together. The reason is that some obligations which are listed in the schemes are the same for both of them (e.g. mowing from the centre of the blocks towards the edges, restriction of chemical use, prohibition of mineral fertilizers).
The schemes for the biodiversity protection may be combined only with the scheme for organic farming.
The application for agri-environmental support was rather complicated in the period 2004-06. Each applicant had to prepare a 'project' and to get various additional documentation. Such conditions were not very attractive for small farmers and therefore most of them did not apply for the support. The administrative procedures were heavily criticized and the Agricultural Paying Agency decided to simplify the process. The application is relatively simple now and it is submitted together with the application for the Single Area Payment in May. Thus the system is much more friendly towards small farmers and they are applying for agri-environmental support much more than in the previous period.

Natura 2000 payments and payments linked to Directive 2000/60/EC

This title covers the compensatory payments related to the implementation of two EU directives: the Habitats Directive and the Water Framework Directive.

Natura 2000 payments are eligible only for agricultural land inside the proposed SCIs. A priori the application is restricted to the 4th and 5th degree of nature protection according to the Slovak Nature Protection Act (the highest degrees of protection). There are only about 3,300 hectares of such land in Slovakia, so it seems that Natura 2000 payments on agricultural land will be very limited. This restriction was a political decision. Natura 2000 was not taken into account by the Ministry of Agriculture in previous versions of the RDP and the Natura 2000 payments were added into the current version only due to an external pressure from the Ministry of the Environment and NGOs, but only in this very restricted form.
The conditions require no use of fertilizers and chemicals. The groups of livestock grazing the land can not be larger than 30 LU, no sheep-folding is possible. The number of animals is counted as total number per group without any concern for livestock density. The animals have to be supervised by a shepherd. The date of mowing should be set by the State Nature Conservancy, mowing has to be carried out from the middle to the edges of the block. The payment is approximately 95 EUR and it can not combined with agri-environmental payments for biodiversity protection.

Natura 2000 payments on agricultural land may be used only over a very limited area, so their impact will probably not be very significant. On the other hand, they may provide good additional incentives for the farmers managing some smaller Natura 2000 sites.

Main problems connected to HNV grassland conservation

The disappearance of traditional grassland can be observed across the whole country. It is the result of the fact that the way of life in rural areas of Slovakia has changed significantly in recent decades. A priori the number of domestic animals is critically low, so general conditions for preserving HNV grasslands are unfavourable.
Some new support has been introduced since joining the EU, but it is oriented towards registered farmers only, represented in Slovakia mostly by larger farmers managing most of the land. Small part-time farmers have only very limited possibilities to get some support from EU funds.
A serious problem is the fact that farmers in general have problems to sell their products. Especially those managing HNV grasslands are situated in difficult mountain conditions where the costs of farming are rather high. Their products would not be profitable at all without subsidies. Because of the overproduction of farming products, the prices are very low. Some help could come from the system of local quality products, but except for some touristic centres, there are not enough consumers to buy such exclusive products, because of the price. Selling products directly on the farm is officially prohibited, but it is planned to allow it through a new law, which should be approved in the coming months.
Joining the EU has brought many new incentives for farmers through the RDP, but on the other hand several strict hygienic and farming standards have had to be applied. In addition, transposition of EU laws in Slovakia has sometimes been even more strict than necessary. Because of these facts, the traditional mountain grazing of sheep nearly disappeared. In the past, it was oriented towards the production of sheep milk and milk products (mostly cheese). Farmers try to find some alternatives, like transporting milk every day down to the villages, or sheep do not stay outside overnight or they are substituted by beef cattle.

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SCOPING REPORTS AND REPORTS ABOUT PRE-IMPLEMENTATION WORKSHOPS

Bulgaria

Scoping Report Agrolink

Where are the specific problems to conserve grasslands and meadows according to the TRINET philosophy?

Environmental problems

- The landscape in mountain areas look as a patchwork of plots of pastures, small agriculture land (mainly potato) and forestry because the land was divided into very small plots of many owners.
- The process of turning the land form public to private, as well as the concentration of the people to the big cities during the 90`s, caused abandonment of the large area utilized grasslands. Rather confusing is the status of those swards. Depending on the length of their abandonment and on environmental conditions, as well as on the manner of their management, this swards form a mosaic of various successions between pioneer ruderal communities and stable pasture or meadow communities.
- Lack of knowledge of people how to manage land protecting biodiversity and rivers
- Investment of big companies which destroy landscape, biodiversity and pastures. In some paces pasture lands were transformed into agricultural arable land or for building new sky resort.

Social

- Emigration from rural areas and a high percentage of ageing population
- Lack of knowledge and skills: less than 5 % of the population has specialised farming education, while traditional ways of managing land were not supported for more than 50 years during the socialist era
- Unattractiveness of farm work and general lack of labour force in the rural regions
- Preference to make profits quickly and/or develop tourism
- Lack of knowledge (willingness) to cooperate in a group. Individual work for small farmers lead to weak results

Legislation and political

- Delay of implementation of legislation for financial support
- No support for small farmers
- No specific legislation (under development – probably will be in force summer 2010) for direct marketing
- No proper financial support for high mountain pastures which have different conditions than low level pastures
- Delay of implementation for the designation of Natura 2000 sites

Economical

- Most of farmers are small and have no machinery and equipment
- Lack of investment and marketing skills

Where are possibilities to build up projects according to the TRINET philosophy?

Rhodope Mountain is one of the best opportunities. There are many problems but the following possibilities are good reasons to build up a projects:

- Good image for all over the Bulgaria and Europe as a mountain with wonderful landscape and biodiversity.
- Attractive landscape which has urgent need to protect
- For the last 10 years has been emerging many good small family business for sustainable tourism and related services where the products can be sold
- Previous successful projects like Project Rhodope funded by UNDP. Existing local NGOs dealing with sustainable land management including biodiversity and pastures
- "'Pamporovo" resort (ski and summer) with good opportunity to sell in catering services (restaurants etc)

What are the main themes, which should be elaborated in the workshop?

1. Direct marketing – how to build direct marketing
2. Direct marketing – legislation – exchange experience in Austria and Germany (or other member state) – to support development the new legislation which is will be adopted by the Ministry of agriculture very soon.
3. How to manage high mountain pasture – above 1500 sea level. Do in Germany or Austria exist specific legislation for high mountain pasture?
4. Sustainable pastures management in NATURA 2000 and High Nature Value places.

Already any existing project ideas, which could be elaborated further

5. Building cooperation (network) between farmers – processors – shop traders
6. Demonstration farm implementing TRINET philosophy.
7. Visit of selected Bulgarian farmers in other countries with good TRINET practices – exchange experience
8. Training of farmers for ''nature" value pasture and green marketing – work closely with scientist from Smolian and Plovdiv.

List of speakers and short summary of what they shall talk about

Name	Institution/farmer	Region (town)	Farm – size, animals	Comments
Nedjat Mehmet Ali	Farmer	Momchilgrad	129 caws, 145 sheep	Certificate for two autochthones breeds of cattles. So far milk is selling to a big dairy. Want to produce own cheese and meat. Rent municipality grassland
Petar Vangelov	Farmer	Svilengrad (Sakar mountain) - near but not in Rhodope	200 catlle for meat, incl local breed Sivo Rhodope cattle	pastures in NATURA 2000, approved and funded project by SAPARD Programme
Ferad Emin	Farmer		260 cattle	pastures rented by municipality and private owners

Name	Institution/farmer	Region (town)	Farm – size, animals	Comments
Zhana Gadzheva	Director of Association for breeding of Bulgarian rhodope cow and Jersey.	Smolyan	Network of 16 farmers members with about 20-30 cattle each	pasture rented by municipality and private owners
Mariana Kehayova	Farmer	Devin	230 sheep	member of Smolyan sheep association
Elena Bochukova	Farmer	s.Orechovo	200 sheep;	28 ha grasslands, 10 ha meadows for hey
Georgi Tsigov	“Ekoagrobio “EOOD	Smolyan	sheep 350	
Krasimir Demirev	Farmer	s. Polyana	200 sheep.	17 ha grasslands
Zdravko Dzhidzhov	Farmer	s. Osikovo	150 sheep,	22 ha grasslands, 3 ha hey meadows. Normally buy additional hey for fodder.
Mincho Garbelov	Farmer	s. Smilyan	300 sheep	
Desislava Manoleva	Farmer	s. Smilyan	120 sheep	
Emil Kehayov	Farmer	s. Davidkovo	200 sheep	
Atanas Danchev	Farmer	Smolyan	400 sheep;	HNV farmlands , 25 ha for hey
Yuri Kartalov	Farmer	Tshepelare, Zornica	200 sheep, 220	pastures in Natura 2000,
Dimitar Dimitrov	Farmer	Svilengrad (Sakar mountain) - not Rhodope	234 goats	Rented municipality pastures - Natura 2000 - both birds and habitatats, HNV lands - 74 ha
Alexander Simeonov/Milen Kehayov	Farmers "Petro G" OOD company	Smolian	1050 sheep, 24 horses	has plan to set up own dairy, so far sell to a big dairy
Nikola Staykov		Progled village, Chepelare municipality	210 sheep, authohtonos Karakachanska sheep, certificate	Pastures and forestry, rented by municipality and private owners, 1800 m above sea level
Milkana Yordanova	Rodopa milk	Smilian village	Dairy - work with many small farmers	Produce tipical Rhodope cheese, and also swiss type cheese like gauda

Name	Institution/farmer	Region (town)	Farm – size, animals	Comments
Tsonka Odgakova	Director - Research center for scientific and applied service, Smolian town	Smolian	mixed farm - cattle, sheep, beehives, potato and grains	Can develop training for farmers and do scientific services for multifunktional grassland management. See additional info for the center
Responcible person for animal breeding	Research center fo animal breeding and agriculture	Smolian	mixed farm - cattle, sheep, beehives, potato and grains	Can develop training for farmers and do scientific services for multifunktional grassland management. See additional info for the center
Boriana Tsotcheva	Regional Directory "Agriculture"	Smolian		responsible authority for the region Smolian county - financial support and subsidies
Stefka Garova	Regional county administration	Smolian		responsible authority for the region Smolian county - administration, work closely with Regional Directory
Mariana Nedeleva	Regional agriculture advisory service	Smolian		governmental advices for farmers
Biser Bekyarov	Association for regional initiatives	Smilian village		NGO dealing with regional development, traditional local foods, manage the most succesfull long time project on local plants varieties like Smilian bean, Manage museum "Smilian bean and traditional culture in Smilian
Silvia Mladenova	NGO "'21 century"			NGO dealing with environmental issues, including biodiversity and sustainable land management
Andreana Andreeva	Project "Rhodope"			for the period 2004-2009 project supported by UNDP for sustainable development of Rhodope mountain - biodiversity, agricuculture, forestry
Speakers				
Assoc prof Vasil Nikolov	Agricultural University - Plovdiv		Will speck about grassland managemnt in Rhodope - specific opportunities	dealing with sustainble land management and authohtonnes animal breeds
Dragomir Zahariev	AGROLINK Association		short report on Grassland management	Specialisation "'Sustainable hay managemant in Kassel Univeristy – Witzenhausen

Workshop Agenda

TRINET Workshop

„Multifunctional pastures use with economical and ecological benefits"

Smolian, Bulgaria, March 26-27 2010

25.03 2010

Traveling from Plovdiv to Smolian about 15:30 -16:00 to Smolian. Arrival in Smilian village about 18:30-19:00. The overnight will be in a small family hotel belong to dairy "Rhodope milk". The farm can be visit next morning before workshop. Smilian village is 19 km from town of Smolian.

Dinner in dairy with traditional Rhodope meal.

26.03.2010

7:30 Breakfast

8:00 Visit dairy and small museum of local traditional milk production

8:45 travel to Smolian

Time		
9:30	Welcome	Svetla Nikolova, Agrolink Association
9:40	What is "TRINET", its philosophy	Eckhard Jedicke, TRINET-DBU
10:10	Grasslands in Bulgaria and their management – problems	Dragomir Zahariev, Agrolink Association
10:30	Introduction of participants	
11:00	Coffee break	
11:30	Practices on extensively land use and selling product as a quality 'green' product. Practices on direct marketing.	Brigitte Gerger
12:00	Good practices on extensively used grasslands	Johann Krutzler
12:30	Lunch	
13:30	Discussion on 'Where are the specific problems to conserve grasslands and meadows according to the TRINET philosophy?'	
14:30	Discussion on conclusions and follow-up activities. 'What could a possible TRINET follow-up project look like? What steps would need to be taken to build it up?'	
15:00	Discussion on 'Where are possibilities to build up projects according to the TRINET philosophy?'	TRINET
15:30	Selecting two or three themes, which should be elaborated further on in the workshop	TRINET
16:00	Coffee break	TRINET
16:30	Working groups concretely formulating the first steps to follow-up projects:	TRINET

	identification of the next steps to do, timetable.	
17:30	Plenary session	Svetla Nikolova, Agrolink Association
18:00	Closing the Workshop	Svetla Nikolova, Agrolink Association
19:00	Dinner	

27.03.2010

9 – 11 AM Visiting to Research Center with mixed farm – pastures, cows, sheep, bee, vegetables in town of Smolian. Please have a look short information about center.

11:00 Departure to Sofia

Pictures of the Trinet-workshop in Smolian

Central Balkans National Park

Questionnaire to study the attitudes and views of farmers and livestock owners who used the grasslands in CBNP

Name, surname, family name:	Georgi Pavlov Ivanov
Address:	Village of Ribaritza, Municipality of Teteven, ul. Bryazovo № 5
Contacts:	……
Are you an owner or shepherd?	livestock keeper and shepherd
What kind of livestock you keep?	sheep, goats, horses
How many of them are grazing in CBNP's pastures in summer time?	all sheep and horses
For what reason you are keeping livestock?	for livelihood and occupation
Who else in your family is practicing livestock keeping?	Wife and whole family
Is livestock keeping a major livelihood for you?	Yes
How you use / utilize the products – milk, meat, wool? Do you process the products by yourself or sell them to middlemen?	Milk is processed for family needs – diary products Meat and wool are purchased to middlemen
Since what year you take your livestock up in the park's area?	Between 1949 and 1958; Then from 1959 till 1992; And now since 2008.
Is the number of capita in the park constant each year?	No
Where in the park do you bivouac (name of the cabin / sheepfold / shelter, etc…?	*Kolev kravarnik* locality
What do you think about the CBNPD's procedure of issuing permits? What do you approve and what do you disapprove about it? What would you suggest on order to improve it and how this should happen?	No comments
How do you like the life conditions in the park's area - cabin, shelter? What could be improved? How, in your opinion, this may happen, etc.?	Each repair or maintenance of the shelter is done by us. Some things /costs should be covered by the park's authority. The road is in rather broken down.

Is there enough drinking water for your domestic animals in the area, where the pasture you use, is located?	Drinking water is enough
Do you have at present or have had in the past any conflicts with other shepherds in the park? What are they resulting from, according your point of view?	No, I have not.
What do you know about the area of the mountain, before the time it had been designated as a national park? Do you find it is well that there is a protected area in vicinity to your residential place? Why do you think so?	It used to be a territory where thousands of livestock capita had been kept. That occupation used to be the livelihood for about 70 % of the population of the village of Ribaritza; the *Bolovanya* Grazing Complex had been established, which had been operational for about 20 years. In my opinion it is good that there is a park close to the village of Ribarotza and I am one of its founders.
Is there any other thing, which has not been asked so far? Would you like to share it and comment?	I think that prohibition for grazing of goats in the park is irrelevant, and in forests in general, as these animals cause no damage.

1. Date: 20.7.2009
2. Park's officer who did the questionnaire: Stoyan Hristov, senior park's inspector, Chief ranger of PS Teteven
3. Duration of inquiry: 30 minutes

Workshop Agenda

TRINET Workshop
„Sub-alpine and Alpine pastures maintenance for a long-term livelihood and nature conservation"
Gabrovo, at the Information center of CBNP Directorate, Bulgaria
March 24 - 25 2010

Time	Activities	Speakers
9:30	Opening words	A deputy, member of the Agricultural commission in the parliament???
9:40	Welcome	Nela Rachevitz, Director, Central Balkan NP
9:50	Presentation of TRINET project and concept	Eckhard Jedicke
10:10	Current situation an problems of grazelands use	Anton Stanchev CBNPD
10:30	Introduction of participants	
11:00	Coffee break	
11:30	Problems connected with Bulgarian legislation concerning direct marketing on national level	NGO - Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds – Ms Mira Dikova (they are leaders of the working group that developed the BG hygienic standards for direct marketing of local products, but the document was not confirmed and signed by the BG Ministry of Agtilture and Food)
12:00	Problems connected with Bulgarian legislation concerning direct marketing on local level	BIOSELENA (Swiss funded and established in 1996) – chair Stoilko Apostolov
12:30	Lunch	
13:30	Good practices from Austria, Loipersdorf	Brigitte Gerger
14:00	Presentation of the *Bazov dial* cooperative (located in a village in the northern part of the park's outskirts) – activity, achievements, how the idea about cooperation arose, the process of its designation – advantages of joint work of small farmers, problems	Cooperative
14:30	**Discussion** – possibilities for establishment of cooperative of local small farmers and shepherds in the southern villages and small towns	
15:30	**Discussion** - Options and approaches for lobbying for government adoption of the Regulations for hygienic norms for direct marketing of products	
16:00	Coffee break	

	Discussion – methods for restoration and rehabilitation of sites for traditional products in as a tourist attraction and source of sustuanable livelihood.	TRINET
16:30	**Discussion** – Conclusion of the results and agreement on follow up activities	TRINET
17:30	Closing the Workshop	Ratchevitz
17:30	Departure of local participants	

Dinner for the TRINET guests in Gabrovo, accommodation in Gabrovo

25.03.2010
8: 30 Departure for the town of Kalofer (via Shipka mountain pass)
Visit of a dairy
Visit of a small mountain farm.

Workshop-concluding summary

The workshop took place in Information Center in Park Directorate, Gabrovo on 24 of March. Park Directorate have sent personal invitation to farmers, NGOs, Sheep cooperation, Institute of high mountain animal husbandry and farming, Trojan, Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Regional veterinary service. Representative from Ministry of Agriculture and Food didn't participate in the workshop.

There were 8 speakers (5 Bulgarian and 3 foreign)

Mr. Ivailo Nikolov - CBNP Directorate
Title of presentation – Condition of pastures in Central Balkan National Park. Known issues.
Key points made in their presentation -preview of the habitats in high mountain pastures in CBNP; general characteristic of habitats, habitat types object of grazing, Management of grazing area, regimes and norms, problems – fire, overgrazing

Mr. Nikolai Kolev – Sheep cooperation from Aprilci town
Title of presentation –Using of the pastures in the past and now
Key points made in their presentation – activity, achievements, how the idea about cooperation arose, the process of its designation – advantages of joint work of small farmers, using of the pastures in the past and now, problems from Rural Development Programme, 2007-2013

Mr. Cvetoslav Mihovski - Institute of high mountain animal husbandry and farming, Trojan
Title of presentation – Natural grassland association – problems and challenges
Key points made in their presentation- relevance, usability and advantages of natural grassland association, condition of meadows and pastures in Bulgaria, productivity, effectiveness, loading of pastures, problems in the management of pastures

Mrs. Miroslava Dikova- Bulgarian society for protection of birds
Title of presentation – Presentation of draft regulation for direct marketing of local products on national level
Key points made in their presentation – extract from draft regulation for direct marketing of local products particularly for milk products, examples from old Member State

Mr. Tencho Hristov – Bioselena NGO
Title of presentation – Traditional bio products,

Key points made in their presentation – procedure for bio certification, certificate, needed documents, hygiene requirement for processing of milk and milk products, examples from old Member State for direct marketing of milk products

Mr. Eckhard Jedicke – Trinet project
Title of presentation – TRINET project and concept
Key points made in their presentation – presentation of Trinet project- the main aims, partners, Trinet philosophy, possibilities for funding of Trinet projects

Mrs. Brigitte Gerger- Natura 2000 management/Trinet project
Mr. Johann Krutzler
Title of presentation – Good practices from Austria
Brigitte Gerger und Johann Krutzler showed two examples of grazing projects in the east of Austria. The Lafnitz valley is a natura2000 area with an unregulated lowland river. The meadows along the river war bayed by the state to protect the wild river character und Johann Krutzler startet the grazing of these meadows ten years ago. In the meantime all grasslands are mowed and the animals are held in big tent-stables. He also build up a biogas plant in which only the dung of the cows is gazed. He gets money for the mowing of the wetland meadows from the environmental program, for the biogas, which is delivered in the common grid and for the meat of his animals.
The second example was a common grazing land around of a moor. The tiny fields are used together. There are a lot of marketing activities to sell the meat of the "moorochsen", because the meat is of good quality and the price is high.

Twenty-two participants have attended in the workshop-Park officers, farmers, representatives from NGOs, sheep cooperative, Regional veterinary service, Institute of high mountain animal husbandry and farming. The first panel was focus management/ maintenance of high mountain pastures.

There were 6 presentations in the morning session. The main topic was conditions of high mountain meadows and pasture, management and maintenance of habitats, regimes and norms for grazing in the park. For Park Directorate this panel was with practical. Park Directorate has to start preparation of new management plan of the park. First we have to obtain some information for habitats after 10 years grazing in the park. In new management plan we should determine areas with different aims - to preserve wild nature and maintenance the habitats.
Most participants agreed on the need for clear and precise rules for grazing in the national park. They should include in the new management plan. It is possible to lay down test sites with different load of domestic animal. As a result of monitoring will be specified load of habitats and will lay down concrete rules and regimes in New Management plan.
The first panel was more interesting and useful for park officers. The management of pastures/habitats is a „hot" topic. Discussion from this panel will help Park Directorate in the process of preparation of New Management plan.

The second panel (afternoon session) was for direct marketing of local products, Bulgarian legislation on this topic. The farmers asked concrete questions on the topic related to the direct marketing of the local product. Bulgarian participants had possibility to get information about good examples from Austria.

Finally there was a discussion for possible follow up projects.
The participants discussed following themes:

- clear targets for grazing in national park plan
- management against shrub succession
- better coordination between ministries for environment and agriculture
- legal facilitation of small dairies
- higher proceeds by own marketing of certified eco-products
- traveling fellowships: exchange of experiences concerning usage of Alpine pastures

The idea of developing a particular project will be developed in the coming months and presented to the general Trinet workshop - May/June 2010

The second day Mrs. Gerger Mr. Jedicke and Mr. Krutzler with experts from Park Directorate visited farm in Kalofer town. We have had meeting with owner and taste local milk product. Then experts visited high- mountain pasture „Sedliuvetz" in Kalofer Park section. Park officers give short information for this region – flora, fauna, grazing areas.

Estonia

Scoping report

Introduction

Historically, Estonian landscape has a diverse pattern of semi natural habitats with rich flora and fauna. Several changes in rural economy over the last two decades have created a situation where major parts of the historically open habitats have been overgrown due to ceased or diminished human utilization. Initiatives from the Estonian Ministry of Environment and several EU projects have improved the situation during the last years. In 2009 there were about 22 000 ha of managed semi natural landscapes in Estonia from which about half were managed by grazing alone or grazing and mowing together. According to Estonian Animal Recording Centre there are 258 herds of beef cattle in Estonia (27.03.2010) and around 26 000 animals all together.

1. Background survey

Report was outsourced by Estonian Environmental Board about the cost-effectiveness of managing the semi-natural landscapes by grazing. As a result it was found that until recently, beef cattle was grown mainly on cultural pastures in Estonia. Specialized breeds suitable for managing semi-natural pastures (Herefords, Scottish highland cattle etc.) have only recently arrived to Estonia mainly through international projects and thanks to the governmental and EU agricultural support schemes. Raising beef cattle is not considered as independent agricultural industry in Estonia but mainly as a tool for managing semi-natural landscapes.

There is no traditional background for raising beef cattle in Estonia. Some farmers keep the cattle outside only during the vegetation period whereas others keep them outside all year around. Objectives for raising the cattle are also hugely different between different farmers. The ones who keep their cattle inside during the winter are mainly interested in selling the meat for profit where as others who keep their cattle outside all year around are interested in using the cattle for managing the semi-natural pastures. Lastly mentioned group is more concerned about keeping the cost of raising the cattle down than increment of the live bodyweight of the animal. Agricultural support payments are an important source of income for these farmers.

Main income for a farmer rises from the reproduction of the cattle, marketing the meat and agricultural support payment for managing the semi-natural pasture. Average selling price for the beef is 19 EEK/kg. Average weight of the 2 year old beef heifer is about 450 kg giving the selling price of 8500 EEK. Butchering costs around 600 EEK together with the transportation of the animals to the slaughterhouse.

When beef cattle is used to manage the semi-natural pastures on Natura 2000 network areas, the semi-natural landscape managing support payment is available for the farmers- 2910 EEK/ha. Considering that one animal assures the necessary grazing load for one hectare of semi natural pasture the support payment could in principle be accounted for one animal. In average there is 0,3-0,4 calf's born in the herd of beef cattle (bulls, cows and heifers) per animal each year. Market price for the calf is about 3000-4000 EEK (this is hypothetical as the market is not enough developed in Estonia) so it could be said that the profit from growth of the cattle is about 1000 EEK in year per animal.

Table 1: income and expenses for raising the beef cattle (kept outside only during vegetation period).

Income/expenses article	Income (EEK)	Expenses (EEK)
Cost of the animal [1]		2000
Hay		1400
Minerals		700
Veterinary services		500
Labor cost (dependant of the size of the cattle)		800
Cost of the infrastructure (dependant of the size of the cattle)		500
Transportation		400
Butchering		300
Increment of the live bodyweight	3000	
Reproduction	1000	
Agricultural support payment	2910	
Building fences (average of 30m/year with a cost of 20 EEK/m)		600
SUM	6910	7200

Calculations in table 1 show that if the cattle are numerous enough, managed capably and there are no expenses made for buying the cattle, farmers could make a small profit managing semi-natural pastures with cattle. Without the support payment, growing beef cattle is not economically profitable. To keep the income and expenses balanced it would also be necessary to support fence building. When cattle is kept outside all year around the expenses are reduced on the hay and infrastructure but the income from the increment of the live bodyweight is reduced also.

2. Interest groups in Estonia

Main identified interest groups in Estonia are:

9. Farmers growing beef cattle, milk cattle or sheep on semi-natural pastures.
10. Various commercial associations and non-profit associations involved in breeding, growing and introducing beef cattle, milk cattle and sheep.
11. Different commercial associations and non-profit associations involved in producing, handling and marketing products from organic farms.

Estonian Beef Breeders Association (Eesti Lihaveisekasvatajate Selts) - advancing the introducing the growing of beef cattle in Estonia, organizing and coordinating the breeding, consultation and training, international cooperation.
Estonian Highland Cattle Association (Mittetulundusühing Šoti Mägiveis) - popularizing Highland breed in Estonia, standing for members interests, getting in touch and keeping contact with similar organizations in Estonia and abroad.

[1] Cost is calculated as ¼ of the cost of the animal, as many animals are gained through different projects and support schemes.

Estonian Sheep Breeders Association (Eesti Lambakasvatajate Selts)- connecting farmers and organizations interested in breeding and growing sheep, organizing and coordinating the breeding, consultation and training, international cooperation.
Saaremaa Ecovillage (Saaremaa Ökoküla)- growing and breeding of sheep. Herd of around 1000 Estonian Blackhead sheep, 35 Suffolk sheep and 70 Gottland sheep ewes.
Estonian Organic (Eesti Mahe Tulundusühistu)- helping its members in producing, handling, marketing organic farming products and increase cost benefit. The associations field of activity ranges from collection and processing to storing and marketing organic farming products (grain, fruit and vegetable, dairy and meat).
Rakvere Meat Processing Plant (Rakvere Lihakombinaat)- Rakvere Meat Processing Plant is the biggest manufacturer of meat products in the Baltic states. Rakvere offers its products under several trademarks. Close to 50% of Estonian beef cattle is processed in Rakvere. In November 2006 Rakvere Meat Processing Factory brought a new line of production to the market under the label of ***Eesti Lihaveis*** (Estonian Angus Beef) where in cooperation with the Estonian Beef Breeders Association they offer the products that have been produced using the beef bred in Estonia. Animals are bred especially to have beef of high nutritional value with fat content of up to 5% in the best pits.

Logo of the Estonian Angus Beef trademark.

Märjamaa Slaughterhouse Commercial Association (Märjamaa Lihatööstus OÜ)- is founded by 32 local farmers to help with the slaughtering and selling of the organic meat. In association with Estonian Organic- beef and lamb of the local area is transported, slaughtered and processed. In the future there are also plans to develop the meat processing part.
Estonian ACB Vianco Commercial Association- is founded by beef cattle growers in order to make the processing of the meat easier and to improve the breeding.

3. Identifying the main weak points in growing cattle and sheep as a tool for managing semi natural landscapes in Estonia.

1. From the background survey and interaction with the farmers and other interest groups the main issues are identified.
2. Growing beef cattle in Estonia is not yet considered as an independent agricultural industry as the market is not enough developed to make it an economically profitable activity without the help from buying the animals and support payments.
3. Cost-effectiveness of growing cattle or sheep is low due to the difficulties of processing the meat; often the cost of transportation of the animal is high as the slaughterhouses are few and far apart.
4. Farmer is often the producer as well as the marketer of the meat; often the networking between different links from the producer to the final product is weak or non-existent.
5. Knowledge of the consumer is low about the high quality “meadow meat” products; there is no national brand or labeling developed to introduce such products to the consumer.

Workshop agenda

"Building up a central and eastern European cooperation in nature conservation-oriented grassland use- TRINET"

Seminar

„Meadow-meat production as a tool of managing semi-natural landscapes"

15-16 april 2010

Vanaõue, Viljandimaa, Estonia

Neljapäev 15. Aprill	
8.30-9.15	Arrival and morning coffee
9.15-9.30	Opening words and introduction
9.30-9.50	Project „Building up a central and eastern European cooperation in nature conservation-oriented grassland use – TRINET" introduction Anton Gazenbeek
9.50-10.10	Growing „meadow-meat" on semi-natural pastures- example from Austria. Johann Krutzler
10.10-10.30	Growing „meadow-meat" on semi-natural pastures- example from Sweden. Sven-Olov Borgegad
10.30-10.50	Small scale farming economics on semi-natural pastures- example from Estonia. Heikki Luhamaa, Estonian Environmental Board
10.50-11.10	Coffee break
11.10-11.30	Support payments on semi-natural landscapes. Mariell Jõesalu, Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board
11.30-11.50	Growing beef cattle in Estonia- progress and problems. Leino Vessart, Estonian Beef Breeders Association
11.50-12.10	Current situation of sheep growing in Estonia. Külli Vikat, Estonian Sheep Breeders Association
12.10-13.10	Lunch
13.10-13.30	Marketing the meat and live animals of Higland cattle in Estonia. Ardi Kadanik, Estonian Highland Cattle Association
13.30-13.50	Growing „meadow-meat" on semi-natural pastures- example from Findland. Iiro Ikkonen
13.50-14.10	Differences in processing and marketing regural cattle and beef cattle. Olavi Liblik, Märjamaa Slaughterhouse Commercial Association
14.10-14.30	Coffe break
14.30-17.30	Workshop „Current problems of Meadow-meat production and possibilities for the future"
17.30-18.00	Conclusions
18.00-19.00	Dinner

Reede 16. Aprill	
8.00-9.00	Breakfast
9.00-17.00	Fieldtrip to the local farms

Minutes of Workshop

MEMO: ESTONIAN TRINET SEMINAR

„Meadow-meat production as a tool of managing semi-natural landscapes“

1) BULLET POINTS OF THE ESTONIAN PRESENTATIONS

- Presentation 4

Small scale farming economics on semi-natural pastures- example from Estonia.
Heikki Luhamaa, Estonian Environmental Board

- Has been working with semi-natural landscape managing since 1997 and cattle breeding since 2006
- Coastal meadows are ideal pasture lands as the diversity of the landscape and vegetation guarantees high quality food for the cattle.
- There are also some problems when using coastal meadows for grazing: need of the land per animal is high (1ha per animal), looking after the cattle and building the fences is more expensive than on other type of pastures, difficult natural conditions (floods)
- Income from the grazing on semi-natural landscape: selling meat and live cattle, agricultural support payments (subsidy for managing semi-natural landscape, suckling cow subsidy, grazing subsidy, fence building subsidy)

Selling prices for the meat (EEK/KG) (Rakvere processing plant October 2009)

Quality class of the carcass	E	U	R	O	P
Fattiness of the carcass					
1	51	46	41	34.5	28
2	50.5	45.5	40.5	34	27.5
3	50	45	40	33.5	27
4	49.5	44.5	39.5	33	26.5
5	49	44	39	32.5	26

- One-time expenses needed: cost of the initial cattle, cattle managing equipment (fixating cage, collecting fences, grazing fences etc.) and tractor for carrying hay.
- Permanent expenses needed: hay for the winter, veterinary services, maintaining fences and other equipment, transportation (animals to the grazing area, hay etc.) and salary for the staff.
- Problems: selling price for the bull/cow calf is the same, half of the calf´s are bulls, prices for selling meat/live animals and subsides are staying same but costs are going up
- Winter hay is bought in, winter feeding area is away from the summer grazing area, need of the land per animal is high (1ha per animal)

- Presentation 5

Subsidies on semi-natural landscapes. Mariell Jõesalu, Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board

- Farmer can apply for semi-natural landscape managing subsidy for the land that: is in environmental registry, at least 0.1 ha in size and is situated in Natura 2000 network area. Area needs to be manageable by grazing or mowing. The border of the area needs to be clearly marked (fence for example). Subsidy is with 5 year obligation period.
- Subsidy for wooded meadow 3725 EEK/ha/year and other type of semi-natural landscape 2900 EEK/ha/year
- History of the subsidy:
  2007- 703 applicants, 14757 ha- payments made 43 300 000 EEK;
  2008- 741 applicants, 17746 ha- payments made 51 700 000 EEK;
  2009- 813 applicants, 20332 ha- payments made 59 100 000 EEK
- Subsidy for growing endangered animals:
  Estonian breed horse- 2920 EEK/year (payments made 2009 about 1 500 000 EEK),
  Estonian "Tori" breed horse- 2920 EEK/year (payments made 2009 about 3 650 000 EEK EEK),
  Estonian breed work horse- 3115 EEK/year (payments made 2009 about 450 000 EEK),
  Estonian beef cattle- 3070 EEK/year (payments made 2009 about 2 140 000 EEK)
- Subsidy for organically farmed animals 500 EEK/animal/year. Payments made in 2009- 8 700 000
- Subsidy for grazing 800 EEK/animal/year. Payments made in 2009- 79 201 000
- Subsidy for suckling cows 997,6 EEK/animal/year. Payments made in 2009- 17 541 000
- Subsidy for sheep growing 143,6 EEK/animal/year. Payments made in 2009- 6 243 000
  All the animals need to be registered with Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board and marked.

- Presentation 6

Growing beef cattle in Estonia- progress and problems. Leino Vessart, Estonian Beef Breeders Association

- First beef cattle arrived to Estonia in 1978 (Hereford cattle)
- By the end of the soviet time the was around 2000 Hereford cattle is Estonia
- During the reforms most of them were slaughtered
- Around 800 cattle remained and this was the starting point of Estonian beef cattle growing

Number of beef cattle from 2003 in Estonia.

Breed	1.08.2003	30.06.2004	1.01.2005	22.08.2006	14.02.2007	1.01.2008	1.01.2009	1.01.2010	31.03.2010
Hereford	3052	3946	3878	5573	5238	6239	7319	8537	**8974**
Limousine	2364	3566	3603	5192	5087	6189	6832	7915	**8141**
Aberdeen	2343	3456	3629	5228	5215	6623	7779	9269	**9530**
Charolais	192	324	301	551	607	816	1160	1646	**1829**
Higland c.	121	160	171	431	474	650	942	1191	**1204**
Piedmontese	100	104	108	274	292	344	439	395	**412**
Blonde d'Acquitaine	3	67	123	258	299	561	941	1281	**1364**
Belgian Blue	1	3	15	245	344	575	1052	1573	**1608**
Simmental	-	19	38	232	284	691	1335	1890	**2008**

Dexter	-	2	6	4	5	10	11	10	**15**
Galloway	-	-	-	-	4	4	5	18	**28**
Aubrac									**10**
Short horn								6	**7**
Sum	**8174**	**11645**	**11872**	**17988**	**17849**	**22702**	**27815**	**33731**	**35130**
Change from previous year		3471	227	6116	-139	4853	5113	5916	**1399**

- In 1995 first Limousine and Aberdeen Angus cattle arrived to Estonia
- Later other breeds arrived: Highland cattle, Charolais, Blonde d'Acquitaine etc.
- By now there are 13 different breeds of beef cattle grown in Estonia and all together 35130 animals

Number of beefcattle in different regions in Estonia since 2003.

County	**1.08.2003**	**28.11.2005**	**23.02.2006**	**14.02.2007**	**1.01.2008**	**1.01.2009**	**1.01.2010**	**31.03.2010**
Saare (largest island)	1211	1711	1696	2000	2622	3436	4331	4432
Lääne (Western Estonia)	1023	2280	2238	2668	3061	3553	4067	4257
Rapla	1015	1491	1455	1696	2206	2889	3332	3585
Pärnu	879	1325	1285	1634	2119	2596	2984	3224
Viljandi	642	1011	995	1176	1266	1675	2092	2141
Lääne-Viru	575	1200	1212	1576	1838	2206	2746	2846
Hiiumaa	541	1133	1116	1633	2023	2092	2562	2675
Harju	517	1013	953	1501	1909	2191	2445	2470
Tartu	420	308	300	404	668	665	636	602
Võru	346	1035	976	1046	1444	1790	2297	2312
Valga	332	727	738	812	1034	1322	1724	1833
Jõgeva	222	178	396	452	727	759	957	966
Ida-Viru	171	301	334	481	599	831	991	1059
Järva	153	224	230	313	599	1005	1466	1600
Põlva	129	334	339	457	587	805	1101	1128
Sum:	**8176**	**14271**	**14263**	**17849**	**22702**	**27815**	**33731**	**35130**

- Beef cattle herds in Estonia in 2010

1. More than 500 beef cattle- 1 herd
2. 300- 400 beef cattle- 6 herds
3. 200 - 300 beef cattle- 10 herds
4. 100- 200 beef cattle- 29 herds

5. 50 – 100 beef cattle – 62 herds
6. 1 - 50 beef cattle- 143 herds

- Success in beef cattle breeding in Estonia
  Quick development during last decade
  13 different breeds now in Estonia, already it is clear that some breeds are better in Estonian conditions
  Support for local communities – creating jobs close to home
  Managing semi-natural landscapes
  Establishing Estonian Beef Breeders Association – central role in beef breeding development
  Thanks to beef breeding the organic farming has also popularized
  Creating "Estonian beef" brand
  System for marketing live cattle:
  Producer- farmer represented by Estonian Beef Breeders Association
  Transportation- Estonian ACB Vianco
  Processing- Rakvere processing plant

- Problems in beef cattle breeding in Estonia
  Too small quota for suckling cow subsidy in Estonia- 13 416 suckling cows (applications 2009 - 20 187)
  That brings down the subsidy paid per animal (997 per animal in 2009)
  Durative breeding as method for changing from milk cattle to beef cattle
  Crossbreeding between different beef cattle breeds- cannot sell pure breed animals
  As the beef cattle breeding in Estonia is still quite new and the number of animals is low, most of the breeding bulls are imported from abroad (France, Sweden, Belgium, Denmark etc.)
  Stable production all year around is not developed – all producers want to sell in autumn

- Presentation 7

Current situation of sheep growing in Estonia. Külli Vikat, Estonian Sheep Breeders Association

- Estonian Sheep Breeders Association has 171 members, there are also other regional associations for sheep breeders in Estonia
- There are around 950 sheep farmers in Estonia and all together around 70 000 sheep
- Involved in breeding at the moment about 35 herds with 5500 sheep
- Main breeding activity with two Estonian breeds (blackhead sheep and whitehead sheep)
- Breeds grown in Estonia: Estonian blackhead, Suffolk, Oksforddaun, German blackhead, Gotland sheep, Island sheep, Estonian whitehead, Teksel, Dala, Dorset, Finnish sheep, Estonian landsheep, also special wool sheep and milk sheep.
- Growing sheep on coastal meadows and alvars: most suitable are Estonian breeds.
- Biggest problem is the parasites- land is not ploughed and same area is used for long time.
- Some areas are isolated (small islets)- damage by people/other animals, young animals die in hard conditions, live as semi-wild
- Tradition of herding on the islets is lost in many areas
- Marketing of the sheep in Estonia is easy, because processors are interested but there is not enough sheep
- Marketing of the sheep in Estonia is hard, because when the amount are small the processing is process is delayed, can only sell young animals 30-50 kg

- It is possible to take the sheep to be slaughtered into different slaughterhouses, only organic slaughterhouse (Märjamaa) pays around 50 EEK/kg or export to other EU countries (Germany 21-22 EEK/kg for example)
- Complications: price is not satisfactory
- Possible solutions: mobile slaughterhouse, local food projects and promotion, export opportunities with higher price, slaughtering and selling meat at home (when proper facilities), using meat breeds- more meat/more profit, product development, more knowledge about breeding sheep, increasing the number of sheep in Estonia, organic farming- more profit, achieving the trust of the customer
- All sheep breeders want: more sheep but not too big herds (distributed), more meat per sheep, better product development and advertising

„Meadow-meat production as a tool of managing semi-natural landscapes“

MAIN PROBLEMS BROUGHT OUT

PRODUCTION

LAND USE

- Due to the change in the law recently, farmers who were leasing land from the Environmental Board, could not extend the contract but had to participate in the new highest bidder lease competition. When semi-natural pastures/meadows are leased to the farmers the price is not the main criteria considered. People who already manage the area, people from the area and people with previous experience are preferred. Only when all these criteria are equal the price is considered. (This problem is solved by now by the change in the law. People with existing leases can extend it without participating in the highest bidder competition. People who want to start new lease will need to participate in the competition.)
- Privately owned land (even if not managed) can´t be used by other farmer if the owners of the land doesn´t agree with that. There is some experience that deals are made between land owner and farmer who manages the land. For example on the Isle of Kihnu land owner gets 50% of the subsidy and the farmer who brings their animal to graze on the land gets other 50%. In many areas the land owner however doesn´t agree with this kind of arrangements.

SUPPORT SCHEMES PAYMENTS NOT HIGH ENOUG

- Support payments and subsidies are not big enough to cover the expenses made for managing semi-natural landscapes. Calculations and experience shows that it takes 9-10 years of work to break even. That is not encouraging people to take up 5 year subsidy obligation periods (if farmer can´t manage the area he signed up for he needs to return the subsidy for the previous years as well). Managing semi-natural landscapes is profitable only when initial investment is not required (animals and necessary equipment from the projects) and recurring costs are well managed.

REGULATIONS ON ORGANIC FARMING TOO COMPLICATED AND STRICT

- Mani examples brought forward by farmers where unnecessarily strict or complicated regulations are applied. For example the rule that if non organic farmland is bordering organic farmland there needs to be hedge planted in between them to stop any herbicide influence (even if the there is no herbicide used on non organic farmland or if it is abandoned).

VETERINARY SERVICE OFTEN INADEQUATE

- Veterinary service often focused to help household pets not cattle and sheep. Knowledge and training is often inadequate.

NO UP TO DATE HANDBOOK FOR BREEDING SHEEP/BEEF CATTLE

- There is no recent publication of handbook available for the farmer beginning sheep/beef cattle breeding. New breeds are brought to Estonia and farmers' don´t have enough information how to properly manage these breeds.

EU REGULATIONS

- Carcass disposal regulations too strict. There is just 1 carcass disposal plant in Estonia and it causes transport problems (for example from islands).
- Regulations about fodder and other feed too strict. Often the extra feeding during winter problematic (especially on semi-natural landscapes).

PROCESSING

- HIGH PRICE OF THE TRANSPORTATION

  Transporting animals to the slaughterhouses is expensive. There are around 20 small and 4 large slaughterhouses in Estonia. As it is usually more hassle to deal with nearby small slaughterhouses, animals are taken to the far away larger slaughterhouses and that raises the cost of slaughtering.

- CO-OPERATION BETWEEN PRODUCERS

  This is problematic especially among sheep breeders. There is demand for the sheep meat but the amounts are not large enough to get large slaughterhouses interested. Sheep managing should be changed.

- BIG ENOUGH/YEAR AROUND PRODUCTION

  There is a need for big enough and all year around beef/sheep production to meet consumer/slaughterhouse needs (Like Estonian Beef Breeders Association, ABC Vianco and Rakvere marketing scheme).

MARKETING

- HOME MARKETING

  It is often more profitable to market meat in small scale from farm but it is not allowed by law/EU regulations.

- SLAUGHTERHOUSES

  Differences in meat quality evaluation system between small and big slaughterhouses. Small slaughterhouses do not pay extra for high quality „meadow-meat“. Not all slaughterhouses accept sheeps. Lot of meat is wasted in the slaughterhouses (about 60% of the live weight of the cattle is used). There is a need for better training of the slaughterhouse workers.

- KNOWLEDGE OF THE CONSUMER

  There is no national stradegy for marketing „meadow-meat“- quality label.
  There is a need for popularizing the products for the consumer.
  There is a need for added value products producing.
  There is a need for marketing chains (kitchens, restaurants, shops etc.)

POSSIBLE FOLLOW-UP PROJECT IDEAS OFFERED

1) Mobile slaughterhouse to reduce slaughtering costs in remote areas
2) Translating and publishing a handbook
3) Added value product development together with brand development and „meadow-meat“ popularizing campain (togehter with shops/restaurants)
4) Excursions to the other countries slaughterhouses to see how it is done elsewhere
5) Finding opportuinities to market hay, manure, wool, sheepskins etc.

NATIONAL LEVEL ACTIVITIES

6) Land problem- negotiations with private owners to allow grazing on their unmanaged land – on going process
7) Looking over the main problems in EU regulations and explaining the need for change (Co-operating with the Ministry of Agriculture)
8) Looking over the support paiment schemes if anyting could be done to change the situation (Co-operating with the Ministry of Agriculture)
9) Better understanding and co-operation promoting between the producer and slaughterhouses, if small slaughterhouses could sell „meadow meat“ with higher price they could also give better price for the producer

HUNGARY

Scoping – possible partners for projects

Nimfea Nature Conservation Association: For environmental targets with rural development in Túrkeve: Specific objectives of our Landscape Rehabilitation and Regional Development Program are:

- Empowering the local community by enhancing the human and institutional capacity with training, awareness-raising activities and establishing personal contacts
- Strengthening the local identity through among others organizing exhibitions, regular media appearances and publications on local natural and cultural values, including traditional meals, costumes, handicrafts, etc.
- Ensuring opportunities for further involvement for the community, so that the development of the program is based on community interest, public participation and self-governance
- Establishing the necessary legal, institutional and financial conditions for a self-sustaining system of keeping and grazing animals, together with the required infrastructure (purchase of pasture, renovation of barns, support to farmers, promotion and marketing of ecological products, etc)
- The nature conservation benefits of the program result from the sustainability of the used landscape management practices. However, in the case of certain species targeted conservation measures are also necessary. Changes in the population of valuable species are the most important indicators of our complex program.

Somogy Nature Conservation Organisation: The Green Corridor Public Foundation was funded in August 1, 1995 by the local government of Somogyfajsz, Somogy Provincial Association for Nature Conservation and 4 private persons.
The Public Foundation mostly acts in Inner-Somogy, but also participates in regional, national and international programmes. In total, it manages about 300 hectares of land owned or rented meadows and about 500 hectares of ponds. The meadows are managed by extensive grazing by traditional Hungarian breeds (Hungarian Grey Cattle and Racka Sheep), breeding, husbandry, and extensive pasture management. Ponds are managed by extensive fishing.

Mezőcsáti Kistérség Circle of Farmers: Borsodi Mezőség kistérség - Mezőcsát: the Cötkény Project nowadays (Rural development from bottom-view): The Cötkény project exists from 1993, and from 1999 it became a complex network with the participation of the local governments. In 2002, on the Natura 2000 trade-political conference (in Brussels) the WWF European Political Class suggested the Borsodi Mezőség's Agricultural-transformation and Rural Development Program as the exemplary example for the sustainable rural landscape development. From 2002, the area got into the Objective Area of the Experimental Agricultural-environmental Paying Zone to the Otis tarda target-project. This gave impetus and faith to the local people. For today, this gives the base of their income and their wish to quit has gone. The goals of the Alliance and its organisational successors are the rehabilitation of the environment, economy and society. Its last intention is the realization of sustainable development and the retention of the population.

Bihar Public Foundation– Hortobágy National Park Directorate**:** The environmental importance of the lawn grasslands in Bihar**:** Bihar Public Foundation owns and manages more than 1100 hectares of land in Bihar and southern Nyirseg that provide habitat to protected and endangered species. The Bihar region is characterised by a mosaic of meadows, tillages and fallows. Bihar Public Foundation manages nearly 500 hectares of fishponds at the Biharugra fishponds. This area is one of the most important waterbird habitats in the country, a wetland of international importance.

Pro Vértes Public Foundation – Danube-Ipoly National Park Directorate: The predecessor of the Public Foundation – Pro Vértes Foundation for Nature Conservation – was established in 1991, in order to solve the nature protection issues arising in the Vértes region within a not-for-profits frame. It was transformed into a Public Foundation in 1994, and it operates as a prominently public benefit organization since 1998. Approximately 75% of the land property is grassland, the other areas are forested, providing nesting places, and plough lands, providing feeding grounds.

Tiszatáj Public Foundation – Bükk National Park Directorate: Tiszatáj Environmental and Nature Protection Public Foundation was established in 1995 by the Hungarian Ornithological and Nature Protection Society and the municipality of Tiszadob. Among the activities of the Public Foundation there are:

- Ensuring the long-term protection of natural values by getting proprietary rights;
- Nature protection aspect management of the areas and landscape rehabilitation of the areas rich in natural values;
- Active protection of protected animal and plant species;
- The operation of a shelter and a hospital for injured and ill wild animals;
- Environmental education and awareness-raising;
- Environmental and ecological aspect development of disadvantageous regions;
- Application and promotion of traditional farming methods.

Agenda of the TRINET workshop in Hungary

Environmental protecting treatments of grasslands with the partnership of the community
International nature conservation seminary
Túrkeve, 2009 – november 6-8.

Friday:
1330: Arrival to the venue of the seminar, take the accommodation, getting acquainted, registration
1400: Trip by horse carriage to the Kőrös-Maros National Park (Csejt-puszta, Túrkedd) and to the scene of the Landscape Rehabilitation Area in Túrkeve (Pásztó-puszta). Guiding provided by ANTAL SZÉLL, the employee of the a Körös-Maros National Park, ZSÓFIA FÁBIÁN the Hungarian coordinator of TRINET project, BENEDEK R. SALLAI and ÁKOS MONOKI from Nimfea Environmental and Nature Conservation Association.
1730 Arrival back to the venue of the seminar, Fekete István Education Centre.
1800 Welcome speech, toast and traditional Hungarian *pálinka* (fruit-distilled spirit) tasting
1900 Gastronomic reception also for vegetarians from native animal types, ecological products and taste of international wines – **please bring your own specialties!**

Saturday:
Chair of the morning program: ZSUZSANNA FLACHNER, a president of CEEweb; MTA TAKI and The Alliance for the Living Tisza
9:00 ZSÓFIA FÁBIÁN, the Hungarian coordinator of TRINET project, Nimfea Environmental and Nature Conservation Association, hostess: Shortly introduce the Trinet Project and our foreign guests
910 ANTON GAZENBEEK, the international coordinator of TRINET Project: Introduction

of TRINET Project
915 TIBOR TÖMÖSVÁRY, Somogy Nature Conservation Organisation: **Conservation of landscapes and nature**
940 ATTILA SÁRVÁRI, Representative of the Mezőcsáti Kistérség Circle of Farmers: **Borsodi Mezőség kistérség - Mezőcsát: the Cötkény Project nowadays (Rural development from bottom-view)**
1005 ANDRÁS VASSAS, Bihar Public Foundation– Hortobágy National Park Directorate**: The environmental importance of the grasslands in Bihar**
1030 LEVENTE VISZLÓ, Pro Vértes Public Foundation – Danube-Ipoly National Park Directorate: **Conservation-oriented mowing practices in Vértes**
1100 Questions, opinions
1130 Coffee break
1200 MIHÁLY BODNÁR, Tiszatáj Public Foundation – Bükk National Park Directorate: **Habitat management and the conservation of grasslands for Great Bustards in Borsodi-Mezőség**
1225 PÉTER BALOGH, Nagykörűért Foundation, Landscape Rehabilitation Project in Nagykörű: **Landscape-farming in Nagykörű formerly and now**
1250 BENEDEK R. SALLAI, Nimfea Environmental and Nature Conservation Association: **Rural development for nature conservation objectives in Túrkeve**
1315 Questions, opinions
1400 Lunch break
Chair of the afternoon program: ÁKOS MONOKI, Nimfea Environmental and Nature Conservation Association
1530 BÉLA HABARICS, Szatmár-Bereg Landscape-protection Area: **Grassland management in Szatmár-Bereg Landscape-protecting Area**
1555 ZOLTÁN ECSEDI, Hortobágy Environmental Association: **Habitat management in the Hortobágy within the Nagy-Vókonyai LIFE Program**
1620 REBEKA SZABÓ, Institute of Ecology and Botany: **Experiences of the Pannon LIFE Project in connection with the usage of grasslands**
1645 Questions, opinions
1710 KATALIN MARGÓCZI, University of Szeged: **Restoration of grasslands or succession of uncultivated lands – few thoughts and case study**
1735 DR. TAMÁS BARANYI, individual farmer: **Grassland usage and treatment "under the burden of nature conservation"**
1800 ANDRÁS MÁTÉ, Kiskunság National Park Directorate: **Management of sand steppes in the Kiskunság National Park**
1825 ISTVÁN KAPOCSI, Hortobágy National Park: **Grassland usage and nature conservation in Hortobágyi National Park**
1850 ATTILA HUBER, Aggtelek National Park Directorate**: Grassland habitat management in Aggtelek National Park**
1920 Questions, opinions
1930 ANTON GAZENBEEK, coordinator of the Trinet Project: **Acknowledgement for the speakers and thought-provoking introduction to TRINET Project**
1950 Dinner – music banquet – informal talking – viewing of the posters

Sunday:
Forum for those who are interested in the TRINET Project
830 ANTON GAZENBEEK**: TRINET Project and possibilities for getting involved**
945 Questions
1000 **„Wise agriculture or nature conservation?"** – or **„nature conservation: is it an objective or an indicator?"** – panel discussion

Chair of the panel discussion: ATTILA MOLNÁR, Nimfea Environmental and Nature Conservation Association

Keynote lectures:

ANDRÁS MÁTÉ, Kiskunság National Park Directorate: **Environmental protecting "vs" agriculture**

PÉTER KAJNER, member of Board of the Alliance for the Living Tisza and the colleague of the Parliamentary Commissioner (ombudsman) for the Future Generation**: "Let's start on foot…" Community initiatives for farming that cooperates with nature**

IVÁN GYULAI, Ecological Institute for Sustainable Development: **Agro-business and sustainability**

From 1230: Open-ended program: after a modest working lunch forum and discussion about TRINET project (ANTON GAZENBEEK)

Summary of TRINET pre-implementation workshop in Hungary, Nov. 6-8 2009.

Main current problems in Hungary raised during the workshop:

- The loss of semi-natural grasslands in Hungary is enormous. For instance, sand steppic grasslands would potentially cover 500,000 ha but only 40,000 ha are left – in Kiskunsag alone there were 200,000 ha of such sand grasslands in the 18th century, now only 12,500 ha.
- Grazing herds and flocks, guided by herdsmen, are almost archetypically Hungarian, but have largely disappeared, already during the collectivization of agriculture after the 1950s, a process accelerated by the regime change in the 1980s. There was a dramatic collapse of the Hungarian livestock numbers after 1990, when the withdrawal of the guaranteed prices under socialism made livestock economically non-viable. From 1992 to 1994 slaughterhouses in Hungary worked non-stop slaughtering most of the national hard and dumping the meat on the European market. The vastly reduced numbers of livestock cause problems for grazing management. Abandoned grazing lands, when not converted to arable land, have become covered in succession vegetation.
- Afforestation, stimulated since 2002 by subsidies, has also destroyed many grasslands, e.g. in Szatmar-Bereg region (NE Hungary)
- The Alföld, or east Hungarian puszta, is becoming too dry because groundwater levels are falling (too much water extracted for irrigation). Natural flooding has been much reduced by river regulation. Drainage channels criss-crossing the land (to allow arable crops) add to the problem – they are often so deep and steep that livestock can't drink from them.
- Hungarian prohibition on selling land to foreigners will soon end!
- In the Hungarian system, the National Parks are at the same time the regional agents of the central Environment Ministry (they have competence within their region for implementing nature conservation law, for Natura 2000 etc) and the whole country is thus divided between the different National Parks. The Parks are given biodiversity objectives to achieve by the Ministry and this is one of the reasons why since the early 1990s they have been systematically buying up large areas of land (land you own and control is one of the surest ways of achieving the imposed biodiversity objectives). The land owned by the parks (such as grasslands) is often made available to farmers to use, according to strict prescriptions. However, the regulations have been changed (under the influence of policies based on economic liberalism) and the Parks are now required to hand out the land after a call for tenders, to the successful tenderer. This means they can't automatically continue to work with farmers with whom they have a good relationship and who use the land well (yet, historically, when the Parks were buying up land, the informal and oral deal with the local farmers was that they would always get access to the land). Moreover, the rules for giving land use contracts to farmers have become quite rigid and exclude several categories of farmers. Finally, before 2005 the Parks could charge very low rents for their land to the farmers, to help them, but they are now obliged to charge market rents.

- A major problem is that since 2005 the National Park Directorates are no longer public authorities. This has many consequences, all negative in terms of protecting grasslands. Until 2006, the National Park authorities were responsible for deciding whether a landowner could change his land from say, grass to arable. Now the land zoning authorities decide – they *should* consult the National Park if there is any effect on nature conservation values. Decree 362/2000 is the document (1000 pages long) which sets down all the procedures all public bodies must follow, it is full of stipulations which reflect the interests of certain powerful political lobbies. For instance, it is forbidden to build in semi-natural landscapes like species-rich grasslands and marshes. Previously, the Park, as authority, approved/disapproved any plans for building there, but now it is the notary who is supposed to warn buyers of such land against building on it ….Some things don't even have to be notified in advance, but can simply be done and then reported *a posteriori.* The Park can then react, but the rules don't say within which time, which weakens its position. Moreover, because these are now defined as civil law matters and the park is not an authority, if the park considers nature values have been damaged, all it can do is sue – this takes years and if the opponent is a big investor with expensive lawyers….
- It also means that the land use contracts with farmers are harder to enforce. When the Park was an authority it could *impose* prescriptions and terminate land use contracts; now the Park is only legally like a private body and the contract is a civil law matter – which means a dispute with a farmer who is not using the land well becomes a court procedure with problems of proving the farmer is in breach of contract…..
- To qualify for special agri-environment schemes, land has to be declared 'high ecological value land' (MTET land). The area recognized as MTET has increased steadily from 2003 onwards. The advantage of an MTET is that farmers must follow prescriptions laid down by the nature authorities (if they do not, a penalty can be imposed), but there are disadvantages too: the prescriptions reduce the management options and exclude many potentially interested farmers who can't or won't adhere to the exact prescriptions (for instance, in Kiskunsag the MTET for the steppic sand grasslands prescribes a minimum number of animals – 0.2 GVE/ha); farmers can't build their houses and sheds where it is most useful for them and even when the regional nature authorities agree the shed should be built at the spot the farmer wants, it proves impossible to persuade the higher authorities to relax these regulations.
- Agri-environment schemes and contracts are too rigid. At the workshop, both farmers and nature conservationists complained that they could not modulate mowing dates in function of the weather, bird behavior etc. Prohibitions on manuring will lead to long-term loss of soil fertility.
- The persons who inspect and control agri-environment don't always understand nature conservation – an additional problem. They inspect 1, 2 x year and this is perceived by the farmers as an 'attack'. What is needed is inspection which is more like cooperation to achieve a common goal, otherwise farmers will behave like soldiers in the military: they do it because they have to and fear punishment.
- Projects for grassland restoration are hindered by a very complicated and slow administrative system, which charges fees for all sorts of permits.
- (it was even said that the agri-environment inspection and the permit bureaucracy are both symptoms of a general Hungarian problem: the old top-down socialist system has simply continued in the public sector. It needs to be reformed and made more consultative)
- From the presentations, it seems that in practice the agricultural corporations which took over from the socialist collective farms, are not interested in ecological land management. Individual private farmers are easier to talk to and convince. But many individual farmers are too old (their experience of pre-socialist agriculture is very valuable and should not be lost!) or else they have been so 'brainwashed' by collectivization that it is difficult for them to see the advantage of working non-intensively.
- Judging by the presentations, a good deal of technical knowledge of grassland restoration and management already exists (different tools and machines/mowing regimes and their effect on biodiversity) or has been experimented with (water buffaloes to graze areas which are regularly flooded, goats to clear land of Robinia)

- Restoration and management by burning seems to be controversial. It used to be very common farmer practice, but is now banned (derogations can be asked and obtained). Conservationists are experimenting with it.
- The (obligatory?) guidelines for managing Annex I habitats which are issued by the ministry limit the options too much: for instance, for sand grasslands only mowing or grazing are given as options (not burning, though it gives good results, according to the site manager from Kiskunsag).

