

Focus paper on extensively managed grasslands



© Žymantas Morkvėnas, BEF, Lithuania

Definition

We understand extensively managed grasslands are permanent grasslands (min. five years) with:

- **no use of mineral fertilizers** and herbicides/pesticides
- **sustainable grazing**: min. and max. grazing livestock unit (GLU) per ha and
- **sustainable mowing**: mosaic mowing regime with adapted cutting dates and frequency, depending on the type of vegetation, the environmental and climatic conditions of the region and farm
- a higher numbers of **plant species** and a **diversified** horizontal and vertical structure of the grassland compared to intensively managed grasslands

Positive effects for the climate, biodiversity and other public goods

- more stable **CO₂ storage capacity** of soil and reduced CO₂ emissions from soil erosion and loss of organic material
 - **lower N₂O emissions** from agricultural soils due to no use of mineral fertilizer
 - **lower CH₄ emissions from digestion**: the commitment of livestock to grasslands and grassland-based nutrition will result in a reduction of the overall number of ruminants
 - preserve **biodiversity** on grasslands (à EU Natura 2000 protected areas)
 - reverse the decline of **insects** (à EU pollinator initiative)
 - **natural water retention** compared to arable land (à EU Water Framework Directive) and
 - therefore, reduce **effects of extreme weather** events, including heavy rains and droughts (à climate change adaption)
 - preserve **cultural heritage landscapes** (à rural economies and quality of life)
-



Threats for extensively managed grasslands and livestock farming

- **Inadequate & insufficient support** through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)
- **High legal requirements of the CAP**
- **Labour shortage** due to high workload, low income & social status, unclear future prospects
- **Declining tradition** of pastoralism
- **Legal issues**, e.g. unclear status of land of formerly communal managed grasslands in Eastern European countries
- **Negative communication** concerning ruminants and climate change without differentiating between free-range farming and confined indoor production systems

As a consequence, the number of farms with grazing animals are declining in the EU. Furthermore, the transformation of intensive (dairy) farms to extensive (dairy) farms for environmental reasons is economically not always possible. This is accompanied by a loss of extensively managed grasslands to succession or its transformation to arable land or special crops.

Grasslands cannot survive without the extensive management of animals on them or for them, neither can the grassland related biodiversity.

Need for positive communication on livestock management and grassland

- It is misleading when the official EU and its institutions communication (which is then taken up by the media and much of the society) formulate the notion that animal numbers and consumption of animal products need to be reduced due to their negative effect on the climate crisis
- Instead communication should differentiate between intensive confined indoor animal farming with external inputs, or grass-fed/pasture based animal husbandry.
- Additionally, there should be positive communication on the health benefits on free range animal products and the positive effects of grasslands for the climate, biodiversity and other public goods.

Supporting value chains

- The products that derive from extensive grazing and/or herbaceous feeding of livestock must be recognizable by the consumer. For this reason it is necessary to support the development of supply chains that guarantee traceability “from pasture to plate”.
- All forms of cooperation that allow the pursuit of economies of scale must be supported, in terms of technical means, the use of manpower, in terms of improvements in the quality of life of those who lead livestock to pasture, with systems of staff rotation, milk collection, slaughter and distribution that do not leave individual suppliers isolated.



Necessary framework for administration and funding in CAP and CAP-strategic plans

To improve the economic situation and stop the decline of livestock farms, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and its implementation in the National Strategic Plans (NSPs) of the Member States (MS) must be adapted.

Landcare Europe suggests to the EU to leave the choice of measures to the MS. However, the EU should highlight the following suggestions for best practice to the MS and encourage them to implement them in their NSP according to the national contexts.

Step 1: Recognition of extensively managed grasslands through administration

The EU has set the framework to ensure the eligibility of grazed grassland areas, by **defining** agricultural activity as including “the maintenance of the agricultural area in a state which makes it suitable for grazing or cultivation, without preparatory action going beyond the use of usual agricultural methods and machinery” (Art. 4, 2 (b), Regulation (EU) 2021/2115). This definition needs to be implemented in the NSP of the MS and executed by administrative bodies to significantly reduce the risks of being sanctioned. The **introduction of specific use codes** for grasslands important to nature conservation and biodiversity (e.g. Natura 2000 habitat types) and grasslands with landscape elements, shrubs and other grazable plant species is recommended. In that case, the land use code is not defined by the type of vegetation, but by the type of cultivation. These areas still have the legal status of agricultural land. The new land use codes should be accompanied by a **specific reference map layer** in the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) as well as a **guiding system and trainings** for administration and farmers. Moreover, farmers need the certainty that the land will not lose the status of farming land as long as they keep up the maintenance to avoid succession.

Step 2: Implementation of coupled payments

Coupled payments are directly relevant to income and can significantly improve the economic situation of grazing livestock farming. Coupled payments should only be paid for animals that are (partly) free ranged or have a grass based fed diet. They should be used to give extra premiums to breeds adapted to local environmental conditions.

Step 3: Eco-schemes for extensively managed grasslands

Extensively managed grassland must be covered by the yearly applied eco-schemes of the first pillar (Art. 31 Regulation (EU) 2021/2115). One option can be result-based payment schemes as they are more attractive for farmers when managing species-rich grasslands as farmers know their farmlands best and it gives them more flexibility in the management.



Step 4: Agri-Environmental and Climate Measures for extensively managed grasslands

Agri-Environmental and Climate Measures (AECM) need to be rewarded higher than eco-schemes as they are multiannual and have a higher benefit for public good services. They need to:

- be financially attractive by including the extra workload and the value for public services in the premium calculation
- be workable and mutually reinforcing
- provide the possibility for multi-annual agreements of 12 years or more to provide security for farmers and landowners
- support the necessary structural adjustments to farms e.g. by creating an additional bonus for farmers who use more than 15-20% of their farm for agri-environmental schemes and/or apply a variety of different AECM

Agri-Environmental and Climate Measures should include:

- The establishment of agri-environmental and climate measures for grazing, mowing, no or reduced use of fertilizers and pesticides, species-rich grasslands and the conversion of arable land to grassland
- The promotion of:
 - grazing animal related infrastructure, e.g. drinking troughs, fences, stables
 - preventive livestock protection against large carnivores and compensation payments,
 - scrub clearance to restore former pastureland in danger of succession
 - the creation of development plans, e.g. grazing concepts, concepts for areas of pastoralism
 - climate & biodiversity counselling for farmers by (organisations like) Landcare Associations



Landcare Europe e.V., 17.09.2024 in cooperation with the project “*Landcare Europe Captures Carbon - Supporting Natural Climate Protection in Agricultural Landscapes*”. This project is part of the European Climate Initiative (EUKI) of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Affairs and Climate Action (BMWK).

Supported by:

