



## SUMMARY REPORT

# The Value of Biodiversity for Agriculture

## *How to both promote biodiversity and support the agricultural sector?*

4 May 2016

European Parliament, Brussels

Policy-makers, Member States, the private sector, civil society, and other stakeholders were brought together by MEP Angélique Delahaye in the European Parliament to discuss the value of biodiversity for agriculture focusing on how to support biodiversity while supporting the agricultural sector.

**Angélique Delahaye MEP and Chair of the “*Biodiversity & Ecosystem Services*” working group of the EP Intergroup on “*Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development*”** stressed that the terms biodiversity and agriculture are often put against each other but they are in fact complementary. It was emphasised that farmers play an important role in preserving biodiversity by adopting good practices. It was said that farmers should not be motivated through sanctions but by encouragement. Since the greening of the CAP was set up it has been perceived poorly by farmers. It was stated that farmers are motivated to set up practices to protect the environment but the regulations need to be more flexible in order to move forward. It was reiterated that farmers are not the enemy of biodiversity but support practices that respect the environment while at the same time contribute to food security. It was stressed that the EU 2020 Strategy, the Birds and Habitats Directives along with many others are put in place to protect biodiversity emphasising that they need to be more flexible and region adaptable.

**Mauro Poinelli, Head of Unit “*Environment, forestry and climate changes*”, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, European Commission** underlined that biodiversity is essential for agriculture but has also a value for society. It was said that the first results from the greening shows that it covers more than 100 million hectares representing 74% of the arable agricultural land. Further, when organic farming and small-scale farming are taken into account it includes about 85%. It was stressed that particularly beneficial for biodiversity is the measure related to grassland and especially Environmental sensitive grassland; the latter, in many Member States covers their Natura 2000 grassland and some Member States go even further. Ecological Focus Areas were also mentioned as an important measure with main objective the promotion and protection of biodiversity. Moreover, the 2<sup>nd</sup> pillar also entails pivotal measures related to preservation of biodiversity, restoration and enhancing ecosystem services. The first results of the programming for the period 2015-2020 shows that the funds allocated to biodiversity are around 44% of the rural development budget. Further, 19% of the agricultural area is under contract for increasing biodiversity and landscape features. On top of that, there are horizontal support services such as knowledge and innovation which also can cover biodiversity. It was also said that Horizon 2020 co-finances a wide range of genetic resources and conservation activities. Finally, it was recalled the Quality Policy that ensures the protection and promotion of high quality food, often produced from traditional species and/or having positive impact on biodiversity. Therefore,



the CAP provides today a wide range of tools that can be applied by Member States or taken up by farmers to promote, protect and develop biodiversity. The final results depend a lot from the participation of all social partners present on the territory. The need to ensure a holistic view of the biodiversity and the involvement of all social and economic partners for common actions was stressed in order to ensure the development of territories, protecting tradition, culture, and in the end the value of biodiversity.

**Christiane Möllhoff, Environment and Sustainability Policy Officer, COPA and COGECA** underlined that EU farmers already value biodiversity and are committed to promoting and conserving biodiversity and are open to adapting farming practices if necessary. It was said that the breadth of environmental outcomes generated by farmers is not recognised enough. The current EU legislative framework offers opportunities to promote biodiversity, both in the larger landscape and in highly sensitive natural areas, underlining that the greening of the CAP – if implemented correctly, has the potential to impact positively on biodiversity. It was stressed that farmers are committed to making the greening work, but do not agree with some of the administrative burdens it brings. It was said that the CAP provides the Member States with the power to decide which options they wish to offer farmers in the implementation and it is then up to the farmers to choose. It was said that when proceeding with the simplification exercises there is still room to improve the management of Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) and more flexibility to declare them. It was said that when farmers wish to declare highly valuable landscape features they need to understand what weighting factors are applied. Further, greening of the CAP has the potential to deliver on biodiversity goals while keeping in mind that prior objectives of the CAP are to increase agricultural productivity and to ensure a fair standard of living of the agricultural community. It was said that the upcoming Commission assessment on the greening of the CAP will provide first hints of the implementation. However, it must also be recognized that the impacts might not be visible for another few years. It was stressed that society must better recognise the role of farmers and forest holders as they are committed to using land sustainably. In addition, EU farmers often implement voluntary measures in favour of biodiversity and climate change. The importance of cooperative approaches was stressed along with the need for flexibility to allow for implementation of measures adapted to local conditions. Further, the importance of education and training, particularly vocational training, was emphasised.