LATVIA

Scoping Report

Local initiatives and stakeholder networks which can be used as starting points for TRINET follow-up projects

Dviete Municipal union (Dvietes senlejas pagastu apvienība)

The key objectives of the union are protection and conservation of biodiversity and heritage value, and preservation of traditional agricultural landscapes in Dviete river valley. Union also works to promote development of ecotourism in region. Eco- education and information are carried out in close collaboration with Daugavpils University and Institute of Limnology.

Rural Partnership Northern Gauja (Biedrība "Lauku partnerība Ziemeļgauja")

The foundation of the society is aimed to facilitate sustainable development of the territory and to improve the life quality of the population.

The members of the "Rural Partnership Northern Gauja" are Valka and Alūksne Region municipalities, NGOs, business persons (also farmers) and physical persons. Nine municipalities situated in the protected landscape area "Northern Gauja" and three municipalities share their border with Natura 2000 site.
The key objectives of the partnership are elaboration of the strategy for sustainable development of the territory and support for its implementation, promotion of the local population initiative focused on life quality improvement and environmental development, contribution to the implementation of the management plan for the Natura 2000 territory "Northern Gauja" and other especially protected nature territories, coordination and raising of financial, material and other resources for achievement of the partnership goals.

Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture (Latvijas Bioloģiskās lauksaimniecības asociācija**)**
Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture (ALOA) was founded in April 7, 1995. It is a professional organisation in the framework of which people producing, processing and selling organic agriculture products as well as people supporting organic movement have been united.
Targets: Unite organic agriculture organisations in order to:

1. Together look for production improvement opportunities;
2. Develop market policy and find marketing opportunities for organic output;
3. Establish educational system and improve educational and training opportunities for organic farmers;
4. Inform the society about the role of natural products in the maintenance of health;
5. Go farming themselves and popularise the use of sustainable agricultural methods friendly to the environment;
6. Attach to Association people from different fields of activities having been interested in organic agriculture.
7. Facilitate quality food production.

Cooperate with the Ministries of Agriculture and Environment and specialists of other ministries, organizations and mass media, which are interested in the development and realization of household management methods friendly to the environment, diversifying employment in the countryside and realizing wholesome domicile policies in Latvia. In collaboration with scientists and educational specialists conduct research on the use of agricultural methods used in organic agriculture, popularize application of these methods, participate in the establishment of demonstration and training farms and organising seminars and conferences.

Tasks:

1. Facilitate organic products supply to consumers.
2. Inform and educate society about organic agriculture and its perspectives, environmental problems, the role of organically produced food thus securing health of the society in the world and in Latvia.
3. Moving proposals in institutions for developing legislation with regard to the improvement of organic agriculture.
4. Ensure participation of the representatives of Association in the work of State authority and administration.
5. Promote cooperation between the members of Association and social organizations in Latvia and abroad.
6. Every member must assume responsibility for keeping prestige of the Association avoiding dishonest way of farming and lessened belief of society in organically produced food.
7. Provide training opportunities for Latvia's farmers and food producers to build their knowledge in organic food production collaborating with educational institutions in Latvia;
8. Encourage elaboration and realization of various projects connected with organic agriculture.

Cooperation Council of Farmers Organisations (Lauksaimnieku organizāciju sadarbības padome)

The Cooperation Council of Farmers Organisations (CCFO) established in 2000 ensures an effective information exchange between the farmers' institutions and the Ministry of Agriculture. The Council is a consultative institution uniting non-governmental organisations of national agricultural producers and processors of different levels. One of the tasks of the Council is to promote discussions between the farmers' organisations and the Ministry of Agriculture as well as other public institutions on topical agricultural issues. Representatives of the CCFO can participate in working groups for drafting of legal acts as well as submit proposals for amendments to the regulatory acts on agriculture. Producers have the possibility to meet at least once a month and discuss the topical issues with the Minister for Agriculture. Currently, the Cooperation Council of Farmers' Organisations unites 48 producer organisations.

Latvian Rural Advisory and Training Centre (Latvijas lauku konsultāciju un izglītības centrs)

Main objectives of Latvian Rural Advisory and Training Centre are:

1. Facilitation of rural development, increase of professional and economic knowledge of rural entrepreneurs.
2. Organisation of consulting services and training in all Latvia's districts.
3. Increase of competitiveness of rural inhabitants in the European Union.
4. Organise post-graduate education of the staff of institutions reporting to the Ministry of Agriculture.

Latvian Rural Forum (Latvijas lauku forums)

The mission of Latvian Rural Forum **(LRF) is to promote balanced development of Latvian rural territories in order to create it as a place where contented people live, able to meet their economical and social needs in the place of their residence. Thirty-two member organizations are united in LRF. Most or member organizations are** Rural Partnerships established under LEADER+ Programme.

State Rural Network (Valsts lauku tīkls)

Main objective is facilitation of close cooperation between organisations involved in rural development. **State Rural Network (SRN) promotes participation of governing bodies and NGOs in Rural Development Programme to secure exchange of information and best experiences, and to provide educational programming for local action groups and technical assistance for inter-and trans-national cooperation.**

Recommendations for follow-up work

There are different methods of grassland using in farms that take part in some above mentioned organizations. Several farms in Rural Partnership Northern Gauja (e.g. farm "Krastiņi") have good experience in restoration of abandoned (overgrowed) wooded pastures, floodplain meadows and other traditional agricultural landscapes and EU habitats. There are farms that use meat-cattle for grazing in high-nature value grasslands. Meat production and support from agri-environmental scheme secure economically viable grassland use.

In Dviete floodplains there are different kinds of farming practices for grassland use. One is traditional milk-cattle farming when high-nature value grasslands are used as pastures and/or as meadows for hay-making (as in farming companies "Zemgale" and "Skaidrītes").
Year-round grazing by using *Highlander* cattle and *Konik* horses is another example of high-nature value grasslands management in Dviete river valley (e.g. farm "Gulbji"). In that case animals are used for restoration and preservation of landscapes and EU habitats. By attracting eco-tourists these animals also provide additional income for farmers and make grassland use more sustainable in long-term.
There are also farms that do not have any animals. In that case farmers can apply for agri-environmental payments and manage high-nature value grasslands. Landscape and biodiversity still benefit from this management, but due to small payment rates and lack of additional incomes economically it is less viable in long-term.

Another example of high-nature value grassland management is represented by farm Bērzkalni in Alsunga (West Latvia). There are no animals in this farm. Grasslands are managed by using agri-environmental support, but additional incomes are gained from conventional agriculture used in arable fields outside high-nature value grasslands. In this farm some minor income also comes from selling of hunting rights (in grasslands).

Latvian Fund for Nature has contacts and experience in collaboration with farmers from above mentioned farms with different grassland management schemes. Farmers can be invited in the workshop and farms can be used as starting points for follow-up projects. There are also wide spectrum of organizations that can be invited in the workshop and used as starting points for follow-up projects.

Agenda of Pre-Implementation Workshop

Seminar organized within project

Building up a central and eastern European cooperation in nature conservation-oriented grassland use – TRINET

Strengthening Nordic-Baltic-Russia/Belarus partnership in farming for biodiversity

Apšuciems, Latvia, 19 – 20 November, 2009.

Wednesday 18 November	
14.00 – 19.00	***Arrival and accommodation***
Thursday 19 November	
9.00 – 10.00	*Registration and Coffee*
10.00 – 10.20	Opening words and introduction on project Strengthening Nordic-Baltic-Russia/Belarus partnership in farming for biodiversity

Inga Račinska, Latvian Fund for Nature

10.20 – 10.40 TRINET - project idea and possibilities for network widening and follow-up projects
Eckhard Jedicke, TRINET project

10.40 – 11.00 Farming for biodiversity in Norway (existing support schemes, trends in biodiversity and/or landscape management *etc.*)
Ann Norderhaug and Bolette Bele, Nordic Cultural Landscape Organization

11.00 – 11.20 Developing meat production for conservation of traditional pastures and biodiversity
Sven-Olof Borgegård, WWF, Sweden

11.20 – 11.40 *Coffee break*

11.40 – 12.00 Maintaining biodiversity in grasslands – sub-measure within agri-environmental schemes in the Rural Development Programme for Latvia
Žanete Zaharova, The Rural Support Service

12.00 – 12.20 Current situation in farming for biodiversity in Belarus
Evgeny Shirokov, Minsk Division of International Association of Ecologists

12.20 – 12.40 Finnish traditional rural biotopes, current situation and ideas how to increase quality management
Iiro Ikkonen and Kimmo Härjämäki, Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland

12.40 – 14.00 *Lunch*

14.00 – 14.20 Organic farming in Latvia.
Dace Kalniņa, Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture

14.20 – 14.40 **Case-study or practical examples of farming for biodiversity** in Norway
Ann Norderhaug and Bolette Bele, Nordic Cultural Landscape Organization

14.40 – 15.00 **Marketing of ecological meat products - practical examples** from Sweden
Sven-Olof Borgegård, WWF, Sweden

15.00 – 15.20 *Coffee break*

15.20 – 15.40 **Linking state institutions and NGOs for rural development and farming for** biodiversity
Anita Anševica, **State Rural Network**

15.40 – 16.00 **Case-study or practical examples of farming for biodiversity** in Finland ('meadow meat')
Iiro Ikkonen and Kimmo Härjämäki, Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland

16.00 – 16.20 **Hay making and biomass energy for** nature conservation-oriented grassland use
Brigitte Gerger, Weideverein Lafnitztal

16.20 – 16.40 *Coffee break*

Parallel discussions

17. 00 – 18.30 *Building up a central and eastern European cooperation in nature conservation-oriented grassland use – TRINET*

- *discussion on future TRINET follow-up projects*
- *discussion on future networking between partner organizations and TRINET*

17. 00 – 18.30 *Strengthening Nordic-Baltic-Russia/Belarus partnership in farming for biodiversity*

- *preparation of guidebook "Nordic-Baltic-Russian/Belarus solutions in farming for biodiversity"*
- *organization of study trip in Sweden*
- *organization of study trip in Belarus*
- *discussion on future networking between partner organizations and TRINET*

After discussion *Small event*

19.15 – 20.15 *Dinner*

Friday 20 November

8.00 – 9.00 *Breakfast*

9.00 ~ 17.00 Seminar excursion

Invited participants:

	Name, Surname	Country	Organization	Contacts
1	Ann Norderhaug	Norway	Nordic Cultural Landscape Organization	ann.norderhaug@bioforsk.no
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4	Eckhard Jedicke	Germany	RhönNatur	jedicke@rhoen-naturschutz.de
5	Evgeny Shirokov	Belarus	Minsk Division of International Association of Ecologists	iaebd@tut.by
6	Iiro Ikkonen	Finland	Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland	iiro.ikonen@gmail.com
7	Kimmo Härjämäki	Finland	Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland	kimmo.harjamaki@helsinki.fi

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19	Dace Kalniņa	Latvia	Latvijas Bioloģiskās lauksaimniecības asociācija, *Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture*	cza@apollo.lv
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22	Ilona Mendziņa	Latvia	Vides ministrija, *Ministry of Environment*	Ilona.Mendzina@vidm.gov.lv
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Pictures from the workshop

Minutes of the Workshop

During 18th – 20th November 2009 the workshop focusing on the role of farming for conservation of biodiversity in rural areas was held in hotel Villa Anna, Apšuciems at the Western coast of Gulf of Riga.

The purposes of workshop were to exchange best experience in farming for biodiversity in Latvia and other countries and to perform it as a forum for discussions among participants in relation to the following topics:

- experiences about the overall situation on biodiversity in rural areas (assessment, policy, existing support schemes *etc.*);
- practical examples of farming for biodiversity;
- discuss possibilities for further TRINET follow-up projects;

Workshop was also attended by representatives from the project Strengthening Nordic-Baltic-Russia/Belarus partnership in farming for biodiversity**.** Involving representatives from the Nordic countries and Belarus made our workshop as a joint seminar where it was discussed not only on practical examples of farming for biodiversity, but also much attention was devoted to international experience, further networking between the project partners, and between the Nordic countries and Belarus.

Summary of presentations

Opening words and introduction on project Strengthening Nordic-Baltic-Russia/Belarus partnership in farming for biodiversity (*Inga Račinska, Latvian Fund for Nature)*

Ms. Račinska opened the workshop by welcoming all the participants to Apšuciems, and pointed out the importance of the topic of this workshop to share best experience in farming for biodiversity and to strengthen cooperation between NGOs within project region. She stressed that there are different solutions on how to maintain traditional rural landscapes in different countries and that makes exchange of experience between countries very valuable.

Ms. Račinska further briefly informed about project objectives and activities. She also discussed further networking between the project partners and advantages from cooperation with the TRINET network.

TRINET - project idea and possibilities for network widening and follow-up projects *(Eckhard Jedicke, TRINET project)*

During his presentation Mr. Jedicke introduce workshop participants with the TRINET network idea and main aims of this network. He also gives an overview on situation of grassland management in Europe.

According TRINET philosophy ecologically optimal land use is (*should be*) simultaneously economically and technically rewarding land use. But in practice there are threats such as land abandonment or intensification of land use. To mitigate the impact of these threats on grasslands, TRINET promotes multifunctional grassland farming initiatives that are beneficial for grassland biodiversity and for farmers.

Mr. Jedicke presented main partnership themes of TRINET partner-organizations:

1. Finding the most effective ways of delivering biodiversity;
2. Evaluating Rural Development and other support tools which are available;
3. Building up systems to make farming for landscapes and biodiversity economically sustainable.

He also presented main partnership actions:

1. Networking;
2. Pooling and disseminating information;
3. Organising and financing the tasks.

Farming for biodiversity in Norway (*Ann Norderhaug and* Bolette Bele*, The* Nordic Cultural Landscape Association and Bioforsk)

At the beginning of her presentation Ms. Norderhaug introduce with Nordic Cultural Landscape. This NGO was established twenty years ago to give the possibility to farmers, nature conservationists and landscape planners to co-operate in management of rural landscapes and habitats. Other organisation working with rural landscapes and habitats is Norwegian regional institute for agricultural and environmental research Bioforsk. Ms. Norderhaug further briefly informed about general situation how farming for biodiversity is supported in Norway. As Norway isn't member of EU, there are remarkable differences at political level and support tools provided by authorities. There have been extensive studies on valuable rural landscapes and habitats of high importance for biodiversity, but country-wide total survey is still lacking. However, there is enough knowledge accumulated to manage and preserve cultural landscapes in Norway. All known valuable habitats are mapped and this information is available at website www.dirnat.no and authorities are responsible for updating this information (where it is located, what is a value and what kind of management needed for each habitat). There is also financial support provided at local, regional and national level for management of semi-natural habitats. Payments may be given to support different management activities, *e.g.* grazing for open landscape management, to support summer farming or to make fencing on grazed habitats. Due to cooperation between agricultural and environmental authorities there are good conditions for balanced rural development and open landscape management. However, during evaluation of existing support schemes needs for more knowledge's and more many to support biodiversity directly were found. Action or management plans for threatened nature types and valuable agricultural landscapes and development of Nature indexes were recognized as powerful tools to preserve the biodiversity of rural landscapes.

Developing meat production for conservation of traditional pastures and biodiversity *(Sven-Olof Borgegård, WWF, Sweden)*

Mr. Borgegård informed about open landscape management projects realised by WWF Sweden. Up to now there are *ca.* 40 000 hectares fenced and grazed to manage grasslands in Sweden. Some projects carried out also in Estonia and in North-West Russia. Mr. Borgegård stressed importance of close contacts with farmers and local authorities to be successful in grazing projects on the ground. During grazing projects it is also important to build barns and manure-holdings. The WWF Sweden helps to identify funding opportunities to build these buildings. Farmers are key persons with double mission – they produce food and they 'produce' landscape. But for long-term grassland management, these grazing projects should be economically viable. The solution for the sustainable management of grasslands is production of "green meat" or "grassland beef". It provides income for farmers and secures conservation of biodiversity in pastures. Economic benefice is achieved by producing extra high quality of meat (ecological and rich in taste). Another very important thing in these grazing projects is a co-operation between farmers to supply meat to customers all year round.

Maintaining biodiversity in grasslands – sub-measure within agri-environmental schemes in the Rural Development Programme for Latvia (*Žanete Zaharova, The Rural Support Service)*

During her presentation Ms. Zaharova informed about existing Agri-environmental schemes in Latvia. She briefly discussed objectives, existing sub-measures, and basic rules for application. Sub-measure Preservation biodiversity in grasslands (alias Preservation of biologically valuable grasslands) was discussed in details.
To apply for this measure:

- in case of extensive grazing – grazing of 0.4 to 0.9 livestock units per 1 ha. Pasturing intensity must be chosen within the permitted interval and according to grassland type, location, climate and other conditions to prevent grassland over-grazing;
- in case of late mowing – mowing shall be performed between August 1 and September 15, and the moved grass shall be collected, removed from the field, or chopped.

Ca. 32.3 thousand hectares of grasslands are managed within sub-measure Preservation biodiversity in grasslands in 2010.

Agriculture for biodiversity in Belarus (*Evgeny Shirokov, Minsk Division of International Association of Ecologists)*

Explaining ecological situation in agriculture in Belarus, Mr. Shirokov pointed to the historical background. Since the Soviet time there was a lot of chemistry (fertilizers, pesticides *etc.*) used in Belarus. This led to contamination of soil and decline of natural fertility.
In nowadays Belarus ecological farming is used mostly in small farms. Large farms mostly have very intensive farming practice.
In his further speech Mr. Shirokov focused on amount of fertilizers and other chemicals used in different European countries. He compared situation in Belarus with situation in other countries.
Mr. Shirokov informed that there are virtually no regulations developed for ecological farming in Belarus. However, there are active NGOs that work on eco-labelling and market development. Market of ecological products has great potential. It was found that more than 40 % of customers are willing to pay more for high quality products. However, majority of ecological products are produced in very small farms with limited capacity to make continuous supply.

Finnish traditional rural biotopes, current situation and ideas how to increase quality management *(Iiro Ikkonen and Kimmo Härjämäki, Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland)*

At the beginning of his presentation Mr. Härjämäki introduce with Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland – it main goals and activities. Then Mr. Härjämäki focused on historical changes in agriculture. He pointed that during the period of more sustainable traditional agriculture the direction of nutrient flow was from the meadows to the fields. This system included the mowing of winter hay which was stored in hay barns and fed to animals during wintertime. This regime was first interrupted by artificial fertilisers and changes to production systems during the late 19th century, in the peripheral regions a bit later. Flatland meadows were mainly turned into cultivated fields, wherever the topography would just allow it. Eutrophication is now playing an important role in accelerating the disappearance of traditional rural biotopes: the nutrient flow is from the field and air to the meadows and other traditional biotopes, weakening the quality of habitats.
Nowadays, large open landscape entities have disappeared along with fences, open ditches, meadows, wooded pastures and coppiced and pollarded trees. Instead there are wider uniform fields, bigger roads, cultivated forests,

garden trees and bushes. As a result, at the moment, about 1/4 of all threatened species in Finland have traditional rural landscapes as their primary habitat.
Then Mr. Härjämäki discussed existing sub-measures, gaps and development needs of Finnish Agri-Environment schemes. Other funding possibilities for grassland management were discussed as well.

Organic farming in Latvia (*Dace Kalniņa, Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture)*

Ms. Klaniņa started her presentation with short introduction with Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture and brief history of organic farming in Latvia.
Speaking on development of organic farming she informed that 7.3 % of agricultural land in Latvia is certified as used for organic farming. Production of organic products is increasing.
Then Ms. Klaniņa informed about Environmental Health Farms – organic farms that offer services for strengthening and improving the health.
Requirements for Environmental Health Farms are:

- Farm has Organic Agriculture's certificate;
- Farm owners have certificate for medical or alternative education;
- They apply principles of sustainability in managing the farm;
- They implement of new service: strengthening and improving the health (no medical treatment!);
- Offer organic food for quests;
- Information for healthy life style, environment, nature protection.

At the end of her presentation Ms. Klaniņa concluded that:

- Organic farming takes significant place in rural development;
- Organic farming is suitable management for biological value grasslands;
- Organic farming and Environmental Health Farms continue to acquire new skills for farming, human and nature health;
- Association of Latvian Organic Agriculture makes data basis about Organic Farms, their service, offer organic products; spread information about organic farming, cooperate with Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Environment, with other organizations etc.;
- Organic farming is good challenge for farmers through the times.

Landscape qualities as a potential for alpine agriculture
(Bolette Bele, Ann Norderhaug, Marianne Østerlie, The Nordic Cultural Landscape Association Norwegian Institute for Agricultural and Environmental Research (Bioforsk) Sør-Trøndelag University Colleg)

During presentation Ms. Norderhaug informed about current situation on farming in alpine habitats in Norwegian summer houses. Large alpine grassland areas are now overgrown and biodiversity has diminished. But further she pointed that summer farming may strengthen the financial condition of mountain farms for instance by labelled products getting a higher price in the market.
Then possible habitat management options were analyzed by using preliminary data from a project in Budalen. Landscape pattern in Budalen is characterized by mosaic of species rich vegetation types influenced by long and continuous summer farming. Project in Budden was highly scientific with GPS tracking of cows and goats, deep analysis of vegetation communities on grazed areas. Product analyses also were done to compare industrially produced products with those produced in summer farms.
Speaking on results, Ms. Norderhaug concluded that milk and milk products produced on species-rich alpine pastures are of special quality compared to industrially produced products. Therefore, maintenance of landscape values as well as food quality may be defined as "added values" to summer farming products. In additional, grazing is necessary if we want to keep the summer farming landscape open and maintain the high biodiversity.

Marketing of ecological meat products - practical examples from Sweden (*Sven-Olof Borgegård, WWF, Sweden)*

In his second presentation Mr. Borgegård continued with discussion on pasture beef production in Sweden. There is national-wide labelling system for these products in Sweden, but the same label is marked with regional marks so that it is possible to know origin of products.
Mr. Borgegård pointed necessarily of co-operation of farmers, local slaughter companies, local butchering companies, and local retailer companies. The co-operation is mechanism how to increase income per animal. He pointed that without co-operation turn-over is not big enough for an efficient and professional sales organisation. Developing of new products is also important when pasture beef is produced. WWF in Sweden have a good knowledge on how to breed cattle and how to manage high quality of pasture meat. Thus WWF as a guarantor is still important for the image of products and for the image of farmers' stability.

Linking state institutions and NGOs for rural development and farming for biodiversity (Anita Anševica, State Rural Network)

As Ms. Anševica informed the main aim of State Rural Network is to promote active participation of rural development organizations and administrations in implementation of the Rural Development Program, creating environment for coordinated actions of rural development policy.
Representatives of State Rural Network in their daily work deal with organizing seminars of good practice, organizing exchange visits to Latvia and EU countries, promote implementation of the LEADER projects. Important issue also is working with Local Action Groups (LAG). LAG is an association of local organisations and rural population operating on a specific rural territory with the population of 5–65 thousand, representing the interests of the population of this territory and addressing rural development issues at a local level based on a multi-sectoral strategy and developed as a result of cooperation of the local representatives of those sectors.
Then Ms. Anševica informed that LAGs are key players in building local development strategies on the following measures:

- Support for creation and development of micro-enterprises;
- Encouragement of tourism activities;
- Basic services for the economy and rural population;
- Conservation and upgrading of the rural heritage sites.

The Koski Manor: Cherishing traditions and keeping up with the present.
Practical examples of farming for biodiversity in Finland (Iiro Ikkonen, Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland)

Mr. Ikkonen briefly introduced with farming in Koski Manor. This farm is large even in Finnish scale – there is 1200 hectares managed by Koski Manor owner. As fragmentation is an increasing threat for rural habitats management of large farms is very important to prevent this threat. This farm was first to introduce Hereford grazing in Finland during 1960s. During the last years there was habitat restoration works carried out in Koski Manor. When performing basic restoration of traditional rural landscapes farmer looked at old names and local history and used information available in old maps. There were meadows and wooded pastures restored.
It was discussed with Koski Manor owner how do enhance meadow meat production in Finland? Main suggestions were:

- To show production methods for key persons;
- To share knowledge (such as farmer to farmer);

- To develop marketing;
- To increase planning and research;
- To increase networking and co-operation;
- To allocate investment supports (and other supports) for right areas in Finland;
- Central Union of Agricultural Producers and Forest owners (MTK) in key position for better marketing of meadow meat.

Then Mr. Ikkonen focused on best examples how meat marketing is developed by using internet, local shops, "meat-boxes".

Discussions on problems in grassland management and key findings on how to improve grassland management in economically viable way.

It was concluded that in case of farming for biodiversity it is important:

- to make farming with less or on chemicals;
- to follow nature-friendly methods (*e.g.* animal density, time of hay mowing *etc.*);
- to introduce waste management;
- to save water;
- to get support from local society;
- to use 'green energy' when possible;
- to improve knowledge on nature protection;
- to diversify products (multi-functional farming - meat, craft trade, eco-tourism etc.);
- to work on market development;
- to be self sustainable as much as possible;

The need for initiatives to strengthen the market for organic food was discussed during the workshop. It was agreed that strengthening of the market is an important condition for further development of the organic production and **grassland management in economically viable way**.

Cheap imported products were mentioned as a serious obstacle for development of economically **viable** farming for biodiversity. Development of different niche-products was mentioned as possible solution. Campaigns like "Buy local!" also needed. However, research on existing market is still needed.

It was found that there are a lot of gaps in existing support schemes (overregulation, a lot of bureaucracy, not enough support for farming **for biodiversity etc.)**. The needs for improvements were discussed.

During the discussions farmers also pointed the need to learn more from best practice in farming for biodiversity. It is important to co-operate to share experience with farmers from Latvia and from other countries. Questions on nature conservation and on economical solutions should be included as topics in study tours.

Lack of small-scaled local slaughterhouses was identified as obstacle for development of local meat market. Example was discussed. There was restaurant in Valmiera, who would be willing to buy the sheep meat from local farmers, but as there are no small local slaughterhouses it is difficult to "trace a piece of meat" to be sure where it comes from.

It was found that co-operation between farmers should be developed to optimise costs of marketing. Development of labelling (and criteria for them) also was found to be important to develop niche products.

Summary of expert meetings on further TRINET follow-up projects

Two meetings were organised to discuss possibilities for further TRINET follow-up projects. One was organised in Ministry of Environment on 18th December 2009. Second meeting was organised in office of Latvian Fund for Nature on 21st December 2009.

During the meeting in Ministry of Environment problems in supporting high-nature value grasslands identified during pre-implementation workshop in Apšuciems were discussed with authorities. Importance of management of semi-natural habitats to comply with requirements of EU 'Birds' and 'Habitats' directives also was discussed.
It was agreed that there is a good potential to involve more experts from non-governmental organizations to improve Latvian situation in grassland management.
Need for closer cooperation with Ministry of Agriculture also was found. Involvement in drafting of policy documents regulating management of semi-natural habitats also is needed to integrate topics of nature conservation in planning process of rural development of Latvia.
During the meeting funding possibilities for further TRINET follow-up projects also were discussed.

Second meeting was held in office of Latvian Fund for Nature. As potential partners in further project, representatives from different Latvian environmental NGOs were invited at this expert meeting. During the meeting Latvian Fund for Nature presented ideas collected during pre-implementation workshop held in Apšuciems and outcomes of negotiations with authorities obtained during the meeting in Ministry of Environment.
Invited experts agreed that there are needs for elaboration of support schemes in existing Rural Development Programme. The aim of further project might be defined as need to increase the capacity of non-governmental organisations in the planning of the Rural Development Programme's (and other EU policy instruments) measures for biodiversity and nature conservation and restoration in Latvian rural areas.
During meeting there were a lot of discussions on how current support schemes promote grassland management – what gaps and what advantages there are.
It was concluded that existing experience in support schemes in other EU countries should be collected and analysed to prepare recommendations for elaboration of Latvian support schemes. Cooperation with international organisations and European Commission also need to be strengthened. As Latvian Fund for Nature is a member of European Environmental Bureau it was proposed to examine the possibility of developing closer cooperation also with that organisation.
Invited experts pointed that there should be opportunity to discuss further development of support schemes with policy makers and with farmers.
Finally, participants of meeting agreed to start project proposal preparation for submission to European Social Fund.

Romania

Scoping report: Romanian initiatives on management of grasslands (especially HNV grasslands)

Introduction

I started the research for good practices in grassland management in Romania by sending two e-mails on the most important mailing list of the environmental NGO sector[2], asking people to let me know if they have or in their region know about such initiatives.
Taking into account that Romania has several millions of grasslands, I get only a few really feasible answers, didn't took the research projects, done by universities or research institutes.
The problems of the Romanian agriculture and rural development, related strongly to grassland management are as follows:

- fragmented lands (average size of family farms are less than 3 ha),
- there are almost 5 million subsistence and semi-subsistence farms in Romania,
- low and very low production due to the wrong use of fertilizers and other chemicals (people don't use at all, or they use too much),
- the subsidies for farmers are very complicated, most of the time the beneficiaries don't have enough information (Romania could spend less than 9% of the European funds in three years!),
- rural areas are getting older, most of the young people are leaving the villages in favor of cities.

But of course we can find positive signs and processes also:

- the extensive way of farming created a unique landscape and botanical richness in rural areas, mainly regards to grasslands,
- we still have the knowledge of the traditional agriculture, which should be combined with specific knowledge and turn in to organic farming,

HNV grassland initiatives in Transylvania

Mereşti (Harghita County)

The grasslands in the mountainous and hilly area of the Harghita Mountains are species rich, from the HNV grassland category. Almost all are extensive used grasslands for grazing and haying by local farmers through the last centuries. The land use has suffered little changes in the communist period in Meresti region, meaning that some grassland was converted into arable land and intensive orchards.

In Mereşti the majority of the farmers owns between 1 and 5 cows. Some of them started to grow the livestock, and they were the basis and the founders of the Association of Cattle Owners from Mereşti. This was very important from several point of view:

- this was the first cattle owners association in Harghita county,
- they had the opportunity to sell the milk through a public tender, because they had more than 5000 liters per day,
- could organize trainings for members,
- had the legal status for investments (refrigerator),
- produce good quality milk (every member done the milking with machines – directly into a refrigerator).

[2] these are the „mediu" and „conservarea_biodiversitatii" lists (environment and biological_conservation lists) with several hundred of organizations and activists in the field of environmental protection and nature conservation.

The association uses the common pasture of the village, but some members have done personal farms with 25-100 animals outside the village, they rent and use own pastures.

Due to the association in Mereşti is beginning to take shape two kind of dairy farmer type:

- the first who owns a few (1-3) cows producing milk for the family, selling less than 50% of the production,
- and a second one who is producing milk (sometimes several thousand liters per day) for selling, organized as market based farms.

The first types of farmers are usually old people, the second one young or middle age farmers. As feed both are using the pastures in summertime and they make hay for winter. The winter is quite long in this hilly, mountainous region of Transylvania, so most of the farmers used to cut even the remote hayfields. In the last years the majority of the work is done mechanized, but a few years ago people hayed and did the whole work manually, transported the hay by animals into the village.
The village is part of a Leader program, which will start this year in Romania, so their main objective is rural tourism, but dairy farms and related programs will be included into the microregion's development strategy.

Poganyhavas microregion (Harghita County)

Poganyhavas microregional association (PMA) is a local development NGO in the Eastern Carpathians. The PMA is composed by local authorities, NGOs and private companies, and work in the several fields:

- local economic development,
- village conservation and built environment,
- grassland management and other nature conservation fields,
- education,
- promotion of local products and rural tourism.

In partnership with Sapientia University from Miercurea Ciuc, they started an 18 month duration GEF funded project "*Mountain hay meadows – hot spots of biodiversity and traditional culture*" in 2009.
According to botanists the hay meadows of Gyimes are the third richest grassland type in Europe. The formation and maintenance of biodiverse hay meadows is thanks to traditional management (no fertilizer and no mechanization). The cattle dominant farming of Szeklerland was favourable to the creation of hay meadows as opposed to sheep farming in many areas of Romania. Making hay is the longest lasting agricultural activity and it contributes to a large extent to maintaining communities and traditions.
The lifestyle change of the rural communities of Szeklerland leads to the disappearance of hay meadows, and this process is overly accelerated by the new milk hygiene regulations.
The project has double goal:

- firstly they aim to protect and maintain hay meadows by encouraging local communities to continue traditional farming,
- and secondly they would like to use the presence of hay meadows to help maintain and increase the life quality of local communities.

The association also organized a special training for farmers on making good quality cheese from their cow milk. The farming possibilities are totally different in this area, there are step slopes, and the haying can be done only manually, so majority of the farmers don't use machines at all for grassland management.

Tarnave hills

Tarnava region is a hilly area in the southern part of the Transylvanian basin, with a very mixed population, of Romanians, Hungarians, Gypsies and Germans. Adept foundation is working in the area for several years; they are a mixed team from Great Britain and locals.

Grassland inventories in the Tarnava Mare area, by Adept Foundation (AF) in collaboration with Babeş-Bolyai University Cluj, Lucian Blaga University Sibiu; Medicine and Pharmacy University Târgu Mureş and the wildlife NGO Milvus Group, reveal that Habitats Directive Annex 1 scrub and grassland habitats cover over 30% of the area:

Habitats Directive Annex I	Type of Habitat	Estimated % of pSCI area
40A0*	Sub-continental Peri-pannonic scrub	10
6210*	Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (*Festuco-Brometalia*) with important orchid sites	7
6240*	Sub-Pannonic steppic grasslands	10
6430	Hydrophilous tall herb fringe communities of plains and of the montane to alpine levels	0.5
6510	Lowland hay meadows (*Alopecurus pratensis*, *Sanguisorba officinalis*)	4
6520	Mountain hay-meadows	2

*indicates priority habitat

The flora is extremely varied in species composition, often over distances of just a few meters. These grasslands, some of the best that survive in lowland Europe, are linked to a rural economy based on extensive livestock farming. They are also a genetic resource for forage crops, especially legumes. Some 60 of the plant species recorded in the region are wild crop relatives.
AF's project area covers approximately 85,000 ha, including 35 villages in ten communes with some 21,000 inhabitants. Their aim is to assess grasslands and design management and monitoring guidelines for them, and at the same time to work with farmers to develop capacity and financial incentives for continued good management. The main activities so far include:

- identification and preliminary mapping of key areas for conservation, creating a custom-made GIS map and database well suited to landscape-scale conservation and land management,
- initial work on indicator species and management plans for a range of grassland habitat types,
- preparation of data leading to acceptance of the area as Romania's largest farmland Protected Area within the Natura 2000 network,
- implementation in 2006-2007 of Romania's only pilot grassland management scheme, which has also influenced the development of new national agri-environment measures,
- initiating a farm advisory team which has successfully promoted agri-environment and commercial incentives in the area.

Linked to this, AF have carried out capacity building and community awareness activities including classes in schools and summer camps, training farmers in milk hygiene and helping them maintain their market for milk, many publications, a national campaign to promote a flexible approach to food hygiene regulations for small producers, and promotion of branded local food products at farmers markets and fairs.
In 2006-2007 period AF carried out a pilot agri-environment programme in cooperation with the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture. As a result, 97 farmers and 1.980 ha entered the pilot agri-environment scheme SAPARD 3.3. These were the only grassland agri-environment agreements in Romania at the time. The results from this pilot were useful in the design of the new measure 214 from the NRDP (agri-environment scheme).
The agri-environmental measure has received very different reception in the communes in the Tarnava Mare area where the AF advisory service was active, compared with where it was not. In one commune where they provided advisory services (Laslea) there were 99 participants in measure 214, covering 558 ha. In a neighbouring commune where we did not provide advisory services (with a similar number of eligible farmers), there were 3 applicants covering 10 ha.
This has demonstrated that:

- small-scale farmers suffer practical problems in applying for agri-environment schemes. This also applies to other Rural Development Programme grants,
- small-scale farmers do respond to advisory services where they are available.

TRINET workshop in Odorheiu Secuiesc

We will invite representatives from the three visited areas, both representatives of the NGOs working there and farmers from the area. We didn't get response from the managing NGO of the Dumbravita ponds N2000 area, who also have some relation with the grasslands inside the area (Romanian Ornithological Society – Brasov branch).
The three regions have projects and initiatives already in this field, so probably will be interesting to know each other and to change some experience, both good and bad.
The workshop will have a site visit part, when we will go to Meresti and visit two farms and having discussion with local farmers.
The main themes of the workshop should be:

- local experiences in HNV grassland management in the Transylvanian region – both good and bad experiences of the Romanian participants,
- multifunctional use of grasslands (ex. biogas utilization – there are some experience in Meresti region),
- producing and selling of local products – some experience from the Adept Foundation,
- elaborating further collaboration and projects within the TRINET network.

- **Programme of the TRINET Workshop in Odorheiu Secuiesc**

- (26-27/2/2010)

- **1st day – 26th February, 2010**

09:00	Welcome message – Agora team, presentation round
09:30 – 10:00	Introductory presentation from the TRINET team
10:00 – 10:30	Summary of the Romanian country report on grasslands and of the scoping report
10:30 – 11:00	Coffee break
11:00 – 11:30	Round of introductions and short presentation of the farmers and organisations present
11:30 – 12:20	Presentations from the TRINET team on: biogas and hay direct marketing and selling local products hygiene regulations in EU countries
12:20 – 13:30	Discussion round
13:30 – 14:30	Lunch
14:30 – 15:00	TRINET team presentation: What could a possible TRINET follow-up project look like? What steps would need to be taken to build it up?
15:00 – 15:30	Discussion round: Where are possibilities to build up projects according to the TRINET philosophy?
15:30 – 15:45	Facilitation of selecting of 2-3 themes which should be elaborated further on in the workshop
15:45 – 16:15	Coffee break
16:15 – 17:00	Working groups to concretely formulate the first steps to follow-up projects: identification of the next steps to do, timetable
17:00 – 17:30	Plenary session, conclusions of the workshop
17:30	Closing of the workshop
19:00	Dinner

- **2nd day – 27th February, 2010**

08:00 – 09:00	Breakfast
09:00 – 13:00	Site visit in Meresti, dairy farms
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch in Meresti
14:00	Leaving back to Odorheiu Secuiesc
15:00	TRINET discussion?

- **Pictures from the workshop**
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Slovakia

Scoping Report

Initiatives dealing with management of HNV grasslands in Slovakia

Scoping activities were oriented on selected regions in Slovakia, where there is concentration of HNV grasslands and there are farmers who can be suitable partners for projects on HNV management. We selected some regions, where we have already had some project activities to have continuity in co-operation, but we have also focused on new regions. Nine regions or localities were identified for first scoping phase (Poľana, Pieniny, Kysuce, Orava, Belianske lúky, Veľká Fatra, Slovenský kras, Malá Fatra and Biele Karpaty).

Poľana

Main problem in the region is abandonment and fragmentation of grasslands, which suffer from low number of cattle and insufficient use. In the region there is one the best preserved areas with traditional agriculture in Slovakia. It is threatened by abandonment and population changes. The farmers are mostly interested in projects oriented on development of viable grazing schemes on mountain grasslands and on restoration of grasslands overgrown by trees and shrubs. Interesting topic is also management of landscape features like terraces, shrubs on the borders between blocks, management of mosaic of different agricultural crops. They are also interested in possible use of grassland biomass for energetic purposes. We have contacts with several farmers representing different kinds of farms from relatively large co-operatives to small family farmers. In the region there is also co-operative established by small individual farmers.

Pieniny

The region also represents typical sample of a traditional agriculture in the mountains of northern Slovakia. In the years 2007-2008 DAPHNE has run DBU project here oriented on restoration of degraded species-rich grasslands and development of management plan for the area of national park. Very good contacts were established especially with the representatives of farmers´s co-operative from the village Lesnica. The co-operative had not been established here during socialism and traditional farming persisted till 90s. But social changes have caused rapid decline of farming activities in the village. It has resulted in very fast abandonment of large areas of grasslands. Because of those facts, farmers decided to establish a co-operative, which works as un umbrella for receiving subsidies and it manages a land of members, who do not farm anymore. During previous DBU project, co-operative restored 57 ha of species-rich grasslands overgrown by trees and shrubs and they would like to continue in such activities from their own sources.

But there is still a serious problem how to use the hay from the grasslands. Therefor another DBU project for energetic use of hay in the region was prepared, but it has not been approved till now. Another option is promotion of extensive grazing schemes with selling of local products for tourists (area is on the oldest national parks in Europe). But the problem is, that local farmers have only limited personal capacities, so if a biomass project will be implemented, further involvement into TRINET may be problematic in this stage.

Kysuce and Orava

Both regions represent the mosaic of different grassland habitats mostly on Flysch bedrock. But they are mostly interesting from a point of view of well-preserved fen grasslands. In the regions there area several localities which are very valuable and important from a national point of a view. In last decades, they were abandoned or occasionally managed by nature conservation authorities. Due to this inappropriate situation, the localities are seriously threatened.

The aim is to find farmers who could start regular management of the localities. It is necessary to provide them information about support schemes, because they are usually not very skilled in the topic. In addition, they need also advice how to obtain appropriate machinery for the management of such grasslands. And last and the most complicated question is, how to make the system to be long-term viable, not only dependent on the subsidies. The toughest question is how to use a biomass from wet grasslands, which is not of a high quality for feeding of animals and the farmers usually do not know to use it on the farm.

We have identified several mostly smaller farmers, who could start management on some selected localities. But it is necessary to help them with start and to provide advisory and training in the first years.

Belianske lúky

The site is the largest locality of alkaline fens in Slovakia situated on the edge of Tatra National Park. During UNDP/GEF project carried out by DAPHNE at the locality, local farmer was identified, who has started restoration and regular management of the locality since 2008. But his position is still very fragile and there is still unsolved the general problem, how to use the hay from such locality.

The project for energetic use of the hay (or other alternative) could be considered here. The locality would be also suitable for training projects presenting best practice on fen grasslands.

Veľká Fatra

Area is important as the region with best-preserved mountain and sub-alpine grasslands in Slovakia. They are still grazed by cattle and sheep. But the intensity of grazing is decreasing and the grasslands suffer from step-by-step overgrowing and changes of species composition.

It is due to a low number of animals, but also due to relatively strict hygienic regulations, which limit traditional forms of mountain grasslands management (mostly milk sheeps).

Possible projects could be orineted on finding feasible alternative techniques of grazing, which would ensure long-term management of grassland in the locality. Very interesting could be also projects oriented on building infrastructure connected with grazing which is in line with EU regulations and still promotes traditional grazing techniques. Such infrastructure could also help with a problem of unequal use of pastures, when some minor parts are degraded because of overgrazing and most of grasslands is undergrazed.

Another issue is a grazing of remote localities, where there is a serious problem with attacks of large predators (bear, wolf). Technical solutions for protection of herds are necessary, if we want to save management on such localities, better control of large predators have to be promoted.

In the area there are several co-operatives as well as small farmers wh area interested in management of species-rich garsslands and they are open to the co-operation.

Slovenský kras

The site represents best sample of dry grassland habitats in Slovakia. It is situated in large karst area which continue to Hungary (Aggteleki NP). Most of area was grazed in the past, but due to a decreasesed number of cattle, utilized area has become much smaller in recent years and the site is faced serious problem with abandonment of agricultural land and secondary succession.

Possible projects in the area could be oriented mostly on restoration of degraded dry grasslands and promotion of sustainable and viable grazing schemes in the region.

We propose to focus mostly on south-western part of the site, where there is very active group of local farmers (mostly smaller farmers and one big co-operative). They were one the first farmers in Slovakia registered into agri-environemntal programme in 2004.

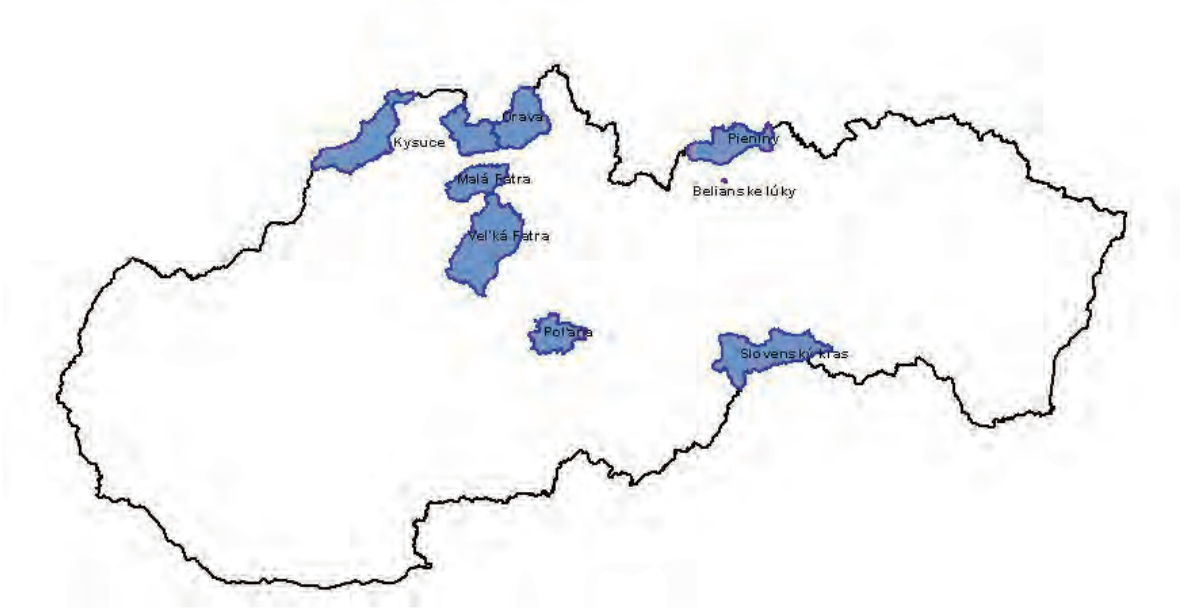
Malá Fatra

The site belongs to the best grassland areas in Slovakia. The traditional grassland management is still persisting, but dissapears very fast. On the other hand area is a national park, visited by a high number of tourists yearly, so it has a large potential for development of sustainable agriculture connected with agro-tourism and marketing of local products.

Possible projects could be oriented on classical conservation activities on one side like restoration of species-rich grasslands, grazing schmes, but also marketing of local products or eco-tourism could be very interesting topics here.

The contacts on the site are established, but we are still need to identify more suitable partners especially among smaller farmers.

Map of selected areas described in the report:



Proposals of topics for workshop on Nov 3-4 in the locality Biele Vody

- restoration of species-rich grasslands including introduction of new approaches, like restoration grazing, new techniques of grazing management
- management and restoration of mountain grasslands, integration of traditinal techniques with EU requirements
- management and restoration of sub-mountain and mountain wet grasslands – appropriate mowing techniques, use of low-quality hay from wet grasslands
- alternative use of hay from species-rich grasslands (possible energetic use, biogas plants etc.)
- marketing of products from farming on species-rich grasslands (this topic is still open). Farmers feel to be a bit sceptic about it, but maybe we cany try to discuss it in spite of this

Workshop agenda
Biele Vody, Nov 3-4 2009

Tuesday Nov 3 2009

09,00-10,00 Arrival of participants, accomodation, registration
10,00-10,15 Workshop opening, welcome note (Dobromil Galvánek, DAPHNE)
10,15-11,15 Introduction of TRINET project (Anton Gazenbeek, Belgium)
11,15-12,15 Current situation in management of species-rich grasslands in Slovakia – positive examples, problems, challenges (Dobromil Galvánek, DAPHNE)

12,15-13,30 Lunch

1. block (overgrowing of species-rich grasslands, grassland restoration, traditional ane less traditional techniques of grassland management, service centers for preparation of local projects)

13,30-14,15 Dynamics of mountain grassland overgrowing – case study from PLA Poľana (Zuzana Gallayová, Technical university, Zvolen)

14,15-15,00 Restoration of grazing activities on mountain grasslands in the mountain areas of Germany (prof. Eckhard Jedicke, Grünlandprojekt Rhön, Germany)

15,00-15,45 Restoration of degraded species-rich grasslands in Pieniny NP park (Ján Ripka, DAPHNE)

15,45-16,15 Service project center in Detva as an example of local activites to use possible EU sources for local activities connected to rural development

16,15-16,45 Coffee break

16,45-18,00 Discussion on 1st block (Main questions: How to prevent further degradation of species-rich grasslands? Which management techniques are the most perspective? Is it better to use traditional approaches or it is necessary to apply new methods? Which mmanagement methods are problematic and need special project support: Is it suitable to restore degraded grasslands? To which extent? By which methods?)

18,00-19,00 Dinner

19,00 Open discussion

Wednesday, Nov 4 2009

07,30-08,30 Breakfast

2nd block (restoration an management of wet fen meadows, hay as energetic source, marketing of agricultural products)

09,00-09,40 Restoration and management of fen grasslands in National Nature Reserve Belianske lúky – good practice example (Tomáš Dražil, Administration of NP Slovenský raj)

09,40-10,20 Use of hay for biogas production – experience from Lafnitztal region in Austria (Anton Gazenbeek, Belgium)

10,20-10,40 Coffee break

10,20-11,00 Use of biomass from Gedrianske luky site – example of biomass energetic use from Slovakia (Ján Gúgh, SOS/Birdlife Slovakia)

11,00-11,40 Organisation of agricultural product marketing and establishment of regional marks on bioproducts (Wim Versteden, Belgium)

11,40-12,30 Discussion on 2nd block (Main questions: How to ensure regular management of rare grassland types e.g. fen grasslands? What to do with a biomass from such grasslands? Is it wise to use grassland biomass for heating or electricity production? Is it even feasible comparing to wood? How to sell agricultural products from species-rich grasslands? What limits development of local marketing marks?)

12,30-13,30 Lunch

13,30-16,00 Field trip on locality Vrchslatina (traditional landscape with species-rich grasslands – traditional and untraditional methods of grazing) (guided by local farmer Mr. Golian)

Summary of TRINET pre-implementation workshop in Slovakia, Nov. 2-4.

Main current problems in Slovakia raised during the workshop:

- 320.000 ha HNV grassland, but was steadily declining and only arrival of CAP and RDP in 2004 has stabilized the situation
- Major problem is natural succession on abandoned land, lack of adequate RDP subsidies (no RDP funding for clearing overgrowth and restoring grassland; ministry claims this distorts competition and contravenes the Accession Agreement) or other incentives for farmers to clear such land and restore species-rich grassland. Several presentations gave visual evidence (aerial photos 1949-2000) of the enormous increase in woodland and scrub at the expense of grassland
- In the EU Accession Agreement of 2003, Slovakia committed itself not to give any support from CAP or RDP to land which was not being used agriculturally in 2003. So impossible to bring cleared and restored grassland into the system. The Baltic States are pushing to get similar commitments which they signed, reversed – but Slovak agriculture ministry is not interested.
- Land with only light succession (scattered trees and bushes) is threatened by EU insistence on clear yes/no classification of grassland in LPIS. In Slovakia land with over 5% tree cover is officially not 'agricultural land' and gets no subsidies. So wooded pastures would be impossible in Slovakia
- Insufficient grazing (undergrazing) is a problem in some areas: animals are kept in pasture too short a time, or too low a density, to have an ecologically positive effect, such as reducing the amount of succession growth
- There is a lack of the right equipment to mow mountain meadows and fens, where fields are often small and/or very steep (30° slopes !) – the big tractors etc farmers usually have are unsuitable. Poland's RDP financially supports famers to buy the correct equipment for difficult land, but this is not possible in Slovakia.
- Mowing fens and similar grasslands produces a low-quality hay nobody wants. Composting is not favoured as solution by Daphne. Are there any viable alternatives? Biomass energy? Hydrothermal carbonization (Eckhard)?
- Agri-environment system for using species-rich grassland is technically-scientifically well conceived (among the better systems in Europe) with a 'menu' of options corresponding to different ecological situations – but the money value of the subsidies is too low compared to the work effort required of the farmer

- Boost direct marketing, to make HNV famers less reliant on agri-environment and other subsidies. Slovak consumers too focused on hypermarkets and low prices – tourists might be better target group (so start projects in areas with many tourists). Labels of regional origin are still very rare in Slovakia.
- Hygiene regulations are a problem, especially for the traditional farms in the mountain areas – farmers are giving up because of the regulations
- On-farm sale is now finally allowed in Slovakia but with many restrictions. For instance, cheese can not be sold on the farm (because of hygiene concerns) and farmers can't even make cheese on their own farm unless they have special installations.

PLENARY WORKSHOP FLADUNGEN JULY 5-8 2010
AGENDA

International TRINET Workshop
06./07.07.2010 in Fladungen, Rhön

Development of nature conservation-oriented grassland use in Central and Eastern Europe – building up cooperation (TRINET)

The principal objective of the workshop in the Rhön is to present the proposals from the different countries for projects concerning nature conservation-oriented use of high nature value (HNV) grassland and to discuss them from various professional angles.The outcome should be an array of project proposals and funding options, which would then be elaborated further after the workshop by the national partner organisations as well as by the international TRINET network. The discussions should be helpful for the partner organisations to achieve their objectives in their follow-up work.

The Rhön Biosphere Reserve offers a wide spectrum of stimulating models; during excursions, the workshop participants will be shown implemented examples stemming from the activities of the Bavarian reserve administration and other stakeholders:

- Promotion of traditional breeds such as the Rhön sheep and the Fränkisches Gelbvieh cattle,
- Large-scale extensive grazing in the framework of the DBU-funded grassland project, and of the Rhön agri-biodiversity project funded by the Unterfranken local authority using finance from the Bavarian biodiversity initiative.
- Rhön label of origin ,
- Initiatives for direct marketing.

Workshop venue and accomodation:

Hotel-Restaurant „Sonnentau“
Wurmberg 1 – 3, D-97650 Fladungen
Tel. +49 97 78 - 91 22-0 · Fax +49 97 78 - 91 22-55
E-Mail info@sonnentau.com
Internet: www.sonnentau.com (only in German!)

Getting there:

- Airport Frankfurt am Main (FRA)
- From the airport, train connection (station Fernbahnhof Frankfurt-Flughafen) via Hauptbahnhof Frankfurt am Main to Fulda (train times will be sent later, information at http://www.bahn.de/i/view/DEU/en/index.shtml)
- From Fulda station we will organise a Shuttle-Service to Fladungen; please contact us about your time of arrival.

Draft agenda:

	Mon., 05. July 2010
	Arrival of participants in Fladungen, transfer from Fulda railway station.
19:00	Dinner and talks about the workshop programme

	Tues., 06. July 2010
9:00	Greetings: Prof. Dr. Eckhard Jedicke, RhönNatur/TRINET-Coordinator
9:10	Funding activities of the Deutsche Bundesstiftung Umwelt DBU, especially in the field of agriculture and nature conservation Dr. Volker Wachendörfer, DBU, Section Nature Conservation
9:30	TRINET achievements so far, workshop objectives and programme Anton Gazenbeek, TRINET-Coordinator
	Overview of the project proposals developed so far by the partner organisations: themes, objectives, region, grassland types, contents, partners, foreseen budget and funding, open questions – with focus on one project proposal per organisation, the most advanced one in terms of elaboration:
9:45	Estonia: Environment Board Keskonnaamet

10:00 Latvia: Latvian Fund for Nature

10:15 Slovakia: Daphne

10:30 Hungary: Nimfea

10:45 Coffee break

11:15 Romania: Green Agora

11:30 Bulgaria: Central Balkan National Park

11:45 Bulgaria: Agrolink

12:00 TRINET Internet and Intranet – development and utilisation: Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland

12:15 Grazing and nature conservation – experience from the work of the Bavarian Academy for Nature Conservation and Landscape Management (Dr. Bettina Burkart)

12:30 Overview of funding possibilities for future projects (tbd)

12:45 Lunch in Hotel Sonnentau, Fladungen

14:15 Finalising the themes and participants for each working group. There will be parallel working groups, according to the type/focus of the partners' various follow-up projects (the themes may eventually be modified even at this point, depending on the results of the brainstorming):

1. Optimising grassland use according to nature conservation aspects
2. Building up marketing projects
3. Lobbying to remove obstacles in agricultural support and hygiene regulations
4. International exchange of experience for farmers

Each working group has a moderator and a secretary

16:15 Coffee break

16:45 Continuation of the working groups

18:30 End of the working groups

19:00 Dinner in Hotel Sonnentau, Fladungen

20:30 Presentation of the results of the working groups, in plenary

21:30 Informal socialising

Wed., 07. July 2010

8:30 Start of excursion

9:00 Large-scale commons pasture grazed by cattle at Steinkopf, Ehrenberg-Wüstensachsen

10:30 Travel to next stop

11:15 Floodplains grazed by Fränkischem Gelbvieh cattle, a typical regional breed, in the Sinntal near Eckarts

12:45 Lunch, either in Dorint Hotel, Bad Brückenau (which is converting to organic and regional produce) or in Gasthof Dickas in Bischofsheim (regional produce, Rhön label of origin, silver thistle as quality criterion for regional commodities)

- Greetings from Michael Geier, head of the Bavarian administration of the Rhôn Biosphere Reserve
- Claus Vorndran, owner of Dickas tavern and distillery, member of the board of the association managing the Rhön label of origin (Verein Dachmarke Rhön e.V.)

14:45 Multi-species grazing of heavily overgrown land in Bischofsheim-Frankenheim

15:45 Return to Fladungen

16:30 Coffee break

17:00 Discussion (Chair: Anton Gazenbeek)

a) Round table: insights and comments from the excursion
b) Summary of the results so far (Anton Gazenbeek)
c) Further TRINET work :
   - Next steps in TRINET project implementation
   - Support for national project applications
   - Possibilities for combining proposals into transnational projects

19:30 Departure for Ehrenberg-Seiferts

20:00 Dinner, visit to cellars and apple sherry tasting in Rhön sheep Hotel „Zur Krone“ – marketing of produce from tall tree orchards on grassland
Jürgen Krenzer, owner and adviser on hotels and gastronomy („KrenzerKreativ“)

23:30 Return to hotel

	Thurs., 08. July 2010
08:00	Breakfast
09:00	or as according to requirements: transfer of participants to Fulda railway station
	TRINET-Coordinators: post-workshop discussion

Registration:

Please send definitive name, organisation represented and e-mail of participants as soon as possible to Eckhard (e-mail see below)

PLENARY WORKSHOP FLADUNGEN JULY 5-8 2010
Summary Conclusions

Conclusions of the two parallel working groups:

Working Group 1 + 3:

Is TRINET needed in the future? Yes, for:

- Exchange of experience and know-how
- Carrying out communication in common
- Finding funding sources together
- Bringing farmers and technicians together to develop niche products based on grassland

TRINET will then be an umbrella organisation organising meetings, running a data base, doing lobbying (CAP, hygiene regulations, rules on transport)....

For lobbying, instead of doing this ourselves, we should use existing lobbying structures (such as WWF or Birdlife in Brussels etc) to transmit our information and suggestions to decision-makers.
In this context, TRINET has been invited, as TRINET, to contribute to the website www.arc2020.eu, which is set up by a platform from within the European Parliament to give civil society a voice concerning the reform of the CAP after 2013. The contributions from NGOs and civil society to arc2020 will be collected and used for EP contributions to the EU institutional debate. This will happen by end of July, as the European Commission is expected to present its proposals for CAP reform in Sept.-Oct. 2010.

Working Group 2 + 4:

A common roof or umbrella, overarching the national projects and partners in TRINET, is needed. Why?

1. To make HNV grassland use as successful as possible and maximise sale of meat and milk from it, it is not enough to sell only regionally – one must sell abroad. To do this, a common database of which regional specialities (cheeses, sausages etc) from HNV grasslands is available in each country is needed, with a virtual exchange system (similar to the online bookstore Amazon.com) so that these specialities can be 'downloaded' (= ordered and shipped) and sold in each participating country. Because this is innovative, we could try to apply for CIP funding;
    - BUT this implies common quality standards and definitions. It is not good if the TRINET virtual exchange lists cheeses whose quality differs enormously between country A and country B. So these standards and criteria must be developed together.
2. TRINET is essential to gather and distribute the information each of us as specialist or organisation only familiar with the national situation, does not have. This too is a horizontal task.
    - BUT to be effective, information gathering and distribution must be done in a standardised way; we must all follow the same rules and procedures in gathering and processing data. A quality control of the data is needed at horizontal level.
3. The logic of the two previous points also applies to the analysis of the problems and gaps and examples of good practice concerning policies and support schemes (hygiene, slaughter, agri-environment etc). Only by collecting and processing at horizontal TRINET level, in a systematic way, will we get valid information with which we can lobby the EU and others. Only by transnational comparison will we be able to say, "this problem occurs in 9 of the 11 TRINET countries, so it is important", OR "in all countries X is possible, only in BG it is not, so there is a problem with BG application of EU policy".
4. A communication plan how to communicate internally and with other external groups is best made overarching, above national projects and partners.

All partners ought to contribute to this horizontal level, but it will need quality controllers and a small nucleus/board to keep everything together and give direction.
Experience exchange also requires a horizontal level. We know from the pre-implementation workshops that HNV grassland farmers are interested in meeting colleagues from other countries and learning from them. It is also clear that manuals on how to farm grasslands (as asked for in Estonia) must be backed up by on-farm training. All this implies an organisation at horizontal level, to find model farms representative of the TRINET goals (which in turn is linked to the information gathering under point 2 above), an d to organise the meetings between these farms and the requesting countries.

Closing Conclusions Wednesday evening July 7

There is agreement that besides the national-level actions (follow-up projects, other activities) we all need a 'horizontal umbrella, as formulated in the conclusions of the working groups.

Some TRINET partners are already elaborating follow-up projects which are proposed for LIFE or ESF, and this is positive. All partners must prepare follow-up projects, in a format which is ready to be submitted to a funding donor – this means, with concrete organigrammes and partners, a budget, a time planning....
These follow-up projects should also contribute to the horizontal umbrella, they should provide 'bricks' or 'building blocks' for the horizontal umbrella.