**Annik Dollacker, Biodiversity Expert Group, European Crop Protection Association** stressed that biodiversity and agriculture are inextricably linked. It was said that productivity depends on the stable flow of ecosystem services (a component of biodiversity) such as soil fertility, soil erosion and water regulation, and pollination being key for agriculture. Biodiversity depends on the diversity of habitats, including farmland habitats and that “wild species” require habitats (network of corridors) beyond agricultural land. It was said that despite knowledge increase and many public and private efforts already undertaken to promote the interlinkages of biodiversity and agriculture the question remains as to why biodiversity is still declining. One of the reasons mentioned are the increased pressures from e.g., urban sprawl and climate change. Secondly, traditionally policies and regulations focus on risk management, which is essential and it was underlined that this misses to take into account the importance of resilience (environmental quality enhancement). Hence a bigger emphasis should be put on resilience-building, including within the CAP and the nature Directives



(Member States decide on measures to apply and their focus is rather on risk management measures). It was stressed that agriculture and nature policies should therefore be more integrated and complementary to risk focused e.g., (pesticide) regulations to address the resilience-building aspect. Until now resilience-building within agro-ecosystems has been addressed through efficient natural resource management of water, land (e.g., pesticide use saves up to 40% of land), and energy, through the use of innovative technologies (precision farming) and the implementation of Good Agricultural Practices such as crop rotation, catch crops, or reduced tillage measures. Moreover, Environmental Enhancement Measures (EEM) were highlighted as a means to build resilience within managed fields e.g., the establishment of buffer strips or uncropped areas to prevent soil erosion or regulate water flow, or flower strips to increase pollination. It was concluded by underlining that such measures are good to motivate farmers to better understand the value of biodiversity/ecosystem services if agricultural productivity benefits and that respective combined training / support of farmers is key.

**Trees Robijns, Senior EU Agriculture & Bioenergy Policy Officer, BirdLife Europe** underlined that the Mid-term Review of the EU Biodiversity Strategy along with EU Red Lists show that many species are threatened and the risk of extinction is problematic and for many species still unknown. The Farmland Bird Index for France was mentioned underlining that the species particularly linked to agricultural areas are the ones most under threat. It was further said that farmland species and birds are an important indicator for biodiversity. It was highlighted that agriculture is one of the main reasons for biodiversity loss. It was also said that biodiversity has in the past been able to adapt to agricultural practices, but due to the rapid changes biodiversity is increasingly under threat. It was pointed out that the main reasons for is intensification and abandonment. It was stressed that if species are individually examined the link of why they are declining can be determined in relation to how agricultural management has changed over time. It was said that the EU deals with biodiversity through the integration of the EU Habitats Directive and EU Biodiversity Strategy with co-financing of measures through the EU budget. It was pointed out that as agriculture plays an important role for conserving biodiversity the CAP is an important source of funding. It was underlined that it is problematic that since its last reform funds are being transferred from Pillar 2 to Pillar 1 reducing the funds available to enhance biodiversity. It was argued that the EU agricultural reform fails on biodiversity and that extra steps are needed by Member States. Farmers and Member States have a huge opportunity to choose within the CAP and evidence shows that they are not implementing the measures needed. With regards to EFAs it was said that 48% of agricultural land is still exempted and permanent pasture loss is still permitted. It was concluded by stating that the intentions are often good, but on the political level there is not enough action.

**The discussion with the audience** reiterated that all speakers share a common objective with the need to find common solutions in order to protect biodiversity and maintain agriculture's productivity alike. The issue of set-aside land was raised asking if such lands could be transformed to honey producing areas to increase the food resources for bees as a greening measure. In response to this it was said that the Direct Payments Regulation provides for a simple requirement of no production and Member States have been reminded that management rules should be considered only in the context of the so-called minimum activity. Criteria should be established by the Member States and the Regulation does not



exclude the possibility to sow grass or wild flowers if it is carried out for an environmental purpose including biodiversity conservation and improvement or within the standard for good agricultural and environmental condition as provided for under cross compliance. Further, outside the first pillar, sowing flowers on set-aside land can be compensated by an agri-environmental measure, if such a measure is foreseen in the Rural Development Program of the Member State. The issue of abandonment was reiterated stressing that it most often takes place in high nature value farming areas where the management has been extensive and positive for biodiversity. The need for a high nature value farming concept was highlighted mentioning that farmland biodiversity requires some type of management to be maintained. It was asked how to best put a value on ecosystem services as farmers often do not know which measures to put in place and set a value on biodiversity. It was stressed that the environment must be seen in a holistic way with agriculture as a part of the ecosystem itself. It was said that abandonment should be avoided and focus should be on developing sustainable attractive areas that preserve biodiversity and agriculture. It was mentioned that the CAP and farming community have been successful facing challenges in the past and that practical solutions are needed underlining the importance of cooperation between all partners as well as the need for local specific solutions. The issue of education was also raised and the need for experts to work alongside farmers. The [PEGASUS](#) project was also mentioned as an important example of how to develop innovative approaches and new ways of thinking about the way farmland and forests are managed.

**Angélique Delahaye MEP and Chair of the “Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services” working group of the EP Intergroup on “Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development”** concluded the meeting by reiterating that participants share the common goal of promoting biodiversity and the need to work together to achieve this. It was said that a follow-up breakfast will be held in June focusing on the downstream of the food chain and the constraints the food chain imposes on agriculture.