As the presentations of the proposed follow-up projects revealed, there are several ideas to launch activities such as brands and labels for 'nature meat', direct marketing systems...or to tackle problems such as using biomass from mowing for energy. We have within our TRINET group a great deal of expertise and experience about many of the activities proposed in the follow-up projects. For instance, for regional brands there is almost 20 years' experience available through Rhön Natur, as the excursion showed. For practical aspects of making direct marketing a commercial success, there is Wim Versteden(Veeakker)'s 25 years' experience. These are only two examples, there are more. It would be wise to use this available expertise in the follow-up projects, to avoid making the same mistakes twice, to be able to use the state of the art at once. The expertise available inside TRINET could be consulted to improve the follow-up projects while they are being written. Once the projects receive funding, it would however make even more sense to use this available expertise within TRINET, so that the actions being implemented achieve the highest level of success. This does mean including this expertise (and its associated costs, such as travel and compensation for time invested) in the planning and budget of the follow-up project.

The presentations also showed that there are ideas common to several of the different follow-up projects being developed. For instance, collecting information about regulations and support mechanisms and lobbying authorities to change these, or helping farmers to process and market their grassland produce. It would seem, to facilitate mutual exchange of experience and transfer of techniques (and also to link into the horizontal umbrella mentioned under point one), logical to merge these transnationally. How this should precisely be done (joint projects by different partners with the same theme, 'international networking ' tasks and subactions within each national follow-up project..) is something to be looked at further.

The round table after the excursions showed that there are two topics which are so widely mentioned in the group that it might be worth setting up TRINET working groups:
"Grazing management "(multi-species grazing, year-round grazing etc) and "Labels and direct marketing".

The invitation to TRINET to join the website www.arc2020.eu and contribute our comments and proposals for improvement of the CAP, is accepted.

MARKETING MEAT FROM GRASSLAND FARMING IN SUPPORT OF NATURE AND LANDSCAPE

THE EXPERIENCE OF VEEAKKER COOPERATIVE

For grassland farming in support of nature and landscape to be viable for the farmer, produce such as milk or meat must be sold, preferably directly to customers who are aware of its special character and origin and who will keep on buying it because of that.
This is often the most difficult part of using high nature value grassland. How to graze or mow in order to preserve biodiversity, is technically quite well understood. Technical solutions how to find a durable market for the outputs of such grazing or mowing, are far less developed.
Veeakker, a cooperative network from Belgium, has for over 25 years been selling meat from animals fed on grass and hay from natural and semi-natural areas. It has acquired a wealth of experience in the economics and marketing of such 'niche' meat, which can surely be useful for new initiatives elsewhere.

Veeakker

Wim Versteden
Heuvelstraat 211
3390 Tielt-Winge (BE)
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A short history of Veeakker

The founder of Veeakker, Wim Versteden, is from a farming family and in 1983 began a small pig farm in a converted stable in Tielt-Winge (Belgium). When he bought his first pigs with his savings, prices for pigs were high, but by the time he sold his first animals prices had collapsed. He realised then that in a system where wholesalers and retailers add their margins and make profits and where economic contexts stimulated overproduction and price collapses, the only forward for his farm was to diversify (niche markets) and to eliminate the traders between him and his consumers. Animal welfare now came first, with better housing and the freedom for pigs to forage outside. No antibiotics were given, which was unheard of then, and the use of imported protein and other fodder was restricted.

This drew attention – many farmer colleagues were, to put it mildly, very sceptical, but green and alternative organisations and media discovered Versteden as a 'green entrepreneur'.

Everything he produced on the farm was sold directly to consumers, who placed orders at the farm. This too was revolutionary in 1983. Customers had to buy one or more packages with different kinds of pork. With this new strategy, the farm was financially viable after two years!

Why? Not so much because of turnover in itself (although this was good), but because the traders were eliminated, and above all, because overheads were low. Wim Versteden did not borrow funds from banks to do investments, but kept it simple and the infrastructure he did have to install, like stables, he often built himself. Lesson: avoid excessive investments and loans.

After the first phase of take-it-or-leave-it packages, customers were also able to choose their own selection of meats. When Wim Versteden began getting more orders, also from further away, he began organising his work with a computer, which calculated how many pigs had to be slaughtered to fill all the orders (packages and individual). Second lesson: organise everything well from the start – chaos in the beginning will never be straightened out!

The customer collected the order, or Wim Versteden brought it to his or her home. Drawback was that he had to drive all over the place. He was being farmer and salesman at the same time, and discovered that he could do neither job optimally. Sometimes he had to bring in the hay but there were customers at the door who expected him to make time for them. Eventually he decided to focus on sales, to collaborate with other farmers for the production side and to look for methods to deliver products to the customer as efficiently as possible.

Thus Veeakker began in 1985 as a limited company. Because he saw that his customers were clustered in cities, Wim Versteden participated in an urban renovation project in the Belgian city of Leuven, where after a year's work the first Veeakker shop opened in 1986.

By choosing to collaborate with other farmers for the production side, the Veeakker shop could offer a broad range of products from the beginning – not just pork from Versteden's farm. This was diversified even further by sheepmeat, grass steers and Galloways from nature reserves (see below, bold font).

Sheepmeat: Sheep can not be economically raised on ordinary pasture in Belgium, as their carcass weight is too low to make this profitable. They are however economically viable on marginal land. Veeakker collaborates with shepherds who graze river dykes for the water authorities and heathlands for nature conservation organisations.

The '**grass steers'** were a new product, started in the 1990s. The idea began with a dairy farm whose milk quota were too small to let it survive; the farmer and Veeakker looked for solutions. Converting the cow's milk directly into meat via calves, which graze with their mothers on semi-natural pasture, was tried. The calves were sold as 'grass steers'. They have to weigh minimum 250 kilo, maximum 300 kilo, before slaughter after one year (as a matter of principle, Veeakker does not sell veal). Hay is given as supplementary fodder, so hay meadows are needed. Thereby the grass steer production takes care of both grazing and mowing aspects of semi-natural grassland management.

Breed is important: the cows must give milk for a long time so that the calves can stay with their mothers and there is little work involved. The breed must also be able to graze marginal land and still produce protein. According to Veeakker's experience, Limousin is perfect for both aspects. Moreover, at the end of its 15-year productive life span, a Limousin cow is fattened off and sold as a special delicacy in the Veeakker shops.

Grass steers have been a success with consumers and now make up a major part of the Veeakker product range.

In 2001 Veeakker started collaborating with the Flemish nature conservation organisation Natuurpunt to market the **Galloway cattle that graze the nature reserves**.

The Galloways are used by Natuurpunt as rustic animals to graze nature reserves where it is impossible to get local farmers involved because the terrain is too difficult, yields are too low or local farmers are not even owning livestock any more. Originally Natuurpunt wanted to let the animals die outside (natural life cycle) but this raised problems in the Belgian context (public opinion, laws and animal protection groups). Veeakker saw an opportunity to commercialise surplus animals and the two organisations agreed on a deal where Veeakker slaughters, cuts, packages and sells the meat under the name 'Natuurpunt – meat', advertising that it comes from the management of nature reserves and Natura 2000 sites.

The Galloways graze outside year-round and only eat natural grass, leaves and herbs. If necessary they are fed hay in winter, which is exclusively mown in the nature reserve. Veeakker is currently doing research on the advantages of this diet for the quality of the meat – the hypothesis is that it will produce healthier fatty acids and a more balanced fatty acid composition in the meat.

To keep the herd in good shape, every year some animals are slaughtered. The payment Natuurpunt gets from Veeakker for selling the animals is invested in the management of the nature reserves.

In the Veeakker shops various kinds of meat are the main product, with eggs and dairy products in addition and also apples, potatoes and flour from farmers in the network. Fish from sustainably managed sources has recently been included as well.

Thanks to its urban location and its range of products, and helped by a series of food quality and animal welfare scandals linked to meat from classic livestock production, the Veeakker shop proved successful, building up a base of loyal customers, with a professional butcher preparing the meat for sale by the shop staff. Similar Veeakker butcher's shops were later opened in Brussels (Ukkel), Hasselt and Mechelen.

The philosophy of Veeakker

Regional cycles

Veeakker's founding philosophy, and central theme ever since, is a commitment to regional trading. Globalised growth is often based on exploitation elsewhere in the world, which means shipping other countries' resources to Europe and exporting our waste to countries too weak to resist. In agriculture there is an additional effect: importing resources like soya, palm oil etc to boost animal protein production in Europe, creates new problems here such as more livestock manure than the soil can absorb. At the same time there is a depletion of resources and ecosystems in the countries where the agricultural inputs come from. In Veeakker's philosophy, regional trading is the keystone for a nature-oriented agriculture with a closed cycle of resource use and recycling.

Often people speak of regional production or trading when the farmer sells his or her produce on the farm. In the Veeakker philosophy, this is not sufficient. It could well be the case that the livestock were fattened by the farmer, but that the raw materials for the fodder used in the fattening came from the other end of Europe, Brazil,or Africa. Within Veeakker, the use of imported proteins and other raw materials is restricted. This element is often overlooked within the concept 'regional economy', according to Veeakker.

The 'Natuurpunt meat' from the Galloways is a true regional product. The Galloways only eat what they find in the nature reserves they graze and they are not transported over huge distances for slaughter and processing. Again, the 'grass steers' which get their protein via the mother cow's milk from the pasture where they are kept, or the sheep which graze dykes and heaths, are examples of meat production which uses locally available raw materials. But even in the extensive raising of grass steers, extra fodder has to be given.

To safeguard the regional cycle, the farmers who produce for the Veeakker shops and network must therefore have enough land to produce the required fodder themselves. One of the rules within Veeakker is that there must be 2 hectares land per LLU (Large Livestock Unit).

The sorts of fodder produced on the Veeakker farms are:

- Peas, beans, rapeseed, lupine and maize, from arable fields within the farm holding
- Sometimes a mix of grain and peas or lupine is sown, which, when harvested, yields a ready-to-use composite fodder
- Silage grass. Instead of covering it with plastic, sometimes grain is sown on top; the plants cover the silage and at the same time yield additional fodder
- Hay – very suitable for the kind of livestock (Limousin cattle, sheep) Veeakker works with, but the Belgian climate (frequent rain!) is an obstacle. Straw is more reliable.

These raw fodder materials are processed into ready-to-use feedstuffs on the farm. Veeakker has an agronomist who monitors this and advises farmers in its network.

One would expect that with increasing public awareness of the negative consequences imported fodder like soya has for rainforests in Brazil and of the negative carbon footprint of road transport, the production of local fodder would be an increasingly strong selling point to attract new customers and keep the loyalty of existing ones. Veeakker's experience is that this is not so. These matters are not

easy to explain to the average customer and in spite of increased media attention, very few people come to Veeakker for precisely such reasons. Above all, hormones, antibiotics and dioxin in meat, which brought many new customers to Veeakker every time there was a scandal, directly concern people's own health. Rainforests and carbon footprints are not perceived as such direct threats to personal well-being!

Grass-fed meat however can be a selling point! The ratio of omega 3/6 fatty acids appears to be different, and better from the cardiovascular health viewpoint, in meat from grass-fed animals than in meat from grain-fed animals. If this could be demonstrated scientifically, it would be a strong selling point. Customers will pay much more attention to statements about their own health than about nature management or carbon footprints.

Cattle in preference to pigs

Between 1995 and 2006 the emphasis within Veeakker shifted from pork to beef. Whereas in 1995 10 pigs were slaughtered for every cow, by 2006 the ration was equal: as many cows were slaughtered on average per week as pigs.

This is remarkable, as over the same period in the commercial supermarkets in Belgium the consumption of pork increased in comparison to beef. Pigs are more profitable than cattle, being generally cheaper to raise, with a lower content of bones and other unusable pieces.

Veeakker, going against market logic, has been promoting beef, both towards the customers as towards its farmer-suppliers, even though profits on pigs are better and pork can be sold at a lower price. Why does it choose to promote the more expensive beef? Because cattle are better for extensive landscape management. Cattle can make enough protein out of marginal grassland by themselves, while a free-range pig destroys grassland and has to be fed supplementary protein as it can not make enough protein out of rough forage alone.

Sharing knowledge and skills

Within the DBU TRINET project, Veeakker is looking for other initiatives who are interested in linking to a central database from which all participants can contribute and obtain technical and economic information (e.g. supply chain management, how fattening livestock on grassland only affects the cholesterol and fat in their meat.....).

Veeakker is contributing its own informatics section to help run such a database. In July 2009 it shifted its software from Windows to Linux (Open Source) and developed a simplified programme to track turnover and sales.

The current structure: not one, but several marketing channels:

1) The shops

Disappointing has been that it has not proved possible to maintain all four shops. Because there was no room to make any processed products, which is where the added value is, the shop in Hasselt had to be closed. It has been replaced by a system where local customers collect their orders at a rendezvous point. The shop in Brussels had to close because the lease ended. These are the direct causes, but more fundamentally however, personnel costs are too high in Belgium to run small shops with staff in a 38 hour working week unless turnover and margins are high enough. The Mechelen shop functions through a franchising arrangement, which reduces direct personnel costs, but it proved very difficult to control the franchisee adequately.

The Leuven shop has staff but also a sufficient turnover to maintain them. It is profitable, but is not growing – the number of customers is constant. Its location is not ideal: away from the city centre, in a residential area, with very difficult parking for customers arriving by car. In the autumn of 2009 it will therefore move to a new development nearby, where a large supermarket chain is recycling an abandoned abbatoir. Veeakker hopes to attract the customers going to the supermarket and so expand its own customer base with a completely new group. To help bring them over the threshold, it will lower all its prices, gambling on a higher turnover.

In May 2009 Veeakker embarked on **a new type of shop** to try to overcome the economic barriers to selling niche meat through small shops.

This shop is located on one of Leuven's busiest commercial streets. Apart from shoppers, the street is used by many people to walk from offices in town to the railway and bus station - these commuters are potential customers. Because the street is so busy, it makes sense to do things like offering samples for tasting or cooking snacks on the footpath outside the shop in order to attract people into the shop.

Striking about the shop is that there is no counter with a display of meats, and no staff to cut and package meat according to the customer's wishes, as there are in the original Veeakker shops. Instead, there are fridges and freezers with pre-packaged meats – customers choose which package(s) suit them best and then go to the check-out and pay. In other words, a system like in a supermarket. The meat is cut, prepared and packaged centrally by Veeakker and brought to the shop by van. One person, at the check-out, is enough to run the shop.

A feature of this new shop is the computerised supply chain management. Each packaged item has a bar code. This means it can be traced up to the moment it is sold, and it is possible by scanning the items, to know at any moment which kinds of meat are almost sold out, which is essential for organising the supply work efficiently. It also means that it is possible to know at any time where each piece of each slaughtered animal is, and how much of each animal has been sold.

The central Veeakker computer sends a list to the shop each day, which notifies the items whose sell-by date (set, for instance, at 5 days for cuts of meat) has arrived. Using a scanner, these can be quickly identified. These items are then moved to the frozen foods (freezing suspends the loss of quality) where they can stay another 3 months maximum, leaving 3 months for the consumer, as 6 months is the maximum for keeping frozen meat. Items which can't be frozen are marked 'must sell' and sold at discount (x% off); if they are not rapidly sold they are removed. The scanning system means that the central Veeakker administration knows at all times how many items have been moved from fresh to frozen or discount, and will immediately know which items have finally not been sold at all and must be written off.

Compared to an ordinary butcher's shop, where meats are constantly handled (every day they are moved from fridge to counter and back) and exposed to the air, the new shop with pre-packaged meat offers several advantages. Greater hygiene, for instance. No loss of weight (which means loss of income as most meat is sold by weight) as a result of exposure to air. And a huge reduction in work. In the old Veeakker shop 10-12 man-hours a day are spent bringing the meat from the fridge to the counter in the morning and putting it back again in the evening. In the new shop, all that the staff needs to do is to turn the lights on in the morning and off in the evening.

Selling fresh meat which is not sold within the first five days as frozen meat has an advantage too compared to the classic shops which Veeakker has been operating so far. In the old system, fresh steaks or chops which are not sold rapidly are either turned into mincemeat or sold off at discount. Which means a loss of financial value and income. By freezing them, the steaks or chops can still be sold three months longer and there is no loss of value – financially an important improvement.

Selling frozen meat beside fresh meat reduces another risk. In a country like Belgium, weather is unreliable, so it is risky to produce barbecue meat unless one is very sure of the weather forecast. Because of the weather, consumers tend to decide to do a barbecue at the last moment, on impulse – and then expect the butcher to have everything available. With freezing, barbecue meats can be produced in bulk and kept in stock throughout the summer, ready for customers.

If this new shop is a success – and its first months are encouraging – it can be replicated at other places. Very little staff is needed (one per shop) so that a good turnover can be achieved with a positive financial margin. All the work of preparing and packaging the meat is done in a central workshop by one or two butchers, instead of having a skilled butcher in every shop.

It is even possible to set up some fridges & freezers as a self-service arrangement in a corner of another food store or a supermarket, by which an even greater spread of customers can be reached, without any investment in staff.

Once there is a network of such shops and selling points, the **computerised supply chain management** and daily scanning of the stock will bring more advantages: Because the meat is all processed and packaged in a central workshop, a central store can be kept from which the shops are supplied, with defined levels of maximum and minimum stocks. As soon as the computerised scanning and tracking reveals that minced meat, for instance, is in danger of reaching minimum levels, the central workshop can make more minced meat. This is much better than the classic butcher's shop, where a quantity of minced meat, based on experience, is made fresh every day, in the hope that it will be sold. Reducing this risk is a strong point of computerised supply chain management.

Veeakker has developed an effective method of computerised supply chain management, which it is willing to share with others who are setting up systems to market niche meat directly to consumers. Wim Versteden: 'Which method of distribution and marketing is best, depends on local circumstances, but our experience is that two things are absolutely vital in whichever system one uses (classic shops, self-service shops, sales through farms, internet): internal tracking and reporting (knowing where each piece of the animal has gone and which items are selling well and need to be re-supplied) and quality of the product (the best shops and staff and the greenest message are lost if the steak is hard and unpleasant – the customer will not return)'.

2) Selling from the farm.

Parallel to the Veeakker shops, is the Ferm Local network for on-farm sales. If a farmer wants to join, a Ferm Local logo is displayed on the farm and the farmer receives folders to distribute locally and software to keep track of customers' orders. Ferm Local (a separate organisation within the Veeakker structure) takes care of the mailings, the data base of addresses, the production of new information folders, the marketing etc. Veeakker does the practical work, processing the meat and putting together the packages ordered by the customer. When customers have placed orders, Veeakker collects the animals from the farmer and takes care of slaughter, de-boning and cutting. On the date agreed with the customers, Veeakker staff arrives with the orders and gives them to the customer, who pays on the spot so that the farmer receives his or her share straight away.

As a result, the farmer does not have to invest anything and has almost no extra work. Through selling cattle from the farm, he gets 300-500 € extra income per animal. Moreover, if he or she agrees, Veeakker will sell products from other farmers through his farm, and he gets a percentage of the sales price.

In this system, planning is vital. One must plan ahead and warn farmers and customers when an animal will be slaughtered, because the customer, when his freezer is empty but there is no new package ready for him, will go elsewhere. It is a good public relations idea to always add a little news to the mailings with order forms sent to customers. For instance, something like '8 calves have been born the past month'. Customers love a story and farmers who have a story to tell, will retain their customer loyalty far better. Or to do some activity when the customers arrive to pick up their packages. The customers all arrive on the same day and time, so the farm will be full of people waiting their turn. Doing something in the meantime, such as a demonstration of ways to cook the meat, keeps people occupied and leaves a favourable impression;

By 2008 there were 30 farms in the Ferm Local network, scattered over all of Flanders. Each farm has about 80-100 customers. The number of farms has deliberately been reduced to 20 in 2009, because some farmers were joining simply to be able to use the Ferm Local logo but were not taking the underlying philosophy too seriously. This was annoying customers and undermining the reputation of the Ferm Local brand and the efforts of the farmers who were fully committed.

Instead, a steering committee of Veeakker and the committed farmers in the Ferm Local network is set up to assess and decide on any new farmers wishing to join.

3) Selling through organic food shops

The meat from the Galloway cattle raised in nature reserves can be ordered from 40 organic food shops which Veeakker supplies once a month, always on a Friday. The meat is packed in a vacuum and labelled.

4) Selling by local delivery

This began in the early days of Veeakker, when Wim Versteden drove around the village of Tielt delivering packages to people at their home address. The current system has replaced delivery at home by delivery at a central point, where people come from around to collect their order. Home delivery costs too much time, too much fuel and is too risky (people not home, not answering the doorbell...). The Veeakker van parks at some central point in a municipality or district – date and time are communicated in advance to all customers in that area – and the people in the vicinity come to collect their orders. The van has a cellphone so that people who are late (or not coming at all) can give warning. There are even places where a particular family has created its own little network (neighbours, family, friends); a bulk order is placed, collected from the Veeakker van and then distributed by the coordinating family. Veeakker gives such network coordinators a small remuneration.

Each week a different area is served by this delivery system. 70% of the orders are placed through internet to the Veeakker. 30% are by phone, fax, e-mail. Veeakker makes a systematic effort to phone those people in a given district who are on the customer database but who have not ordered by the time the van is ready to be loaded and go there for delivery.

Of course, this system functions well because Belgium is a very densely settled country.

Customer profile

There are 9000 addresses in the Veeakker database, of whom 5-6000 buy outside the shop (internet, farm etc). There are now 600 new hits on the website every week. Various studies have been done about the Veeakker customers' profiles. In summary, the customers are not correlated to levels of income but to levels of education. Typical Veeakker customers are people with higher education, including many from the teaching and medical professions. Besides urban inhabitants, there are customers from rural areas – the shop in Leuven draws customers from a radius of 30 kilometres around the city.

The keys to surviving and expanding as a niche enterprise

1) Economic efficiency and rational structures

Wim Versteden and his partners have split Veeakker into:

- a limited company which manages the buildings and the informatics,
- a cooperative company which takes care of running the business (purchase, sales, personnel).

Ten years ago the cooperative company had 30 employees, now there are 15 who manage a larger turnover of slaughtered animals. This shows how efficiently Veeakker works.

A central strategy within Veeakker over the years has been retaining more added value in the company by developing ready-to-eat products. Beginning with ham from Wim Versteden's pigs in the 1980s, the range of smallgoods now extends from paté to luncheon sausage, in addition Veeakker makes and sells spaghetti sauce, soup, vol au vent, gyros etc. It also makes barbecue packages and offers a catering service.

Because of the way it is produced, the raw material (meat) is more expensive in Veeakker than in ordinary shops, which means a disadvantage when it has to set sales price for cuts of raw meat. However, the more value is added, the lower the proportion of the raw material in the sales price and the smaller the difference with the supermarkets. The catering service is not dearer than other caterers and the Veeakker soup is, per litre, even cheaper than the Aldi house brand soup.

However, important warning: Professional expertise in preparing these value-added products is absolutely necessary – otherwise quality suffers and it will not work.

Consistent with its philosophy of regional cycles and sustainability, the purpose of Veeakker's diversification is not to raise turnover or profit, but to prevent waste. When Wim Versteden was selling packages of mixed meat from his farm, customers accepted taking such packages when he explained that this was a way to avoid waste. This has been a policy in Veeakker ever since. Modern customers are choosy and only want the best cuts (steak!) (although recently, the crisis has led to increasing consumption of cheaper minced meats). Veeakker promotes diversifying eating habits ("don't always eat steak, try something else") and developed the smallgoods and ready-to-eat products in order not to have to throw away the less popular parts of the animals.

Because Veeakker does not want to raise sales prices in spite of rapidly increasing costs, it is opting more and more for specialising and commercial networking.

Thus since August 2007 it has outsourced all its primary meat processing from de-boning meat to making packages of simple meat cuts to sell in the shops and from farms in the Ferm Local network. The official (EU and national) hygiene norms keep getting stricter (they are now stricter in Belgium for a butcher than for a hospital) and Veeakker can not keep up in terms of the investment required to conform to these norms. De-boning and cutting is now done by a specialised company which handles 'normal' meat for mainstream retailers and thus has enough volume and cash flow to be able to follow the complex and changing legislation. However, because payment is by kilogramme, the company is

always trying to raise its profit margins by lowering its costs. This means it tends to employ low-paid workers who only get a minimal training. So the quality of the de-boning and cutting is not always ideal. This is especially a problem with Galloways, where the properties of the meat vary from animal to animal. Therefore, Veeakker only outsources the de-boning of Galloways, not the cutting, which is left to its own skilled butchers.

Although outsourcing is cheaper, there is more loss of meat because of the lower-quality work; in fact, the profit margin on meat was better when Veeakker still did everything itself. However, the hygiene regulations simply do not allow this option anymore.

Carrying the meat around the various parts of the Veeakker network is outsourced to road transport companies, except for deliveries to customers and to the organic food shops.

In both cases Veeakker is using their strengths to its advantage, but it is criticised for this by parts of the green and organic movement. Yet Veeakker is convinced that an enterprise like it, with a philosophy and a message, will not grow if it stays in its own narrow group. Veeakker hopes to get customers from a broader range of society, especially people not involved in the green and alternative movements. To be able do this, it is focusing more and more on what it does well and what it must do itself, namely contacts with customers and farmers and developing and applying the correct business philosophy. Do what you are good at and outsource the rest to a network!

2) Growing the customer base and ensuring customer loyalty

Veeakker is a niche company, but to succeed in a niche market one has to be part of that niche so that you understand your customers. Trust is essential. Veeakker is based on trust. Without joining any label, it has managed to build up a loyal customer base. “This only succeeds”, Wim Versteden says, “if you gain a positive image and do not deceive the customer. During our history we have made mistakes and sometimes been too trusting, but we have always admitted the mistakes and tried to repair them. When you make a mistake, it is bad. But it is often an opportunity to communicate with your customer and in so doing, the mistake can be converted into an advantage, an opportunity to bind him or her more strongly to your venture. Honesty works best here”.

Veeakker has always taken a global vision, developing specific ideas about economics and management. These ideas were continually being taken over by others. Thus Veeakker was, in the 1980s, among the first in Belgium to offer hormone-free meat – ten years later it was standard practice. So Veeakker constantly had to think ahead and take up new challenges to stay ahead and in tune with its niche market. To stay ahead, it is important to be well-informed and to assess the future as accurately as possible. Sometimes Veeakker came up with an idea too soon and had to abandon it again, but when a new opportunity arose it tried again.

When, in the early years, Wim Versteden delivered the orders to his customers on his farm, he always told them something about the farm, the animals etc. This has remained a thread ever since: Veeakker still invests a lot in informing its customers (newsletters, website, information in the shop). Veeakker received many reactions to its mailings of newsletters, yet eventually it switched to relying more on its website and sending out less mailings. Coincidence or not, Veeakker lost quite a significant number of clients during that ‘internet’ period. So now it has gone back to sending out two printed newsletters a year. As Wim Versteden puts it: “ When the customer feels involved with your project, you won’t

easily lose him or her". A retired CEO of a multinational company, who is one of the customers, said that the 'heart and soul' Veeakker puts into its communications is one of its strong points, and could be strengthened by communicating even more authentic stories from the farmers in the network.

3) Problems, challenges and how to overcome them

To be avoided, according to Veeakker's experience, is **paying farmers a price far above the market price**. This caused very poor results for the Veeakker company, because even when paying farmers more, it is not commercially possible to let the selling price to customers rise too far above the average market price. Moreover, farmers were happy until the market prices rose above the Veeakker prices for whatever reason – then they wanted more, forgetting they had been paid above market prices for all those years before.

Slaughtering and cutting on the farm was the best method we have ever had during the history of Veeakker in terms of hygiene and animal welfare. Wim Versteden waited until the animal was quiet before killing it and there was no suffering because of transport by road. Stricter legislation means that this is now impossible. There is an increasing concentration among slaughterhouses (fewer, and larger, units) so that the distances covered increase and the animal welfare conditions stay poor.

Mobile slaughterhouses (in effect a truck which is driven to the farm and inside which the animals are slaughtered) are in my opinion much better in terms of animal welfare, because the animal is slaughtered in the (reassuring) presence of the farmer, without stressful transport. Many small farmers I know (but not the large-scale, industrial farms) agree. But changing legislation has made mobile slaughter almost impossible. Assuming that all legal obstacles can be overcome, the technical requirements are so high that it is not feasible to invest in a truck to slaughter small numbers of cattle. Technical provisions (filters for waste water etc) are also obligatory on the farm where the slaughter takes place.

A problem with the Galloway cattle which graze nature reserves is **quality management**. From the nature conservation side there is a tendency to regard the animals purely as ecosystem management instruments ('biological mowing machines') yet Veeakker has to sell the meat even though its quality is variable. Especially with old animals, customers complain. Because of this Veeakker has adjusted its carcass processing to the quality – older Galloways, whose meat is tougher, is processed to mince meat or salami. However, from a marketing viewpoint, it would be preferable to select in advance the animals to be slaughtered and then take them out of the nature reserve to fatten them on wetter grasslands during the last 6 months. Galloways do not reach a commercially viable weight of 300 kilo until they are 4 – 6 years old.

Important for **supply chain management** is giving the right name to the meat when it is being cut from the carcass. If a slice is classified as 'prime beefsteak' at the premises where the slaughtered animal is being de-boned and cut, but when it gets to the shop and the butcher considers it too tough to sell as steak, one has a problem. The farmer expects to be paid on the basis of the classification of the pieces of meat when they were cut from the carcass, but if the classification is wrong according to the staff selling the meat, it will not be sold at the right price to justify the payment to the farmer. Worse still is if it is sold as if it had a quality which is has not got – then the customer is upset. So correct classification right from the start of the supply chain is essential!

Grassland Products Best Practice Case Study:

Using hay as basis for successful meat cattle farming (Weideverein Ramsargebiet Lafnitztal)

Protecting by using

The river Lafnitz flows 112 km from the pre-Alps to its confluence with the Raab/Raba on the Austrian-Hungarian border. For a large part of this length, the Lafnitz is the boundary between the Austrian Regions of Styria and Burgenland. It is one of the least regulated lowland rivers in Austria.

Originally, farming in the Lafnitz valley was mixed, with arable land and meadows. Grass from the meadows was mowed as hay to feed to livestock kept in stables.
However, its soil and climate make the Lafnitz valley very suitable for maize and other arable cultivation. Rising prices for cereals and for grain-based energy and raw materials accelerated the conversion of the Lafnitz meadows to arable fields during the second half of the 20Th century. Cattle raising was also steadily becoming economically less attractive in other pre-Alpine valleys which enjoy favourable conditions for growing crops.
As a result the number of cattle declined sharply in Burgenland and lowland Styria in the past decades. In turn, this means grassland loses much of its value as a source of fodder.
Yet preserving grassland requires farmers who use the grass.

This became apparent when in the 1990s the water authorities began acquiring corridors of land along the Lafnitz river as part of their new 'passive flood management' policy. In these corridors, natural river dynamics like erosion, sedimentation and flooding would be given free rein. They should therefore be left to nature as gallery and floodplain woods, or (because grassland was essential as habitat for several rare or threatened species) used extensively as meadows.

In some of these areas, such as the Wolfau reserve beside the river, farmers were still prepared to mow such preserved or restored grasslands for free, because they still used the hay as livestock fodder. However, in several of the new blocks of riverside corridor land which the water authorities acquired, only when payment was offered, could a farmer be found who was willing to mow the large riverside buffer strips. Because they did not need the hay, it was simply composted. This kind of meadow management by contracting farmers against payment was not sustainable - it was a burden on the budget of the water authorities.

In 1998, during the rural land consolidation procedure 'Lafnitz', which had as one of its objectives to add more riverside corridor land, the Weideverein Ramsargebiet Lafnitztal was founded by a group of citizens, mainly water engineers, agronomists and local farmers. Its mission, based on the 'wise use' concept of the Ramsar Convention, is to implement projects which contribute to the sustainable development of the Lafnitz valley. One of its first projects was to help the water authorities solve their grassland management problem. In particular, the old tradition of mowing and grazing the Lafnitz meadows should be revived. Hence the name Weideverein Ramsargebiet Lafnitztal, which means 'Grazing Association Lafnitz Valley Ramsar site', and the motto 'Protect meadows by using them!'.

Learning by trying

The idea of sustainable and multifunctional use of the Lafnitz meadows became the foundation of a LEADER project, 'Low-intensity grazing in the Lafnitz valley', which was implemented between June 1998 and June 2001. Its financial basis was own contributions by members of the Weideverein, plus co-finance from LEADER II. Cattle from participating local

farmers were pooled. Novel was that instead of mowing, which had been the traditional grassland use in the Lafnitz district, the land would be grazed by cattle. The calves would be sold to generate income.
Work began in 1998 in the Zinswiesen, a grassland area beside the Lafnitz in the municipality Loipersdorf, with five cows on a few hectares of leased land. The Weideverein invested in simple wooden fences and a shed, as well as facilities to provide water, either from groundwater wells or by providing access to the river. Two retired farmers looked after the animals.
By 2000 there were already 30 cattle, contributed by local farmers. 42 hectares were being grazed.

The cows with their calves grazed the meadows from May to October, with a maximum stocking density of 1.4 cow per hectare, which meant low-intensity ('extensive') grazing. During the pasturing, the meadows were not overgrazed, were not fertilised and no supplementary fodder was given. The cattle did need fodder in the winter, and so adjoining meadows were mowed for hay. During the winter, the animals were mainly fed with this hay. Besides the sale of calves to traders, this cattle farming was supported financially by CAP suckler cow premia and RDP agri-environment payments for meadow management.

The Weideverein learned by trial and error:

- At the beginning of the project the cattle were kept in the same pasture, but this was detrimental for the vegetation and for wildlife. Consequently, rotation grazing was introduced.
- Originally, the cattle were supposed to stay outdoors all year round. The winter temperature was not the problem, but the shifts between frost and thaw made the soil vulnerable. The hooves of the cattle tore up the turf, the bare ground was trampled and risked being washed into the river. After two years, it was decided to keep the cattle indoors in winter.
- Instead of barbed wire, which could hurt cows and which made the landscape less attractive, electric fences were used. These could also be more easily moved about. However, hunters complained that the electric fences prevented roe and red deer from crossing the pastures during their seasonal wanderings. The Weideverein therefore replaced the electric fences by wooden fences wherever they crossed game tracks.

Nevertheless, there was initially scepticism from the side of nature conservationists who considered that meadows should only be mowed, never grazed. Not until scientific monitoring showed that the indicator species for biodiversity occurred just as often, or even more frequently, in the grazed as in mowed grassland, did acceptance grow.

The next step: professional mowing and grazing

By 2001 there were already 100 cattle in the project, and to feed these in winter, 350 tonnes of hay were mowed on 80 hectares of meadow.

For stock-raising on this scale, the democratic and non-commercial structure of the Weideverein was no longer appropriate. The decision was taken that the Weideverein should concentrate on its strategic tasks as coordinator of projects and on public relations, while the daily livestock and meadow management should go to a commercial enterprise to be established for the purpose, the Weidegesellschaft ('Grazing Company') Krutzler KEG. This new enterprise is thus an offshoot of the Weideverein, and its shareholders are three members of the Weideverein.

This split between the NGO and the commercial enterprise has been successful. The NGO Weideverein has carried on elaborating and coordinating projects for the wise use of the Lafnitz valley, such as soft tourism development , or river restoration.

The Weidegesellschaft Krutzler KEG continued the LEADER project as a suckler cow farming enterprise and entered into an agreement with the administration of the public water

domain, under which it would lease and farm the grasslands within the riverside corridors of the domain in the upper and middle Lafnitz valley. Every year there would be a monitoring survey by the nature conservation and water management officials, to check that land use was conform to the requirements of water and nature protection.

For the water and nature conservation authorities this is a sustainable solution. They no longer need to pay from their budgets to have grassland in the public water domain kept open by contractors (farmers or others) who are paid to mow. On the contrary, they even get revenue from leasing the land.

Making full use of market opportunities

The Weidegesellschaft invested in the purchase of cattle to expand the herd. The cows are Austrian Fleckvieh, a traditional dual-use breed (milk and meat). However, because they are kept as suckler cows, they are not milked. The bulls in the herd belong to beef breeds. The calves are thus crosses of Fleckvieh with e.g. Charolais or Limousin.

By 2003 mowing and grazing was already being done on 110 ha. In 2007 150 ha of meadows were mowed and 30 ha pasture was grazed. This 180 ha is mainly, but not exclusively, public water domain, which extends in a ribbon 60 kilometres long from Neustift/Lafnitz in the north to Rudersdorf/Fürstenfeld in the south. The meadows are thus scattered, often small and irregular in shape, which makes mowing them far from easy. Only the pastures had a reasonable size. At first cows were still being brought to pasture in May, where they stayed until September, but in the past few years the Krutzler KEG has pursued a different strategy: open-air grazing was stopped and all grassland was used to mow hay to feed livestock which is kept indoors. Why is this?

In the early years of the project, the calves were sold to traders who had them fattened elsewhere. After the the Weidegesellschaft Krutzler KEG was established, it decided to fatten the calves itself and sell them ready for slaughter. This raises the added value generated and retained, and makes the mowing of the riverside meadows in order to produce hay for feeding cows and calves, economically fully viable.

However, this had two implications:

1. To finish the calves for slaughter, the hay from mowing the meadows is not sufficient by itself, especially not because the meadows cannot be mowed at the moment when the grass has the optimum nutritional value. Instead they are mowed at a later time, laid down by the nature conservation authorities, in order to protect and foster the valuable habitats and species. Floods extending into the riverside corridor strips complicate matters further. As fodder supplement, the cows and calves are fed pressed cakes of soya leftovers from a local agro-industrial factory (soya is grown in the district!), as well as maize silage.

2. Because of this permanent additional feeding which is needed to fatten the calves, it was not practicable to let the cattle graze outdoors. Therefore, in 2006 a large, brand-new stable was built for 500 suckler cows and their calves, with storage for hay, straw and machinery. A second stable for another 400 animals was ready in 2008.

These stables were designed with animal welfare in mind. A frame of metal tubes is covered by a sheet of synthetic textile which lets light and air through its pores, but protects against rain and wind. The stables are dry and comfortable, well ventilated and with quite bright natural light during the daytime. The textile covering can, during fine weather, be rolled up to let in more fresh air and light. Manure is removed from the stable and fresh straw laid down on a daily basis.

Recently, the Krutzler KEG received the Burgenland animal welfare prize for livestock husbandry.

The latest project is to use the manure from the stables to produce bio-gas which is burned to generate heat and electricity. This bio-gas installation is now running and making a big

difference! It generates 250 kW electricity. Only dung and liquid manure is used to run the plant. The waste heat is used for drying hay and corn. The solid waste left after gas production is a useful fertiliser, which is spread over the fields. So this plant is an example of perfect recycling management, which also makes the Krutzler KEG farm enterprise commercially more viable.

In the beginning, the Weideverein's project to revive grassland use was viewed very sceptically by many farmers in the Lafnitz valley. However, a decade further, it has been demonstrated, first by Weideverein and then by Weidegesellschaft/Krutzler KEG, that a grassland farming enterprise based on mowing meadows for hay, can be run competitively and dynamically, even with the special requirements imposed by Natura 2000 and the Water Framework Directive.

The birth of TRINET

With this experience, the Weideverein wanted to build bridges to similar initiatives in Europe. Hence, as part of the LIFE project it coordinated from 2003 to 2007, an international workshop was organised in Buchschachen November 6-7 2006, with as theme 'Sustainable agriculture and water management supported by LIFE in Natura 2000 sites across Europe'. Speakers from Germany, the UK, the Netherlands, Latvia, Sweden, Rumania, Hungary and Austria took part. The TRINET idea first took shape at this workshop. It was deepened and became the basis for the current DBU-funded project at a follow-up workshop, held in Sigulda (Latvia) a year later.

Remarks and suggestions collected by the TRINET project "Building up a central and eastern European cooperation in nature conservation-oriented grassland use" about high nature value grasslands, the CAP, and notably the RDP

(These remarks are distilled from overview surveys done by the TRINET partner organisations and from a series of workshops held during winter-spring 2010, at each of which farmers engaged in HNV grassland farming gave their opinion).

An overall finding of the TRINET partners is that in recent history there has almost everywhere been a dramatic loss and decline of HNV grasslands because of agricultural 'improvement', intensification, conversion to other land uses, drainage and hydrological regulation etc.
Yet the dominant *current* problem facing grasslands in the TRINET Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries is abandonment of farming, followed by natural succession to scrubs and finally forest.
There appear to be two processes behind abandonment:

- The transition from a state-run economy to a market economy meant the closure of many state farms and the disappearance of large numbers of livestock (sheep especially, e.g. in Hungary, but also cattle) because they were no longer shielded against cheaper produce from the rest of the EU and the world. The decline in the numbers of livestock has been very dramatic during the early 1990s in many of these countries. Consequently, large areas of grassland are no longer being grazed or mowed and have been falling prey to succession.
- Where there were traditionally many individual farmers (Romania for instance), they have continued farming but here there is a growing problem of 'farm succession': the older generation which still farms does not have a younger generation ready to take over the farm. Instead, young people in the rural areas prefer to emigrate to the urban areas or to other countries, where there are opportunities for careers and jobs. Once the older people who are still mowing and grazing the mountain grasslands in the Carpathians give up, the land will fall out of use. This threatens hundreds of thousands of hectares of HNV grassland in Romania alone.

Abandonment is a horizontal, cross-cutting problem. HNV grasslands lying within National Parks, Natura 2000 sites and other protected areas *should* because of their legal status, be safe from intensification, afforestation, ploughing, drainage etc….but they are NOT protected against land abandonment. The cessation of grazing and mowing, leading to natural succession, is a threat facing all these protected grasslands as much as the unprotected ones.

The core issue which should be focused on is therefore a socio-economic one: how can land abandonment be halted or reversed? In other words, how can an ecologically appropriate use of HNV grasslands, where it exists, be secured for the future, and how can such farming be started again where it no longer exists?
(this reasoning also applies to intensification and conversion of grasslands: how can ecologically appropriate use of HNV grasslands be made so attractive, *socially and economically speaking,* that farmers are not motivated to use the land in a different, less ecologically positive way?).

Fundamentally therefore, loss and degradation of HNV grasslands is directly related to the change of living patterns, the disappearance of traditional and sustainable livelihoods (in the case of grasslands this primarily means keeping grazing animals or mowing meadows for hay) and the lack of rural employment opportunities.

So the aim of rural development policies should be to (re)establish traditional/extensive land-use, create employment adapted to local circumstances and respecting the carrying capacity of the given area. Programmes building on local resources – including human and natural resources, such as inherent culture and tradition – could revive the rural economy, would increase and diversify the sources of income for the local community and consequently would contribute to the economically AND ecologically sustainable development of rural areas

Eligibility for RDP support (definition of a 'farmer')

Description of the issue:

In some countries organizations/persons who are not principally famers but who own or manage HNV grassland, can get RDP support.

For instance, the Estonian Agricultural Registers and Information Board (EARIB), which manages RDP support schemes, makes support for the maintenance of semi-natural habitats available for 'farmers' (natural and legal persons, civil law partnerships and other associations of persons without the status of a legal person) and 'other land managers'. Thus NGOs can obtain EARIB support and they are in fact quite typical applicants. Municipalities can ask the EARIB support as well.

In Latvia also it is not necessary to register as farmer to apply for EU subsidies in agri-environmental schemes, i.e. obligations and subsidies within payment schemes are related to the particular applicant and s/he can be any manager of the land, regardless of their legal status (farmer, individual proprietor, NGO or any legal entity).
However, in some Latvian schemes there are obligations for applicants to be livestock owner. For instance, *Payments to farmers in areas with handicaps, other than mountain areas* (Less favourable areas) are available only in grasslands if the minimum livestock density (0.2 LU/ha) is ensured in these areas. Thus, if landowner has no livestock, grasslands, even when important for biodiversity or landscape, are not eligible for this payment.
Finland: In the current 2007-2013 RDP NGO associations can also apply for the 5-year agri-environment contract to manage traditional rural landscapes and gain subsidies, in nearly the same way as farmers. In addition, both farmers and NGO associations have the possibility to apply for basic grassland restoration support (675 €:yr) to cover e.g. the clearing of some overgrown wooded biotope types and the restoration of coastal meadows (crushing of reed).

In most other countries, only professional farmers can qualify for RDP support.

Our proposal:
In the new RDP, make it clearer that land managers who are not professional farmers, but who manage HNV land, can get RDP support for biodiversity maintenance and enhancement.

Availability of payments under other 'grassland-related' schemes also is important, to provide a total sum of all payments per hectare which is competitive with the sum in intensively managed agricultural land.

The eligibility of subsistence and small-scale farmers

Description of the issue:

Slovakia: It is very positive that a great deal of new support has been introduced for HNV grassland since joining the EU, but this support is oriented towards registered farmers only, represented in Slovakia mostly by larger farmers managing most of the land. Small part-time farmers have only very limited possibilities to get some support from EU funds.

Bulgaria: livestock breeding in Bulgaria is mainly based on private households with a couple of sheep, goats and cows reared by their owners as subsistence farming. Many HNV farmers are excluded from support, are not registered or lack the technical capacity to meet new requirements and standards.
There is in Bulgaria an extremely high share of subsistence and semi-subsistence farmers. Typically they are old people, living in poor conditions, with little scope to set up a viable farm business. Their numbers can best be revealed by comparing the figures of agricultural land in use and the land registered in the Land Parcels Identification System (LPIS), which shows land eligible for CAP support. On average less than one fifth of all grasslands are in farms claiming support (which are the more commercially oriented farms). Even worse, only 8 % of all arable land is registered in LPIS. Furthermore, this excludes long-term abandoned land which is statistically registered separately.
Bulgarian farmers managing HNV grasslands and/or situated in mountain areas can apply for the **single area-based payments** (63 EUR/ha) as well as for **LFA payments** (90 EUR/ha) and **agri-environmental schemes for high nature value farmlands** (131 to 155 EUR/ha). Logically, this support is only provided to registered farmers and land. However, in many areas with grasslands only a small part of arable land (between 10 to 20%) and about 20-30 % of the grasslands are officially registered. In practice this leaves huge areas of land without any support and thus threatens to lead to further abandonment and the resulting loss of biodiversity and habitats.

In Romania there are several million subsistence or semi/subsistence farmers, who have no other income source. Most of the grasslands in Romania are used in an extensive way, with low stocking densities (less than 1 LU/ha), while the hay meadows produce 2-3 t/ha on average.
Almost no farmer puts chemical fertilizers on grasslands. Although some intensive livestock farms in hilly areas are using such fertilizers, in traditional practices farmers use about 5 t/ha of organic fertilizer in every 4th year.
The majority of the grasslands are used for mowing in a traditional way: in the morning the cattle from the village are taken by 1-2 persons and kept on the common pasture till late afternoon, when they return to the village. In this system the families have one to six cattle, they produce milk mainly for themselves and sell only the surplus (subsistence and semi-subsistence farming).
In mountainous areas farmers are usually cutting hay 2-3 times. The first cut is at the beginning of June, depending also on the weather, the last one at the end of September. Most of the grasslands are hayed manually or with small-scale machines. This practice is good for wildlife, mainly birds such as the corncrake (*Crex crex*).

Our proposal: In the new member states, especially in Romania and Bulgaria, small-scale, traditional and subsistence farmers play a key role in managing HNV grassland. Yet they are to a large degree excluded from CAP support. In the reformed CAP, this must be reversed and special attention ought to be given to these farmers (who are the backbone of rural communities in many regions)

Proper support for subsistence and small-scale farmers

Description of the issue:
Subsistence and small-scale farmers need, more than anyone else, access to support for necessary investments. Yet in practice the opposite is rather the case:

In Bulgaria, most of the farmers are small and have no machinery and equipment. They suffer from a lack of investment and marketing skills. Yet criteria for RDP support for farm investments as applied in Bulgaria militate against the farmers who need it most: no one over 60 years can apply (but most mountain farmers as in the Rodopi are over 60), farmer cooperatives can not apply, farmers must be officially registered as farmer since 1999….

Hungary: small farmers are clearly disfavoured by the current system of agri-environment schemes, partly due to disproportionately high bureaucratic burdens, partly because of the pressure towards larger land holdings because the RDP is giving too much support to heavy machinery and similar large investments.

Our proposal: Ensure that subsistence and small-scale have easy access to investment supports which are tailored to their specific needs.

Problems with definition of farmland

Description of the issue:

A problem which repeatedly turns up in practice is the maximum % of woody plants (trees, shrubs) allowed in a grassland for it to still qualify for CAP support

In Slovakia, more than one third of the mapped HNV grasslands are located outside the LPIS (Land Parcel Information System), which is an integral part of the IACS (Integrated Agricultural Control System). This is due to various reasons, but the main reason seems to be that these grasslands are overgrown by trees and shrubs above the level which is considered eligible for EU subsidies.
Land with only light succession (scattered trees and bushes) is threatened by the general EU insistence on clear yes/no classification of grassland in LPIS. In Slovakia land with over 5% tree cover is officially not 'agricultural land' and gets no subsidies. So RDP support for managing the Habitats Directive Annex I habitat type wooded pastures would be impossible in Slovakia.

In Latvia too, there are problems with the definition of "agricultural land in good condition". Many wooded meadows and calcareous meadows with a coverage of juniper do not qualify under this definition. As a result, there is no agri-environment support for farming in the priority habitat of Community interest Fennoscandian woodland meadows - 6530*, and a significantly reduced possibility to get subsidies for farming in habitat *Juniperus communis* formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands - 5130.
On the basis of not complying with the requirements of "agricultural land in good condition" , traditionally used grasslands which still can be used for grazing, are systematically excluded from the Latvian UAA area (it is an ongoing process and maps are corrected each year) . These are areas with higher soil moisture or where tussocks occur; areas which regularly overflow during seasonal floods; areas where bushes occur. Therefore, there are no payments available any longer for these areas (but most of them are highly valuable for farmland biodiversity). Such treatment by an intensification-oriented local bureaucracy makes it difficult to implement any issues described in the chapter 'Valuating ecosystems services' in this document.

However, this is a matter where national interpretation plays a role. In Estonia, areas partly covered with trees and shrubs or areas with traditional landscape elements such as stone walls, temporarily flooded areas, traditional wooden hay barns and animal shelters, are regarded as a part of the eligible grassland area, if the existence of trees and shrubs or landscape elements is related to traditional agricultural activity or environmental objectives.

Our proposal:
Modify LPIS and IACS in such a way that there is a more uniform classification across the EU of grassland which contains shrubs, trees and other elements, and that this uniform classification raises the maximum % of such elements to a level which allows support to be given to wooded meadows and pastures, park landscapes and others where the structural variety is the cause of high biodiversity value (some of these are acknowledged to be of great value by the EU itself, being classified on Annex I of Directive 92/43/EC)

National margin of manoeuvre in RDP application

Description of the issue:
Member states have considerable flexibility in how they implement the RDP. Unfortunately, the countries with the greatest wealth of HNV grasslands have the most narrow application of RDP in favour of these grasslands:

Romania
The NRDP 2007-2013: the main problems of this programme are:

- the axis 2 budget in the Romanian NRDP is one of the lowest in EU27 (25% - the minimum set by the Commission),
- very low budget for the only compulsory axis 2 measure (agri-environment): only 40% of axis 2, and only 12% of the total rural development budget,
- a measure for organic agriculture is totally missing from the Romanian NRDP,

The LEADER axis was not functional yet in Romania in 2009, so the sharing of experience between micro-regions could not be financed.

Bulgaria

Most funds are concentrated on the most intensive farmers

Key concerns:

- The RDP for 2007-2013 focuses on 'increasing competitiveness' and 'diversification' with few environmental safeguards and a lack of integration with Axis 2 objectives.
- Only 25% of the total budget is allocated to Axis 2, with no guarantee that sufficient funds will be targeted to adequately conserve and enhance biodiversity resources.
- Many agri-environment schemes existing before 2007 have barely been improved, some beneficial ones actually abandoned or weakened, with funds directed at basic 'entry-level' type schemes that require little change in practices and deliver few benefits.
- Those few effective schemes which do exist will continue to suffer from lack of uptake due to phased introduction, no 'ring-fencing' of funds, competing objectives, low payment rates, lack of advisory support and inappropriate targeting.
- Natura 2000 sites are at risk due to delayed introduction of 'effective' agri-environment schemes or management plans, and inadequate funding. At the same time, there is also the existence of large areas of unprotected HNV farmland.

Latvia

In Latvia there had been only one sub-measure directly targeted at management of biologically valuable grasslands. Unfortunately, since 2010 management requirements in this sub-measure have been changed and now these grasslands should be mowed within the period from August 15 until September 15. Yet because of very low nutritional value, this hay can not be used as fodder for livestock. Consequently, such late mowing prevents further use of biologically valuable grasslands in an economically viable way. Setting such late mowing dates is also controversial in terms of grassland biodiversity (this is not a traditional harvest-time, which historically was responsible for the formation of local grassland biodiversity).

Our proposal: reduce the margin member states have by raising the minimum shares that axis 2 must have. But it is not enough to simply set quantitative targets. Quality of the RDP support schemes is even more important. Some suggestions:

- Targeted and coherent packages of measures from Axes 1, 2 & 3 are needed to address the social and economic problems facing HNV farming sustainability.
- Investment and diversification aid for low-input farming systems should be directed at value-adding production increasing economic profit for farmers; accessing new markets; finding modern alternatives to labour-intensive practices; helping farmers access the economic benefits of biodiversity conservation.
- LFAs and direct payments maintain farmers in farming, but not necessarily in traditional management practices which are beneficial for biodiversity. There is a need to retain the 'principles' of these practices, whilst allowing for technological advancement
- Farmer support of agri-environment objectives must be gained by explaining why management for biodiversity is a priority and how their businesses can benefit
- Where agri-environment schemes are targeted at biodiversity, expert environmental advice should be sought and followed by everyone to ensure the schemes' effectiveness (scheme designers, advisory staff, farmers, paying agencies)

- Some flexibility should be allowed to delivery staff to adjust management requirements to the needs of particular species or to regional differences in farming systems, climate and habitats.
- The current agri-environment system is based on compensating income forgone & additional costs, but is not effective if farmers already have very low incomes, or are already engaged in the right practices.
- The future challenge is therefore: paying for the positive externalities of HNV farming; rewarding positive traditional management which is not economically viable.

Level of second pillar payments

Description of the issue:
Compared to western and central European countries, support payments are too low in the new member states where the need is greatest! These countries have designated large % of territory as Natura 2000 and much of this is HNV grassland. If the EU wants Natura 2000 to be a success, it must adequately help the people who are using these HNV grasslands and so maintaining them.

Latvia: Due to the complicated management conditions (soil moisture, small fields, uneven surface *etc.*) for high-nature value grassland, payment rates in the agri-environmental scheme ('Maintaining biodiversity in grasslands', 123 Euro per hectare per year) is not competitive in comparison to more profitable conventional agricultural practices. This puts pressure on farmers to opt for more profitable uses of the land, such as turning grassland into arable land or increasing grass production using artificial fertilizer, activities which cause the loss of high-nature value grasslands.
Finally, there is no support for specific project-based "agri-environment" measures. Different habitats and different species (plant and bird) need different management. As the current Programme has only one scheme targeting the support of biodiversity, applying 'one rule for all' makes its effectiveness controversial. There are no possibilities to take into account any regional differences (or even differences at farm level).

In Estonia also, support payments and subsidies are not big enough to cover the expenses made for managing semi-natural landscapes. Calculations and experience shows that it takes 9-10 years of work to break even. That is not encouraging people to take up 5 year Axis 2 subsidy obligation periods (if the farmer can´t manage the area he signed up for he needs to return the subsidy for the previous years as well). Managing semi-natural landscapes is profitable only when initial investment is not required (animals, fences and necessary equipment) and recurring costs are well managed.

Slovakia: The scheme for 'Conservation of semi-natural and natural grasslands' has been implemented from 2003 onwards (it started in the pre-accession period through SAPARD support). During the previous RDP period (2004-06), the conditions of the scheme were set up according to four principal ecological groups of grasslands (dry grasslands, mesic grasslands, wet grasslands, high-mountain grasslands). The restrictions imposed by the scheme to qualify for agri-environment payments were mainly the limited use of fertilizers and pesticides, special mowing dates and a special regime of grazing. The scheme was implemented only on grasslands which were certified as semi-natural or natural by a national certification authority. The scheme was very well accepted by

the farmers and introduced over an area of 101,000 hectares in the whole country. It has surely acted as a good incentive for farmers to manage species-rich grasslands.
However, some problems and shortcomings were observed as well - mostly the fact that the conditions for different habitat types were scarcely differentiated. The scheme had one payment for all grassland types (approx. 180€/ha/year), which has not been motivating enough for the management of some problematic grassland types (e.g. fen meadows).

Therefore a re-design of the scheme was prepared for the RDP 2007-13. The grasslands are divided into 7 habitat groups (Dry grasslands; Mesic grasslands; Hay mountain grasslands; Wet grasslands in lower altitudes; Alluvial *Cnidion* grasslands; Fen, *Molinia* and *Calthion* grasslands; High-mountain grasslands). For the RDP 2007-13, the State Nature Conservancy has become the certification authority for the localisation of semi-natural and natural grasslands suitable for the scheme. Some conditions in the scheme are general, some are specific for a particular habitat type. Only limited organic fertilizing is allowed and only for some habitat types. The use of pesticides is very limited - to point application, with approval of an official authority. Date of mowing is generally set for July 15, but it can be shifted by the State Nature Conservancy if necessary. Fen, *Molinia* and *Calthion* meadows may be mown only by hand or by light machinery, and it is not allowed to graze them. Grazing of some other types which are dependent on regular mowing is also limited to grazing after the first cut. Sheep-folding is possible only in selected habitat types, and folds have to be removed daily. Use of fences for grazing is not allowed: the animals have to be supervised by the shepherd. The eligible load for grazed areas is between 0.3-1.0 LU/ha. This range is the same for all semi-natural grasslands in the whole country. No additional sowing, improvement and mulching of grasslands is allowed. We can generally assume that the conditions of the scheme meet the conservation requirements. They may be unsuitable in some situations, but this can normally be solved by the local management plan or through a statement of the local conservation authorities. **Consequently, the Slovak agri-environment system for using species-rich grassland is technically-scientifically well conceived (among the better systems in Europe) with a 'menu' of options corresponding to different ecological situations – but the money value of the subsidies is too low compared to the work effort required of the farmer.**

The main problem of the scheme is indeed the very low level of payments at the moment. Payments are differentiated according to the type and they vary from approx. 60€ to 190€/ha/year. The initial proposal considered higher payments, but the Ministry of Agriculture did not accept this. Current payments are not motivating enough for farmers and may lead to abandonment of some less-productive grasslands. The payments are especially low for the types which require special management measures (e.g. manual mowing on fen meadows, mowing of remote mountain meadows).

Even in Finland, the much higher levels of payment as expressed in euro, are not sufficient for some types of HNV grassland. At the moment the financial support level for the management of traditional rural landscapes is 450 €/ha/year, and for the first year of basic restoration/fencing 675 €/ha. In small and laborious sites such as in wooded meadows, these levels of subsidy are inadequate.

Our proposal:
Redistribute budgets so that there is enough funding to ensure that payments for supporting ecologically beneficial farming of grasslands are attractive to farmers and truly compensating their effort and work. These schemes must simultaneously be making a real contribution to biodiversity, i.e. be more than general basic input reduction/ environment protection' schemes.

Excessive bureaucracy in applications for RDP support and excessive rigidity in their implementation

Description of the issue:
Finland: The special support contracts of the agri-environmental schemes are one of the most bureaucratic contract types. This slows down farmers' interest in committing themselves to these subsidy types. The agri-environmental measures should be redesigned to make them more flexible and region/farm specific. The farmers should be able to choose measures which have a remarkable environmental impact potential and which are reasonable to implement. The measures could be re-designed to include more distinctive categories for "basic compensation for environmental services" and "special compensation for environmental services".

Also in Hungary, agri-environment schemes and contracts are too rigid. At the Nov. 2009 TRINET workshop, both farmers and nature conservationists complained that they could not modulate mowing dates in function of the weather, bird behavior etc. General prohibitions on manuring will lead to long-term loss of soil fertility which negatively affect certain HNV grassland types.
The persons who inspect and control agri-environment don't always understand nature conservation – an additional problem. They inspect 1, 2 times a year and this is perceived by the farmers as an 'attack'. What is needed is inspection which is more like cooperation to achieve a common goal, otherwise farmers will behave like soldiers in the military: they do it because they have to and fear punishment.

Improvements are possible, e.g. in Slovakia the application procedure for agri-environmental support was rather complicated in the period 2004-06. Each applicant had to prepare a 'project' and to get various additional documentation. Such conditions were not very attractive for small farmers and therefore most of them did not apply for the support. The administrative procedures were heavily criticized and the Agricultural Paying Agency decided to simplify the process. The application is relatively simple now in the RDP 2007-13 and it is submitted together with the application for the Single Area Payment in May. Thus the system is much more friendly towards small farmers and they are applying for agri-environmental support much more than in the previous period.

Our proposal: Simplify application procedures for RD support schemes, as Slovakia has done. Provide more advisory services (as already exist in some countries). Explicitly modify the Regulation to allow pragmatic flexibility in the performance of agri-environment schemes – the result is what counts. In this context the monitoring of compliance must be involving suitable experts whose task can be just as much to advise and guide the farmer to better achieve the biodiversity goals, as to check the formal adherence to the rules.

Insufficient attention to HNV grassland farming in mountain areas!

Description of the issue:
There is too little attention in most new member states which have elevated land for the special difficulties which farmers in mountainous areas face.

Bulgaria completely lacks a mountain strategy and there is no proper financial support for high mountain pastures which have different conditions than low level pastures

In Slovakia there is a lack of the right equipment to mow mountain meadows and fens, where fields are often small and/or very steep (30° slopes !) – the big tractors etc farmers usually have are unsuitable. Poland's RDP financially supports famers to buy the correct equipment for difficult land, but this is not possible in Slovakia!

Support for winter feeding of animals kept outdoors year-round would be a great help. Year-round grazing is excellent from a conservation point of view, but it requires additional feeding, and this is not acknowledged by support schemes.

Our proposal: make it compulsory for all states with land above a certain altitude, to formulate mountain strategies and to implement special RD schemes responding to the needs of mountain grassland farmers as identified by these strategies.

RDP support for restoring HNV grasslands which have become degraded or overgrown

Description of the issue:
Former grasslands which have been drained or afforested can be restored and brought back to a level which qualifies them as 'high nature value'. But this requires an initial investment which can be quite considerable, e.g. for hydrological interventions to reverse drainage.

The most widespread need for restoration in the new member states is however linked to overgrown land.
In Romania for instance, the rural population is getting older and older, most of the young people are leaving rural areas, and those who stay are not working in agriculture. There is a continuous decrease in livestock, which leads to the abandonment of grazing, causing the degradation of large areas of grassland due to the occurrence of ecological succession characterized by the encroachment of many invasive species.On the basis of a grassland inventory carried out in 2004 by Dutch and Romanian experts, it was calculated that of the total permanent grassland surface, about 15% suffers from abandonment of agricultural activities.
From 1992 to 1994 slaughterhouses in Hungary worked non-stop slaughtering most of the national herd, which had become superfluous after the socialist farm structures collapsed, and effectively dumping the meat on the European market. The vastly reduced numbers of livestock since then

cause problems for grazing management. Abandoned grazing lands, when not converted to arable land, have become covered in succession vegetation.

The RD regulation permits funds to be used for restoration of land to bring it into a condition where it qualifies for 'normal' recurring agri-environment premia. Countries such as Sweden have been allocating large budgets for restoration of HNV grassland since as early as 2001. Yet only some new member states, such as Estonia, have support payments to build fences and restore the semi-natural landscape.

Bulgaria: farmers willing to start using abandoned grasslands or arable fields will face serious difficulties as the clearing of unwanted scrub encroachment is not supported by any of the Axis 2 payment options. **The Bulgarian Rural Development Plan** 2007-2013 does not include such measures for non-productive investments either. Any restoration of overgrown and abandoned fields is the responsibility of the land manager.

Restoration of overgrown grassland is not fundable from RDP in Slovakia, in spite of NGO attempts to include it. Consequently, Slovak farmers must rely on LIFE+ to clear sites inside Natura 2000 (and for HNV grassland outside Natura 2000, there is no EU support). This is unfortunate, because after 1989 there was a long period of agricultural decline in Slovakia and because the soil is less eutrophic (as a result of less efficient and intensive farming during the socialist era) than in western Europe, overgrowth (natural succession) has been very rapid. This causes a problem. Cross-compliance can oblige farmers to keep still-existing grassland clear of scrub, but it can not compel them to clear the backlog of accumulated scrub.
Moreover, in the EU Accession Agreement of 2003, Slovakia committed itself not to give any support from CAP or RDP to land which was not being used agriculturally in 2003. So it is impossible to bring cleared and restored grassland into the system.

Latvia: Linking agri-environmental schemes (especially the scheme 'Maintaining biodiversity in grasslands') with requirements under the Single Area Payment makes land which is no longer agriculturally viable ineligible for any payment. Support payments may be granted only for those areas which are eligible for Single Area Payments – which means, only for areas that were in good agricultural condition in the reference year 2003. There is therefore a lack of measures to promote the restoration of grasslands through the reoccupation of former agricultural land which has become afforested or overgrown by scrub.
NB: Latvia and its Baltic neighbours are currently pushing to get these commitments which they signed in 2003, reversed.

To complicate matters further, on abandoned land, very often "natural afforestation" happens – when open land overgrows with bushes and gradually turns into forest, it is automatically transferred in Latvia to the category "forest land" and henceforth classified as forest. This means that the land, now officially classified as forest, can never again be cleared of trees and used as grassland. This application of forestry law is also a problem in some other member states, including EU-15 states.

Our proposal:
Restoration of overgrown/degraded grassland should be an integral and compulsory part of all RDP support schemes.

Ideally, support level should be high at the beginning ,when famers have to invest in clearing and fencing land, dropping to a lower level after restoration to just cover the annual costs of managing the land by mowing or grazing
In particular, the focus ought to be on financing support for planning and basic restoration of big management entities (to ensure different variation and intensity of management and avoid local extinctions)
Accession Treaty clauses which in effect disallow restoration and use of pre-2003 grasslands, ought to be reversed.

Land tenure issues

Description of the issue:
Although matters relating to land ownership and rent are outside the scope of the CAP, they can have an important effect on HNV farming.

Hungary: The price of land is continuously increasing, although it is still far from the prices of Hungary's Western neighbours. Nevertheless all large land-owners who can afford it are still buying up any land they can put their hands on, foreseeing even higher prices in the near future. Further increase of land prices is a very realistic expectation, especially when the moratorium on foreign land ownership is ended (at the moment only Hungarian citizens, the state and government agencies can own land). With higher land prices, newly starting, but financially not strong enterprises, like a family farm will have practically no chance to survive, this scenario is an absolute contra-indication for the preservation of high-nature value grasslands.
The large areas of land owned by the Hungarian national parks (such as HNV grasslands) is often made available to farmers to use, according to strict prescriptions. However, the regulations have recently been changed (under the influence of policies based on economic liberalism) and the Parks are now required to hand out the land after a call for tenders, to the successful tenderer. This means they can't automatically continue to work with farmers with whom they have a good relationship and who use the land well (yet, historically, when the Parks were buying up land in the 1990s and 2000s, the informal and oral deal with the local farmers was that they would always get access to the land). Moreover, the rules for giving land use contracts to farmers have become quite rigid and exclude several categories of farmers. Finally, before 2005 the Parks could charge very low rents for their land to the farmers, to help them, but they are now obliged to charge market rents.

In Estonia also, recent policy changes mean that state-owned land in nature reserves is put out to tender, and farmers which have been renting and using this land have to bid, with no certainty that they will succeed against competitors. Yet quite many of them have also concluded 5-year agri-environment contracts which can not be concluded if they lose use of the land.

Romania: Some of the grasslands (mainly those which are used as pastures) are not the property of the local inhabitants, but belong to the state and are given by various contracts to the local government. Many times there are conflicts between local government representatives (mayor or councillors) and the users of the grasslands (most of the time these are husbandry associations or individual persons). The main and central issues in these conflicts are the payments or subsidies from the EU and Romanian government, but also the rent which the users have to pay for the grasslands.

The subsidies are paid to those who are using the land – as said above, these are usually farmers. However, sometimes the landowners (e.g. local governments) obtain the subsidies because they pay the farmer to cut the hay, giving the hay for free. In this case the subsidy goes to the owner because he is 'using' the land.
This reveals a gap in the legislation: if the local government as the owner of the grassland gets any rent from the user of the grassland, then it should not get subsidies also. Getting both rents and subsidies is not correct. If the user of the land pays any rent, any subsidy should belong to the user of the land.
This legislative gap causes some problems:

- pasture management plans are missing;
- maintenance of the pastures is not solved;
- there is no long-term planning regarding the grasslands.

Conflicting RD support schemes

Description of the issue:
In the Rural Development Programme for Latvia 2007 – 2013 there is a sub-measure 'First Afforestation of Non- Agricultural Land' which supports afforestation by planting trees on abandoned land.
In Hungary, afforestation, stimulated since 2002 by subsidies, has also destroyed many grasslands, e.g. in Szatmar-Bereg region (NE Hungary). These artificial plantations endanger nearby sand steppes and rocky grasslands as well: the newly-planted trees are usually non-indigenous or often even invasive species Robinia pseudo-acacia, Pinus silvestris, P nigra..which exterminate the original vegetation, and often spread out to other natural vegetations.

Our proposal:
Eliminate conflicting overlaps between different second pillar support schemes by clearly and strictly defining where and how e.g. afforestation with premia is possible

Increase opportunities to directly market HNV grassland produce as niche products

Description of the issue:
Improving income for HNV grassland farmers, and reducing their reliance on CAP subsidies, through direct marketing to consumers of meat and cheese as a quality, nature-based product, has not yet been tried on any significant scale in the new member states.

Farmers are worried about the permits, the investments, and – certainly the older ones - can't imagine asking loans from the bank for a business plan.

In many countries, it was not even permitted to sell directly from the farm – legislation enabling this was only passed in Slovakia in spring 2010 and Bulgaria still has no specific legislation (under

development – probably will be in force summer 2010) for direct marketing. Selling meat on a small scale from the farm is still prohibited in Estonia.

There is still the very large question of how to inform consumers that such green, nature-friendly HNV milk and meat products exist, and of which labeling system to use. Knowledge of the consumer is low about the high quality "HNV milk and meat" products; there is generally no national brand or labeling developed to introduce such products to the consumer.
A distinct certification is certainly needed for produce from HNV grasslands. Organic (bio) certification is not appropriate – it excludes many grassland farmers whose practices are ecologically beneficial. Also, organic certification does not guarantee good HNV grassland management – witness such bio-certificate requirements that grassland must be ploughed every three years (organic rotation farming), or 'bio' lambs which are fattened in a stable on fodder which is organic – but the pastures are not grazed!
However, any label or certification for HNV produce must avoid the trap of over-regulation – without losing sight of the objective, it must be pragmatic and flexible enough to allow farmers to adapt to local circumstances.

Our proposal: National RDPs should foresee budgets for such information and marketing programmes. The question of a suitable certification or appellation for produce from HNV grassland farming must be looked at from a European perspective, with full consultation of grassland farmers and nature conservation experts.

Tackle barriers preventing the exploitation of niche marketing opportunities

Description of the issue:
Certain EU legislation and/or the way it is applied in certain countries, forms major barriers to HNV grassland farmers trying to improve their economic situation and farm viability, and reduce reliance on subsidies, by bringing niche products on the market:

<u>Hygiene regulations</u>

In the Central Balkans National Park mountain pastures, shepherds produce, for their own family needs, milk and cheese which have excellent gustatory qualities and are a desired product. Conclusion: there is consumer demand and potentially the shepherds could earn money from selling it, which would make grazing the pastures more attractive. However, the production takes place in improvised containers and dairies, where hygiene is not meeting the standards of the EU. On the other hand, these are very small dairies, which face a financial and capacity impossibility to comply with the high hygiene requirements set by the Bulgarian relevant legislation (harmonized with that of the EU) targeted at large, extensive and industrial producers of dairy products. There is a need to revise the concrete hygiene norms, especially for small-scale producers of dairy products. In particular mountain dairies– thus enabling a sustainable trend in the long-term development of the sector. Also, there is a need to establish a clear and fixed definition, description and technical parameters on what a high mountain dairy should be, so that it is possible to make quality labels of origin and protect the high mountain dairies against dishonest competitors.

Elsewhere in Bulgaria also, the overly strict **hygiene requirements** (as compared to other EU member states) do not in practice allow small- and medium-scale farm enterprises to sell end products, which brings about a reduced scope for direct sales in the region. So far the only option for small-scale producers is to sell milk to milk collection points, an unfair situation in which middlemen make most of the profits without providing any support or engagement with the farmers. Financial support, as well as tailored legislation for small and semi-subsistence farmers, is a precondition for the creation of markets and local brands for end products and for the revival of the livestock keeping sector.

Joining the EU has brought many new incentives for Slovak farmers through the RDP, but on the other hand several strict hygienic standards have had to be applied. In addition, transposition of EU laws in Slovakia has sometimes been even more strict than necessary. Because of this, the traditional mountain grazing of sheep nearly disappeared. In the past, it was oriented towards the production of sheep milk and milk products (mostly cheese) on the mountain pastures – which is no longer possible under the new hygiene rules. Farmers try to find some alternatives, like transporting milk every day down to the villages, or sheep do not stay outside overnight, or they are substituted by beef cattle.

Carcass disposal

The EU rules on the disposal of carcasses causes problems for HNV grassland farmers in remote areas and areas with difficult access. E.g. Estonian islands – lambs born dead or killed by carnivores can't be buried on the spot, but under the rules have to be collected by a special disposal vehicle. There is just 1 carcass disposal plant in Estonia and it causes transport problems (for example from islands).

Regulation 889/2008/EC

Article 24.4 about parasite control. This article is actually preventing some farmers (at least in Estonia) from taking up ecologically-oriented grazing, even though suitable non-toxic alternatives exist.

The role of dairy factories and slaughterhouses

In the Romanian Carpathians, HNV farmers sell milk as raw material to dairy factories at 0.15-0.20€/litre, and so get no added value from the good quality of their HNV grassland milk. The dairy factories often pay months late – causing liquidity problems for farmers.
In Bulgaria also, high-quality milk from mountain pastures is just poured into the rest of the milk when the farmer sells it to the dairy factory.

The existing (EU-based) quality standards for slaughterhouses and dairy factories focus too much on the buildings themselves, and (apart from bacteriological criteria) not on the intrinsic quality of the milk or meat itself – its place of origin (natural pasture? Artificial hybrid grassland?), the way the livestock were kept (animal welfare aspects)…This disadvantages farmers who use HNV grasslands and prevents them getting a quality premium in the price.

The tables used by slaughterhouses to grade meat is not adequate – it does not take account of the special properties (fat content and distribution, meat texture) of meat from the breeds and animals used in extensive HNV grazing.
Slaughterhouses in their price-setting do not recognize the quality of animals raised in a nature-friendly manner, or of special and local breeds of livestock.

The economic concentration of dairy factories and slaughterhouses is making it increasingly difficult for HNV farmers to exploit niches and market locally or even produce goods for sale in a wider region. This is a problem which also affects HNV farmers in the 'old' member states! Example: in the Rhön there were 5 dairy factories in 1990 and now there is only one. There are only 3 EU-certified slaughterhouses in the whole Rhön. Thus the cost-effectiveness of raising cattle or sheep on HNV grasslands is low due to the difficulties of processing the meat or milk economically; often the cost of transportation of the animal is high as the slaughterhouses are few and far apart.

Slaughter regulations and mobile:on-farm slaughter

The restrictive and complicated rules about slaughtering and processing meat on the farm, or about mobile slaughter facilities, render it, in practical terms, as good as impossible for farmers to develop any alternative to the slaughterhouses!

Our proposal: a thorough review must be made of all the ancillary flanking legislation (food hygiene, slaughter, product grading, carcass disposal, etc) which affects farmers, and changes made to provisions which are actually hindering HNV grassland farming from using market opportunities. This must be done in consultation with the HNV farmers and their marketing structures, who are directly affected and who know where the practical problems are!

More investment in training

Description of the issue:
In the new Member States, much local knowledge and craft skill was lost during the socialist era.
Thus in Bulgaria less than 5 % of the population has specialised farming education, while traditional ways of managing land were not supported for more than 50 years during the socialist era

Yet it is essential to add value to meat and milk if HNV grassland farmers are to get a decent return. Because butchers and other skilled craftspeople are the key element in achieving this added value, training to disseminate what is left of the traditional knowledge and skills in things like making cheeses, sausages etc and to spread state-of-the-art quality techniques, is essential.

A comment from Estonia which is presumably valid for other countries too is that much meat is wasted in the slaughterhouses (only about 60% of the live weight of the cattle is used). There is a need for better training of the slaughterhouse workers to cut carcasses and meat better – currently much is wasted, more value could be got from a carcass with better cutting.
Training of veterinarians ought to be improved so that the vets have greater knowledge of the specific breeds (often endangered local breeds) used in HNV grassland farming, and of the special conditions pertaining to extensive grazing (which may often be year-round).

Our proposal: There is a serious need for training in the field of grassland management in particular, as well as in economic and ecological issues (HNV farmland). Training is also needed to improve performance in e.g. slaughterhouses. The state agencies are often not capable of organizing this and financing such training sessions and adult education courses. Funds should be available to allow non-governmental bodies to take on this task.

Valuating ecosystems services

Description of the issue:

Intact floodplain grasslands are very important for water management and passive flood control (they are thus helping achieve Water Framework Directive targets).

All natural and semi-natural grasslands, but especially boggy and fen grasslands, are important carbon sinks.

These, and other ecosystems services, are not adequately acknowledged and compensated in the existing support schemes.

Our proposal: These ecosystems services ought to be acknowledged and given a value (see DG ENV-sponsored TEEB study), on which RD support can be based.

In fact, second pillar support to compensate for restrictions or positive outcomes of land use can be linked more tightly to the achievement of goals set down by other EU instruments. Natura 2000 is the classic case, but here is an example of linking grassland use to achievement of Water Framework and Floods Directive goals:
River regulations and decreasing rainfall led in the Hungarian Great Plain to a drop in groundwater levels. As a result, the drying of the surface is still in progress, dominancy is changing in the grassland vegetation associations. The solution could be a regional rise in water level, with an overall wise management of the available water resources, including the technique of having flood waters slowly expand over so-called 'retention areas' which are areas of land which are allowed to be flooded; the water stands there and slowly drains away, instead of fast drainage**.**

Going beyond the current system of complex subsidies and support payments, it ought to be considered whether it would not be more effective to give direct payments to farmers (and other grassland users when relevant) for providing specific ecosystems and environmental services, under service contracts.

ARC is a civil society platform that enables
different stakeholders to come together
in an innovative and transparent process
in order to offer a strong common message from civil society for
a new European agricultural and rural policy.

ARC Agricultural and Rural Convention

"A Communication from Civil Society to the European Union Institutions on the future Agricultural and Rural Policy"

November 2010

1 What is ARC?

The aim of ARC, the Agricultural and Rural Convention, is to give civil society a strong voice and to prepare a powerful common message for a new European agricultural and rural policy. ARC is an innovative, transparent process, open to all those interested in reform of the Common Agricultural Policy. It has been designed to gather a wide diversity of aspirations for the future of agriculture and rural areas, and then to combine them into a creative and practicable vision which achieves the widest combination of benefits.

ARC represents a range of civil society organisations which operate at European, multi-national, national or regional level**. Their focal interests include sustainability in general, renewable energy, water management, the environment, biodiversity, landscapes, cultural heritage, fair revenues for farmers, land security, small and family farms, animal welfare, organic farming, food security, food sovereignty, food quality, local food systems, consumers, partnership with developing countries, fair trade, public food service, public health, mountain areas, rural communities and their access to services, integrated and territorial development, research, training, and many related issues. Taken together, they represent many hundreds of thousands of European citizens, both urban and rural.

** The organisations who have to date confirmed their support for this Communication are shown at the end of this document.

2 Our standpoint

Our proposals are driven by a shared concern, within our wide network, to sustain the well-being of the planet and its people. We believe that :

- the world must make more responsible use of all global resources, notably soil, water, minerals, fossil fuels, wild species and habitats
- there must be radical reduction of greenhouse gases in order to avoid catastrophic climate change, together with action to moderate the adverse impacts of climate change upon human activity and upon biodiversity
- the drastic loss of biodiversity, both of wild species and cultivars, must be halted
- the quality and diversity of the cultural heritage and of landscapes should be protected and enhanced
- human rights of access to food, water, health and well-being, civil liberties and livelihood must be respected and actively sustained within the bounds set by overall ecological and social sustainability
- long-term food security must be assured at worldwide level : it is not acceptable that more than 1 billion people suffer from hunger or under-nutrition, that the health of a further billion is blighted by over-nutrition, obesity and other related chronic diseases, or that vast amounts of food are wasted
- The EU should not continue to depend on the land resources of other continents, nor should it export farm products at prices below the full cost of production, thereby creating unfair competition for farmers in other countries, especially in the developing world

- poverty and inequality, including social exclusion and gross disparities of income and quality of life between regions and people within and beyond the EU, must be addressed
- citizens and local communities everywhere must be enabled to play a full part in determining their own futures
- farmers must be enabled to get fair, remunerative prices and a fair income for the food that they produce and the services that they provide
- high standards of animal welfare must be attained in the EU's agriculture
- forests must be managed sustainably, in order to realise their full potential to provide rural employment, safeguard ecosystems, capture carbon and mitigate climate change
- policies must respect and reflect the diversity of Europe, and the principle of subsidiarity, while meeting EU goals and pursuing social, economic and territorial cohesion and equity between nations and regions : this means introducing place-based policy, strengthening decision-making structures at local and regional level as well as multi-sector and multi-level governance.

3 Our Vision

Reacting to these imperatives, we believe that a radical review of policies for both agriculture and rural development is needed. Our vision for this focuses on:

- A **paradigm shift in agriculture and in food systems** from the dominant unsustainable, resource-intensive, industrial-style farming and centralised food industry, so far favoured by EU farm policies, to sustainable farming everywhere and a diversified pattern of regional and local production and processing of food, with closer connections between farmers and consumers, and high care for public health, environment and animal welfare.
- An **economic, social and environmental renaissance of rural areas**, building upon the strength and diversity of communities, cultures and resources, linked effectively to place-based territorial development and honouring the EU's commitment to social, economic and territorial cohesion. This renaissance can make a major cumulative contribution to finding new sources of prosperity and creating new jobs.

This vision, and this broad line of argument, point towards a future Policy which has three inter-related focal concerns - sustainable agriculture, with its links to soil protection, water management, biodiversity, landscape and animal welfare, and climate protection; sufficient and nutritious food, with its links to production quality and diversity, health, trade, aid and remunerative farm-gate prices; and rural development, with its links to structural and related policies.

4 A new Common Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy

We propose a future Policy, renamed **Common Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy**, with clearly stated objectives which include, but go beyond, those stated in the Treaty of Rome. The expanded set of objectives would embrace food security, a fair return to farmers, food quality and public health, sustainable standards in agriculture, land security, holistic protection of the environment, mitigation of climate change, strengthening and diversification of the rural economy, and the well-being of rural communities. Many of these objectives are already embodied in international treaties or conventions, or in EU Directives, for example the Kyoto agreement on Climate Change, the Ramsar Convention, the Birds and Habitats Directives, and the conclusions of the recent Conference on Biodiversity COP10 meeting at Nagoya when states agreed to achieve by 2020 farming without negative influences on biodiversity and environment.

In the sections below, we describe the measures which would fall within the scope of the proposed Common Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy. Our view on the structure of the future Policy is guided by our strong sense of the dual nature of the challenge. We need both a paradigm shift in agriculture and food systems and a rural renaissance. The EU's policy for rural development has gradually evolved since the late 1980s. It has always been seen as an adjunct of agricultural policy. here is good logic in retaining the link between farming and rural development: but that link has distorted the overall policy, with too much focus on basic farm support and too little on sustainable farming systems, on balanced food markets and on the needs of rural communities and economies.

In our view, the time has come to recognise Rural Development as a major policy area in its own right, no longer as an adjunct to agriculture. It should be seen not as second pillar of another policy, but as a distinct policy, standing alongside but separate from the agricultural policy. Accordingly we propose that the Common Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy should be implemented through two Funds, the **European Agricultural Fund** focused primarily on farming and food; and the **European Rural Fund**, focused on the wider rural economy and territorial development. The two Funds, and the measures within them, complement each other. A crucial distinction between the two Funds is that the Agricultural Fund would be focused almost wholly on horizontal measures, applicable to all the territories or enterprises within their scope, whereas the Rural Fund would be focused on measures which will vary in application according to the character and needs of different areas.

In the two sections that follow, we outline the proposed scope of the two Funds, by reference to main themes. The measures proposed within each theme may include financial support, such as direct or contractual payments or funding for communication; and other types of action, such as regulation or definition of concepts. Some actions, such as the proposals for Research at section 7, may even fall outside the scope of the European Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy, but must be closely related to what happens inside that Policy. We use themes as a structure in this document in order to clarify the main thrust of the ARC proposals. At section 8 below, we emphasise the need for strong linkage between the different major programmes of the European Union.

5 The European Agricultural Fund

We propose that the European Agricultural Fund should embrace a set of measures which are mutually supportive and consistent. They fall within two broad areas:

- direct support to farmers and other land managers, including payments for environmental and social services
- policies related to food, with a focus on food security, trade and aid, food supply management, and food quality, health and related issues.

These measures are designed to meet the objectives that we outline in section 4 above. Crucially, these objectives include food security and a fair return to farmers, as already promised in the Treaty of Rome, and the meeting of challenges which have risen on the public agenda in more recent years, such as food quality and public health, sustainable standards in agriculture, land security, holistic protection of the environment, mitigation of climate change, strengthening and diversification of the rural economy, and the well-being of rural communities.

This wider set of objectives will only be met by a combination of the two sets of policies. Our vision is linked to fair market prices which generate appropriate income for farmers and allow for sustainable and high quality production. The policies that we propose for food security, trade, aid and supply management are designed to assure food security and to assist farmers to gain the

fair return that is promised. With those measures in place, it will be right to focus financial support increasingly – and, beyond a transition period, wholly – onto payments related to the other objectives. We see the next programme period, 2014 to 2020, as that period of transition from the existing to the new paradigm of agriculture and of food-related policies.

In this section, we offer first our vision of the future pattern of support to farmers and other land managers, including payments for environmental and social services. We then outline our proposals for food-related policies.

5.1 Sustainable Agriculture Everywhere

In our view, the current mainstream system of agriculture in Europe is inherently unsustainable. It depends upon heavy use of fossil fuels, intensive industrial-style processes, and long-distance transport of food and feedstuffs; often fails to meet high standards of animal welfare; and poses a long-term threat to the health of soils, water resources and ecosystems. It causes continuing loss of farm labour: 3.5 million jobs were lost in the EU15 farming sector in the ten years 1995 to 2005. It draws vitality away from rural areas, especially poorer or more marginal farmlands. Over-reliance on artificial chemical inputs threatens the health of farmers, farm workers and consumers.

We call for a progressive shift from industrialised agriculture towards a sustainable form of farming, which sustains productive farming everywhere, builds on the regional and local diversity of farming and economies, makes far lighter use of non-renewable resources, respects animal welfare, puts good agronomic sense and agro-ecological innovation at the heart of farming decisions, and achieves a wide range of positive environmental, social and economic outcomes, linked to the vitality of rural areas.

This shift from industrialised to sustainable farming is based on a hard-headed view of the imperatives stated in section 2 of this paper. These imperatives point clearly to the conclusion that a model based in continuously intensifying farm production on part of the EU territory and outside of it, while abandoning the less fertile land, is not sustainable and carries grave dangers for the environment of Europe and the world, its long-term food security, the vitality of its rural areas, and the well-being of the planet. Food security can be assured by effective sustainable use of all farmland, including continued food production on the less fertile lands and land formerly set aside, reduction of food waste throughout the food chain, growing emphasis on food quality and nutritional value, and progressive changes in diet which reflect consumers' awareness of the environmental and other impacts of food production. The drive for efficiency and productivity in food production can and should continue within the sustainable model.

These concepts underlie our view of the future pattern of support to farmers. We recognise that direct payments play an important role in farmers' income: today only a minority of farmers can make a living on the sale of their products alone. But we believe that the present system of general subsidies to the farming industry, de-coupled from production and only marginally related to sustainable farming systems or public goods, is neither politically justified nor socially legitimate. Financial support to farmers in future should relate to outcomes that the EU needs and which will not be achieved by market forces alone. The food-related measures that we propose later in this section are designed to assist farmers to gain the fair return that was promised by the Treaty of Rome. With those measures in place, it will be right to focus financial support increasingly – and, beyond the transition period 2014 to 2020, wholly – onto payments related to sustainable practice, environmental stewardship, support for small and family farms and for those in difficult areas, and diversification of farm economies and rural economies.

The Agricultural Fund should provide incentives for this shift from industrialised to sustainable agriculture, through the following measures:

a. Clear definition of standards of sustainability in agriculture, by reference *inter alia* to:

   - limits on the use of artificial fertilisers and other chemical inputs, by extending the principles found in the 1991 Nitrates Directive, according to which nitrogen content in the soil has to be monitored and the runoff has to be limited
   - mandatory limits on greenhouse gas emissions, both from livestock (with exemption for extensive grazing and hay mowing) and from use of fossil fuels
   - absorption and sustainable re-use of all waste products (e.g. slurry, foul water) within the farm
   - contributing to the fulfilment of the Water Framework Directive
   - protection and enhancement of biodiversity (both of wild species and of old varieties and local breeds of cultivars and domestic animals) and landscape features
   - no support for fallow cleared and/or maintained by herbicides
   - achievement of high standards of animal welfare.

b. Incorporation of these standards into updated legally binding codes of good practice, with efficient enforcement of these codes

c. Direct payments to all farmers should be radically revised, in order to:

   - ensure conditionality related to the standards for sustainable practices mentioned above
   - omit any reference to historical yields
   - assure equity in levels of payments between farmers in different member states of the EU, tracked in relation to national purchasing power parity
   - provide for degressive payments, with higher levels of payment for small farms and family farms, while for larger farms the level of payments should be linked to the labour force employed.

d. Support for community investment in agricultural land; for landowners renting their land on affordable and secure terms to farmers engaged in community-connected sustainable agriculture; and for local authorities engaging in active preservation of locally-oriented sustainable agriculture in urban and peri-urban areas.

e. Support for farmers in peripheral, mountainous and other less favoured areas, to recognise the physical handicaps under which they operate and the contribution that they make to local economies.

f. Outlawing the development and use of GMOs in EU agriculture and food supplies (including that in animal feeds): this should apply throughout the EU, without provision for national or regional discretion.

g. Financial support for transition into organic farming systems, particularly those emphasising low input of non-renewable resources; into other ecologically-oriented farming systems which have clear environment and biodiversity benefits; or into systems that deliver high standards of animal welfare.

5.2 Targeted payments for environmental and social services

As a complement to the direct payments and specific supports described above, we propose a system of targeted payments for environmental and social services supplied by farmers and other land managers.

The rural areas of the EU contain a rich and highly diversified heritage of ecosystems, cultural

landscapes and other environmental assets, including soil and water resources which are fundamental to the long-term health of the EU's land and thus to its long-term food security. The protection and management of this heritage depends, in large part, on stewardship by farmers, foresters and other land managers. Some elements of that stewardship can be assured by good sustainable husbandry. But in many areas, the constraints upon farming imposed by high environmental values or by physical handicaps mean that farmers can only make a viable income if they receive targeted payments related to the environmental and social services which they provide. The agenda of public goods, when related to agriculture, agro-forestry and rural areas, has until now been mainly focused on conservation of ecosystems, and the maintenance of farming in mountains and other special areas. But the agenda has been gradually widening, to include the 'new challenges' of adapting to and mitigating climate change, generating renewable energy, managing water resources, protecting ecosystems, landscapes and the cultural heritage, and sustaining the vitality of rural communities.

The Agricultural Fund should include the following measures:

a. Targeted and harmonised support, conditional upon clear environmental standards, to farmers, graziers, foresters and cooperatives who manage land which is high in biodiversity, often categorised as High Nature Value farmland. These farmlands, which may total over 30% of agricultural land in the EU, include mountain and upland pastures, common grazings, dehesas, nordic wood pastures, hay meadows, wet meadows, orchards, park landscapes and some low-intensity arable areas. They have been created, and are maintained, by low-intensity farming and grazing regimes, based on traditional methods and (often) local races of livestock. They form ecosystems and landscapes rich in biodiversity and culture, and bring strong benefits in soil and water conservation and in sequestration of carbon. They help to sustain the formal and informal economies of large farming communities, and yield high-quality food. But they are threatened in many areas by abandonment, and in others by intensification of farming. To combat these threats, and to recognise the public goods which these grasslands provide, we propose that they be subject to a system of targeted and harmonised payments for environmental services*.

   * Indicative examples of how such a system would work are provided in the report. "*CAP reform 2013 – last chance to stop the decline of Europe's High Nature Value farming*", published jointly by EFNCP, Birdlife International, Butterfly Conservation Europe, and World Wildlife Fund.

   This system should fall within the Agricultural Fund, as at least partial replacement of the current direct and un-targeted payments, and with 100% EU funding. The types of land to which it would apply should be clearly stated in updated Directives, covering all the types mentioned above. The payments should fall within a standard scale, or a limited set of scales, of payment for services, based on a generalised valuation of the public goods which these areas provide. This system would essentially be recognition of the constraint which the environmental value places upon the agricultural use of the land, and would thus be justified as a means of sustaining that agricultural use. The payments would be conditional on the continuance or resumption of the farming regimes that created or sustained the environmental values which underlie the definition of the zones.

   In mountainous, peripheral and other less favoured areas, this regime of environmental payments would need to be harmonised with, but not subsume, the support related to physical handicaps described at 5.1e above.

b. Continuation of agri-environment payments, in order to protect environmental values beyond what can be achieved by conditionality on the supports mentioned at 5.1 and 5.2a above. Such payments should have growing emphasis on landscape values and on the cultural and built heritage.

c. Payments to farmers in Natura 2000 areas and connecting areas under Articles 3 and 10 of the Habitats Directive, where they are obliged for reasons of nature conservation to undertake land management work not covered by the supports under 5.1, 5.2a or 5.2b above. This proposal is specific to those parts of designated Natura 2000 areas that are managed by farmers. We do not see the European Agriculture Fund as the source of funding for other Natura 2000 areas or for capital investments needed to conserve these areas.

d. Payments for carbon storage or sequestration achieved through the management or regeneration of, for example, humus-rich farmland, permanently unploughed pastures, wetlands or woodlands.

e. Support for conservation of High Nature Value woodland which falls within the farm economy: this may include unmanaged and managed woodland, forest patches in agricultural landscapes, grazed woodlands and ecotones (borders) between forests and agricultural lands.

f. Support for capital investments which contribute to management of water resources and to adaptation of farming and forestry regimes to cope with climate change.

g. Payments for restoration investments, e.g. to restore grasslands by clearing copse succession and installing fencing, or to transform arable land into water meadows in flood retention areas to promote flood management, carbon capture and biodiversity.

There is clear potential for synergy and combination, in a systemic way, between the seven different measures described above. Systems of support and of payment for services should be easy to understand, to administer and to monitor, in order that farmers and other beneficiaries are not baffled by unnecessary paperwork.

5.3 Food security, trade and aid

The world population is growing, demand for food is rising, and there is urgent need to tackle hunger and malnutrition, depletion of natural resources and of water supplies, and loss of cultivable land. The solution to this is not to concentrate food production in limited regions and to rely on massive international trade and transport of food: that would be a recipe for new economic colonialism, dependency, conflict and unsustainable use of transport. Rather, the solution lies in a high degree of self-sufficiency and food sovereignty at local, regional, national or continental level. Farm land should be kept in sustainable management throughout Europe, for long-term use in food production. The EU should produce a high proportion of the food that its citizens need, including all the basic commodities required for its production; and should broadly limit the import of food or feedstuffs (in particular animal feed) to that which cannot sustainably be produced within the EU. For livestock farming in particular, the sustainable, low-input and regionally-based kind of farming that we advocate will not be economically viable as long as the market is flooded with soy, maize and other imported feedstuffs. The EU should not subsidise food exports by any means; and should use international aid to assist farmers in developing countries to sustain and boost their food production, in order to improve their livelihood and to combat hunger and malnutrition.

The Agricultural Fund should provide incentives for this shift towards a high degree of self-sufficiency and food sovereignty, through the following measures:

a. Re-negotiation of international trade rules to establish the right of food sovereignty, i.e. the right for people, communities, regions, countries or Unions to establish their own agriculture and food policy: this right should be accompanied by the duty to avoid dumping through subsidised food exports.

b. Separation of agriculture from other industries in world trade talks: food sovereignty in the EU should not be compromised by trade-offs to benefit exports in other economic sectors. Countries should be able to ensure that their farm-gate prices are remunerative.

c. Insistence on sustainable standards for food imports to the EU.

d. Stimulus to produce animal-feed protein within the EU, as an alternative to protein imports

e. Ensuring coherence in development policies, in accordance with article 208 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, including cessation of export subsidies on food and measures to ensure that other forms of support such as direct payments do not result in exports at prices below the full cost of production

f. Support to farmers in developing countries to preserve or develop sustainable farming systems, to improve their livelihood and to combat hunger and malnutrition.

5.4 Food supply management

At present, about four-fifths of the food produced by EU farmers goes into supply chains which are dominated by large-scale processors and retailers. This places both the primary producers and the consumers within economic chains in which they are at a disadvantage *vis-à-vis* ever more powerful buying industries. Many farmers are not able to cover their production costs, let alone have surplus funds to invest in innovation. Consumers often pay higher than necessary food prices because of unfair margins.

The future Policy must set a market framework which enables farmers as well as consumers to be influential partners in the food and agriculture chain; which prevents strong fluctuations in food supply and consequently in farm-gate prices; and which thus discourages speculation on food prices in stock markets. Such a market framework is an essential condition for securing stable prices and sustainable food production and consumption in all regions of the EU, and a fair return to farmers for what they produce.

The aim should be to secure stable prices and a fair sharing of value between farmers, processors, retailers and consumers, so that farmers can secure remunerative farm-gate prices and consumers can have a fair deal. The system must be such that different, often conflicting, interests of participants in the food supply chain can negotiate on equal terms, so that primary producers and consumers are no longer the pawn of other interests but can actively co-decide. This effort can include measures proposed elsewhere in this paper, including establishment of food sovereignty (5.3), cessation of subsidies on food exports (5.3) and support for regional and local processing of food and for regional and local food systems, including community-supported agriculture (6.2). But other measures are needed.

The Agricultural Fund should include the following measures:

a. Creation of a market monitoring system which ensures greater market transparency through continuous monitoring of margins, the movement of demand and of prices and the evolution of average production costs; and which, on the basis of these average production costs, determines a target price corridor for certain products. Farmers, consumers and other societal groups should be involved in this process.

b. Support for creation, by farmers, of trading groups, to increase the bargaining power of farmers: this may depend upon well-considered relaxation of competition rules. Farmers should be enabled to work collectively and granted the right and the capacity to manage supply at EU level: for example, they should be able to lower the volume to be produced by farmers when demand decreases and prices fall below the fixed price corridor.

c. Change in the system of price intervention. The present system, which aims to keep prices low for raw materials for the (exporting) food industry, provides no sufficient safety net for producers who manage their farms according to sustainable principles, because the intervention prices are far below the production costs: it should be scrapped. Instead, we propose a new fair-priced producer-financed intervention system, to complement the process of managing supply described at (b) above. It would allow the stocking of products during the short periods that are needed to adapt supply to changes in demand.

5.5 Food quality, health and related issues

Major food scares in recent years have raised public awareness of the vital importance of healthy food. Precautionary standards have been raised as a result, with some benefit but also, and as we report later (see 6.2) with damaging effect in some local food systems. But there is still widespread disquiet about the impact of industrial food production and processing on human health, animal welfare, biodiversity and the environment. Obesity, diabetes and other ills reflect unhealthy diets which are offered to consumers with ever more processed and composed foods.

Consumers can, and increasingly do, take responsibility for what they eat by checking on ingredients, additives and origins of food, and by pursuing alternatives such as organic, free-range or known-origin products. Producers, processors and traders will respond to such assertive consumers. But in order to take the initiative, consumers need accurate information about food, and about its links to health etc. Schools should play their part in educating children on these issues. Public authorities should use their purchasing of food for consumption in schools, hospitals, public companies, jails, military barracks etc to influence the quality of food and its links to health, local economies and environment. All parts of the food chain – producers, processors, traders, consumers – should contribute to a sustained EU-wide campaign to cut food waste.

The Agricultural Fund should include the following measures:

a. Public information programmes, at EU and national level, about food, diet and the link to health, sustainable lifestyles, responsible consumption, the avoidance of food waste, and the link between food and landscape etc: these programmes will require clear definition of what is meant by terms such as ‘healthy, natural nutritious, environmentally friendly’ food.

b. Programmes, at national and sub-national level, for education of children about food, its origin, links to health etc.

c. Reform of EU tendering regulations to permit, and active EU encouragement of, public procurement and catering policies which set an example of affordable use of good-quality, natural, healthy, nutritious, animal welfare-friendly and regionally sourced food and of food whose production is linked to landscape and biodiversity enhancement.

d. Tighter regulation of all food labelling, to ensure that consumers can understand the origin, production methods, processing treatment etc of all traded food.

e. Launch, by the EU, of a campaign to cut food waste: this should focus on all parts and aspects of the food chain, including the purchasing, processing and selling policies of food processors and traders, transport and storage systems, consumer behaviour etc.

f. Support for the right of farmers to manage their own livestock breeding and seed production, including on-farm conservation of cultivars and use of traditional knowledge and cultural heritage related to local plant varieties and livestock races: to this end, the relevant provisions of the International Treaty on Plant Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture should be integrated into EU policy.

6 European Rural Fund

Rural regions with the EU vary greatly in the structure and strength of their economy. Some, by their location or by vigorous policy, have strong and diversified economies: they already possess the potential to contribute further to the overall prosperity of the Union. Others have been gravely weakened by the collapse of collective farming, the centralisation of industry and commerce, out-migration of young people, and other forces. The result of these trends is gross and growing disparity between regions, mass migration without perspectives for decent income, loss of social capital, and in some regions abandonment of valuable farmland and loss of the environmental and cultural values which were created and sustained by farming.

We propose that the European Rural Fund should respond to this grave disparity between regions by launching, in the next programme period, an **economic, social and environmental renaissance of rural areas**, in order to realise the full contribution that all rural regions can make to a prosperous and sustainable Union and to honour the EU's commitment to social, economic and territorial cohesion.

This renaissance must reflect and build upon the high diversity in the character, resources, strengths and traditions of the Union's many different rural regions. Moreover it must draw upon the energies and resources not only of the EU and of national and regional governments, but also of local authorities and the private, corporate and civil sectors. That is why, at section 4 above, we drew a distinction between the mainly horizontal nature of the measures within the proposed Agricultural Fund and more place-based measures (which will have more varied varied, and often very specific, application) in the Rural Fund.

We propose that the actions supported by the Rural Fund should be designed and implemented under the strategic guidance of multi-sectoral territorial partnerships whose composition and functional principles are based on the LEADER method but with a wider brief than is now given to many LEADER Groups. These partnerships, in each case enabled and supported by public authorities according to the principles of good governance, should ensure effective coordination of local and sub-regional activities within the wider socio-economic and territorial context.

In this section, we first outline the proposed scope of these actions, and then outline our vision for these strategies and partnerships. The sequence is:

- Support for strengthening and diversifying the rural economy.
- Support for regional and local production and processing of food.
- Support for strengthening of rural communities, services and infrastructure.
- Support for sub-regional partnerships and for the involvement of civil society.

6.1 Support for strengthening and diversifying the rural economy

The economic renaissance, for which we call, can draw upon the measures that we describe in Section 5 related to the viability of farming and for regional and local production and processing of food and other farm products. But it can also draw on many other economic sectors, and upon the remarkable diversity of rural regions in different parts of the EU. In most rural regions, there is potential to strengthen the secondary and tertiary sectors at a sustainable scale, including adding value to farm and forest products near to their origins, development of tourism, innovative use of information technology, non-damaging generation of renewable energy, and the location of high-tech industries in high-quality rural settings, and in all these ways to contribute to the EU 2020 target for creation of new jobs. But such strengthening may depend upon adequate infrastructure, notably in telecommunications and in sustainable surface transport systems. It will depend also upon access for existing or potential entrepreneurs to land, buildings, credit and expert support: at present, such access can be difficult to secure in the

context of speculation in land values, the upward pressure on land prices, and the reluctance of banks to lend money without generous security etc.

The Rural Fund should include the following measures:

a. Support for the creation and growth of micro-enterprises and SMEs in all economic sectors, through provision of credit guarantees, access to support services, business advice systems etc.

b. Support for farm successions, including financial support for retirement and for new entrants to farming; and for community-connected agriculture, including credit guarantees and financial incentives for community investment in farming businesses and related value-added initiatives.

c. Support for farm modernisation, where this will assist production or the move towards sustainable practice or farm diversification: this support should be available to all farmers and farm co-operatives, and should carry conditions as to structures etc that are proportionate to the size of building and enterprise involved. However no support should be available for intensive, industrial livestock production.

d. Strengthened EU interest in forestry, with a focus on support to action by woodland owners and added-value enterprises to create jobs and diversify local economies through sustainable woodland management and processing of woodland products and to provide environmental services such as conserving biodiversity, soil and water management, and carbon capture. This may be expressed through a coherent and comprehensive forestry package with specific measures targeted *inter alia* at enhancing sustainable management, protection from natural and man-made hazards, strengthening forest producer co-operation and innovation capacity.

e. Support for investment in telecommunications infrastructure in rural regions.

f. Support for action by local communities, land managers and enterprises to create or extend enterprises focused on energy conservation or generation of renewable energy, without loss of organic matter in soil, and avoiding competition for land and resources between food and energy production. Rural regions contain massive resources of land, water, wind, sun, biomass etc that can be used to generate renewable energy at an appropriate scale, on the initiative of local land owners, enterprises or communities, without the involvement of giant energy companies.

g. Support for development of rural tourism, with its link to environment, heritage, added value, local services etc.

h. Stimulus and support for national initiatives, and for multi-national exchange, in developing applied skills through pre-career education and vocational training, apprenticeships and similar systems, mid-career training, advisory and extension services, peer-group activity, local mobilisation and capacity development, and other systems. Such activity can include not only stimulus to innovations, but also re-valuation of traditional skills in building, cheese-making and other added-value trades, animal husbandry, crafts, herbal medicines, cooking, etc.

6.2 Support for regional and local production and processing of food

The adding of value to food and other farm products forms a vital link between agriculture and other parts of the economy. This link can have crucial importance to rural economies. But at present, for perhaps four-fifths of the food produced by commercial farmers in the EU, the adding of value takes place largely not in truly rural enterprises, but rather in large-scale centralised processing units. This removes the potential for adding value to food in the rural areas. Major effort should go into encouraging added-value activity at local and regional level,

through small and medium-sized enterprises, including those run by farmers, as a key element in diversifying local and regional economies. This effort can take advantage of the multiplicity of national, regional, local and 'niche' markets which already exist in the EU. It must include a review and simplification of the regulations related to livestock slaughter, food hygiene, phyto-sanitary standards etc. which place a disproportionate burden on small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The Rural Fund should include the following measures:

a. Support for the creation and strengthening of regional and local food systems*, such as farmers' markets, cooperative farm shops, box schemes or community-supported agriculture; and for an active European network for exchange of good practice among regional and local food systems, and between the producers (notably farmers or fishermen) who actually work the land or waters and create the basic ingredients for the food.

   *A useful overview of local food systems in Europe, with their implications for policy, is provided by the report 'Local food systems in Europe', published by the FAAN – Facilitating Alternative Agro-Food Networks group.

b. Support for branding and labelling of regional products, drawing upon the great diversity around Europe in culinary tradition, gastronomy and related aspects of the cultural heritage, including sustainably managed herbal medicines and traditional products : note the link between this and the tighter regulation of all food labelling advocated at section 5.5d. Where appropriate, the link between the regional products and other values (such as mountain landscapes, biodiversity, aquatic ecosystems) should be highlighted through the label or brand.

c. Clarifying, publicising and ensuring national implementation of regulatory provisions at EU level for properly justified and monitored exemptions from hygiene, slaughter and other regulations for micro-enterprises and SMEs: these regulations as implemented in some Member States can severely disadvantage such enterprises.

d. Modification of public tendering rules to permit the flexible use of public procurement and catering systems to promote use of regional and local foods (note the link to 5.5c above); and support for links between public caterers and local food suppliers.

6.3 Support for strengthening of rural communities, services and infrastructure

The rural areas of Europe, as defined in the present generation of Rural Development Programmes, are home to about 135 million people, more than one quarter of the EU total. Within them, the rural communities vary greatly in their social vitality and in the adequacy of their social and cultural services and infrastructure. Many are strong in these respects, and offer high quality of life. Others – notably in some of the new member states and in the outer parts of EU15 – suffer from severe weakness. This weakness can lead to a spiral of decline, with demographic imbalance, out-migration of young people, further loss of services and vitality, and declining quality of life for those who remain. Equity and the commitment to territorial cohesion demand a determined policy to halt and reverse that decline.

Particular need and opportunity for a dynamic and imaginative approach to development applies to those **special areas** which may be called 'peripheral' or 'less favoured' but which, from the perspective of those who live there, may be central to their lives and highly favoured in cultural, environmental or other terms. Such areas vary greatly across the face of Europe, from the sparsely populated regions in Sweden and Finland to mountain communities in the Pyrenees, Alps and Carpathians, subsistence farming communities in many countries, concentrations of

poverty in some regions, and isolated communities in many island and coastal regions. Such regions may indeed now suffer - to varying degree - from demographic imbalance, out-migration, loss of young energetic people, narrow economies, severe handicap for farmers, weakness in community services and in infrastructure. But they also act as stewards of ecosystems, landscapes and cultural heritage of European importance, notably many farmlands of high nature value; they manage resources of farmland, grazing land, forests, minerals, water supply and energy on which the EU depends now and in the future; and they represent a social capital of communities which can sustain and absorb population. Rural and regional policies should support rural communities in turning perceived disadvantages into economic and social advantages, focusing on sustaining social vitality, maintaining social services, diversifying the local economy, rewarding farmers (however small) for the public goods that they produce, and (where appropriate) accepting the value of informal economies.

The Rural Policy should include the following measures:

a. Support for activities to strengthen social capital in rural areas, and the capacity of rural communities to participate in local governance and local development processes.

b. Support for the provision and strengthening of rural services and infrastructure, whether by public authorities, by private bodies or by rural communities themselves.

c. Recognition of the key role of towns as centres of social, cultural and economic life in many rural regions, and of the need to sustain the range and quality of services in those towns and to ensure effective linkage and mutual support between urban and rural areas. This has clear implications for the links between (on the one hand) sub-regional development programmes and (on the other hand) policies for spatial planning, transport etc. There is a particular need to use planning policies to stop the urbanisation of good farm land**.**

d. A radical new approach to sustaining the social vitality of communities which are based on long-established patterns of subsistence and semi-subsistence farming. At present, these communities gain scarcely any benefit from the CAP or EAFRD, because the Semi-subsistence Farming measure is either not applied or little used, the measure for Farmers' Cooperatives is little used, and many subsistence farmers are excluded from direct payments or agri-environment payments because their holdings are too small. This failure to connect, if allowed to continue, will cause the withering of these communities. The need is for a dynamic and integrated approach, on the lines of that being pioneered by non-government organisations in several countries, whereby farmers are enabled collectively (rather than individually) to benefit from farm-related payments, value is added to farm and forest products, craft skills are revived, tourism is promoted, social services are sustained, and young people are enabled by job creation to stay or return. These successful initiatives suggest that greater support should be given to intermediary bodies (such as sub-regional partnerships, NGOs, community organisations) who can deliver results effectively at local level, with close involvement of the farmers and other local people.

e. Support for the rural poor and vulnerable. Of the 45 million people in the EU who live below the poverty line, about a quarter may live in rural areas. They vary in location and circumstance, but they include concentrations of poverty and exclusion among certain minorities, including many Roma people, particularly in the new member states. Many current programmes of rural and regional development appear to be ill-suited to addressing the needs of the rural poor and vulnerable, despite the promise in the Lisbon Strategy of a 'decisive impact on the eradication of poverty'. 2010 is the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, of which the priorities include the production of National Programmes to "place social inclusion at the heart of national policy agendas" and "promoting multi-dimensional integrated strategies to prevent and reduce poverty

mainstreamed across all relevant policy areas". The Commission's recent Budget paper states an EU target of lifting at least 20 million people out of poverty.

Rural development programmes should reflect and build upon this commitment by the EU and Member States to tackle concentrations of poverty and social exclusion. New and imaginative approaches are needed, focused upon building the collective confidence of each community to the point where it can take initiative to better the lives of its members and (where it wishes) to seek and absorb the help of outside agencies. This new approach demands openness in the national and local authorities, flexibility in future EU measures for rural and regional development, and integration between different sectors and funding sources. The UNDP's Cserehat initiative in Hungary offers a significant model, which has been adapted by the Hungarian government into its national programme to eliminate area-based poverty in 33 most disadvantaged rural micro-regions.

6.4 Support for sub-regional partnerships and for the involvement of civil society

In section 8 below, we note that the effectiveness of the policies that we propose will depend greatly upon the processes of governance, funding and delivery that guide their implementation. We then call for mechanisms at EU, national, regional and sub-regional level which achieve true synergy and complementarity between the major European Funds which can serve the social, economic and environmental well-being of rural areas, and which harness the energies and resources of all sectors to the tasks described in this Communication. The funding of these mechanisms at EU, national and regional levels falls largely outside the proposed European Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy. But the mechanisms that are needed at sub-regional level can and should be supported, within that Policy, through the European Rural Fund.

We propose that the actions supported by the Rural Fund should be focused through integrated sub-regional development strategies designed and managed by multi-sectoral territorial partnerships. These partnerships should bring together, in each mainly rural sub-region, representatives of the public, private and civil sectors. Each partnership should prepare a development strategy for its sub-region, covering the whole of the 7-year programme period but subject to periodic review. Where appropriate, the scope of the strategy and the partnership should run into urban as well as rural areas. The strategy should articulate how the measures within the Rural Fund and other Funds as described at Section 8 below would be deployed within the sub-region; and this would form the basis for the delivery of all relevant operational programmes within its sub-region. The partnership's operational funding should be provided by the Rural Fund.

This proposal builds upon the experience since 1991 of the LEADER programme, in its three phases as a Community Initiative and its current mainstreamed regime. LEADER has shown the high value of focusing on the needs and resources of a specific territory, of multi-sectoral partnerships and of integrated and innovative approaches. However, if a true rural renaissance is to be achieved, the next programme period must see more widespread and more ambitious use of sub-regional partnerships, with a broader remit and more assured funding.

A closely related issue is the role of civil society. Throughout the EU, conceptions of governance are changing. It is increasingly realised that governments, at all levels, have a major role in delivery of common services, but that they cannot alone meet all societal needs. Financial pressures, and public reactions, are forcing authorities to recognise that large parts of the action must lie with the corporate and civil sectors. This is notably true in rural areas, where small, scattered or isolated communities depend on a significant degree upon communal self-help. The division of responsibilities, and the 'social contract', between the public, corporate and civil sectors will vary between the member states: but the role of the civil sector should be

recognised and supported, because of the contribution that it can make to rural and regional development and because in playing that role it takes pressure off the resources of public authorities. In many countries, non-government organisations have shown that they can play a creative role as animators of rural development processes, either within or outside multi-sectoral partnerships. Foundations and private donors can also play a significant part in supporting development processes.

The Rural Fund should include the following measures:

a. Provision by the EU of adequate operational funds for all sub-regional partnerships created in mainly rural sub-region under the requirement stated at section 8 d below.

b. Support for the active involvement of rural communities and their representative organisations in the shaping and implementation of development programmes at local and sub-regional level.

7 Research and Development

The changes that we have called for – a new paradigm for agriculture, and a rural renaissance – point clearly towards the need for innovation, for recognition and new application of existing knowledge, and for new knowledge. For example, many rural enterprises of all kinds will need new knowledge and skills in diversifying their enterprises, in handling information technology, in marketing and product development, quality control, financial management, cooperative activity etc. There is urgent need for practical inter-disciplinary research on organic and sustainable food production systems. Those who supply, and those who fund 'public goods' such as environmental services, water management, carbon capture etc will depend upon increasingly sophisticated definition of these goods, and of the means by which they may be assured and monitored. Innovation will be needed in such fields as generation of renewable energy, energy conservation, many methods of adding value to rural products, other aspects of the 'green economy', and new resourceful ways of sustaining rural services (for example by use of Information and communications technology in health services, education and public administration). Rural Europe has the opportunity to pioneer in many of these fields.

This is a significant field for applied research, development, innovation and the generation and transfer of knowledge. At present, the CAP does not directly provide funding for such activity, which therefore depends on national funding and on partial cover through the mainstream research programmes of the EU, notably the "Food, agriculture and biotechnology" theme within the EU's 7th Framework Programme. We believe that there is a strong case for funding –through Framework Programme 8 – a programme of applied research, development and innovation related directly to the knowledge that is needed in order effectively to pursue the range of policies set out in this Communication. Research projects should be formulated in close conjunction with stakeholders at grassroots level. In administering this programme, the Commission should ensure – to a sharper degree than is often now achieved – early transmission of research results to its own policy teams and to those of member states, so that ideas illuminate action in a timely way.

Also needed is a vigorous process of information, training and exchange of ideas and good practice among all involved in agriculture and rural development. The Policy should make provision, at EU and national level, for vigorous programmes of information, training and exchange of ideas and good practice among all involved in agriculture and rural development. The European Network for Rural Development and the National Rural Networks should, in the next programming period, be transformed into a much more open, quick-moving, transparent and accountable system for exchange and cooperation between stakeholders. Equally there should be support for sectoral networks engaged on exchange and mutual cooperation, such as

for grassland management, for value-added initiatives or for generation of renewable energy. New tools for communication and participation, like the European Citizens' Initiative (ECI), could contribute to improving both horizontal and vertical dialogue between all stakeholders, including citizens in their role as consumers.

8 Governance and delivery, including linkage to other EU programmes

The effectiveness of the policies that we propose will depend greatly upon the processes of governance, funding and delivery that guide their implementation. At present, rural areas and economies can benefit from European funding through not only the EAFRD, but also the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF), the Cohesion Fund, the European Social Fund (ESF), and the European Fisheries Fund (ESF). The different Regulations make plain the geographic and thematic scope of the support that can be given under each Fund, but do not themselves spell out the exact demarcation, nor the potential for positive complementarity, between them. Many rural areas may indeed gain benefit now from the other funds as well as the EAFRD: but the processes for achieving that benefit are clumsy, in that the different Funds and the sectoral operational programmes through which they are deployed at national level may not readily match in their operational systems, so that potential beneficiaries are often baffled by bureaucracy.

Moreover, the agencies through which the Rural Development Programme is delivered – national Ministries of Agriculture, regional authorities, LEADER groups or other sub-regional partnerships – are at present seldom empowered to call down funding from other EU Funds, so that efforts to link the different programmes at territorial level are frustrated. A modest exception to this general point is offered by the Local Action Groups in some countries, for example Denmark, which can act under Axes 4 of both the EARDF and the Fisheries Fund. Some other local partnerships, such as the *Pays* in France or the Local Development Companies in Ireland, can act both within and outside the confines of the RDP. But the general picture is of delivery systems which are constrained to the narrow compass of the RDP, with Local Action Groups that are often limited to delivery of Axis 3 only of the RDP, and in some countries extensive rural areas that do not have the benefit of Local Action Groups or other sub-regional partnerships.

These weaknesses in delivery, and these constraints on achieving effective complementarity between different EU and national funds, must be addressed if there is to be a renaissance of rural areas. The need is for mechanisms at EU, national, regional and sub-regional level which achieve true synergy and complementarity between the major Funds, and which harness the energies and resources of all sectors to the tasks described in this Communication. This is wholly consistent with the integrated approach stated in Europe 2020.

The new Common Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy (CAFRP) should therefore make provision for:

a. A common EU-level strategic framework for the CAFRP and the successors to the present ERDF, Cohesion Fund, ESF and EFF. This should include:
    - commitment to the paradigm shift in agriculture, and the rural renaissance
    - provision for place-based integrated territorial development, with linkage and mutual support between rural and urban areas
    - clear objectives for the changes that are to be achieved, by (say) 2017 and 2020, for example in the achievement of sustainable standards in agriculture; the creation of a balanced food chain which secures fair incomes for farmers; and the strengthening and diversification of rural economies
    - provision for monitoring and evaluation to assess progress vis-à-vis these objectives.

b. Regulations for these five Funds which are fully harmonised with each other; which explain clearly the demarcation and the intended complementarity between them; which are harmonised in procedural terms, so that member states and delivery agencies can minimise the difficulty for beneficiaries; and which enable the delivery of relevant measures by sub-regional partnerships operating across the full range of Funds.

c. A requirement that Member States (and/or Regions, in countries with federal systems) shall produce – for the next programming period – national and/or regional strategic frameworks which reflect the purposes of the common EU-level strategic framework, and which set a clear basis for active complementarity between the Operational Programmes related to the five EU Funds.

d. A requirement also that member states, or where relevant regional authorities, shall – throughout their territories – promote the creation and support the activity of sub-regional partnerships in the task of preparing and implementing sub-regional or territorial development strategies, with powers to deliver all relevant measures within the Operational Programmes related to all five EU Funds, and specifically all measures within the scope of the proposed European Rural Fund, and with operational funds provided (in mainly rural sub-regions) through the Rural Fund or (elsewhere) through the Regional or Cohesion Funds – see link to 6.4a.

9 Funding

Our focus in this Communication is on the proposed re-direction of policies, not yet upon the re-allocation of money between Funds or measures or upon the balance between European and national funds. However, we have made the assumption that the new Common, Agriculture, Food and Rural Policy would have broadly the same share of the EU budget as is now allocated to the two pillars of the CAP, in order to meet the objectives and to tackle the major challenges set out in this Communication; and that there will be effective linkage between that Policy and the other instruments of the EU. Our proposal to include all 'horizontal' measures, including environmental payments, in the Agricultural Fund, while significantly reducing untargeted payments to farmers and the food industry, would release funds for a more robust campaign of Rural Renaissance through the Rural Fund. The proposals in sections 6.4 and 8 for strategic linkage to other EU funds, and for the creation and activity of sub-regional partnerships, are designed to secure the effective use of all relevant EU and national funds, and to focus the resources of the corporate and civil sectors upon the challenges of development. This also implies that measures described under chapter 6 could partly be funded under other relevant EU funds.

10 Conclusion

We have described the opportunity which the new programming period will offer to launch a new paradigm in agriculture, a renaissance in rural areas and a radical attempt to harmonise the use of different EU Funds. We are well aware of the radical re-thinking of policy and practice which these changes will entail for Member States and stakeholders. We will play an active role in the public consultation which will follow the Commission's own 'Communication' of November 2010. In doing so, we will show how civil society organisations, in their turn, can contribute to the great collective effort which will be needed in order that the rural regions of the EU realise their full potential to serve the needs of all European citizens and to meet the goals articulated by the European Union.