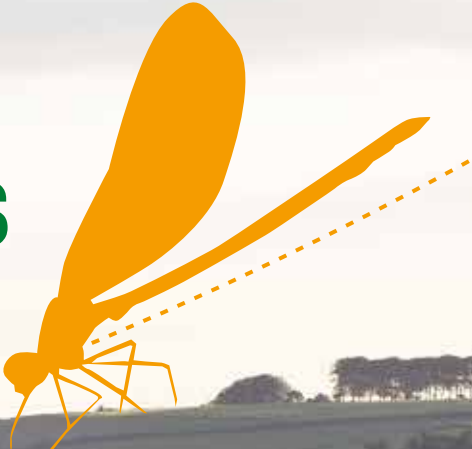


Briefings for MEPs on CAP Reform

#2 Greening: Ecological Focus Areas



#2 Greening: Ecological Focus Areas

INTRODUCTION

As well as providing much of our food, our farmland supports our rural communities and produces vital 'public goods' such as biodiversity, landscapes, clean water and healthy soils. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is one of the most powerful factors influencing how our farmland is managed and has a key role to play in supporting the provision of these public goods, which cannot be adequately provided by the market.¹ However, for much of its history it has driven environmentally damaging land management and whilst recent reforms have helped to turn the tide it is still not meeting its potential to safeguard food production and farming in the long-term by protecting and enhancing the environment.

The CAP is currently being reformed and the decisions taken across 2012–2013 will have significant consequences for the quality of land management up to 2020, a year which coincides with the renewed European Union (EU) targets for halting and reversing biodiversity declines. The current reform round contains proposals to 'green' direct payments under Pillar I by introducing a number of new requirements that farmers and land managers must meet. It is possible that 30% of direct payments to farmers will be conditional on these greening requirements.

¹ European Network for Rural Development, 'Public Goods and Public Intervention' (http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/app_templates/filedownload.cfm?id=D44F5AC8-F0D1-373F-E090-B782D2D22384)

This is a significant sum of public money and MEPs can ensure that the greening measures introduced will deliver benefits to the environment which are effective and lasting. In particular, the greening measures must better support the provision of the vital 'non-food' public goods that farmers and land managers provide. Of the measures proposed, we believe that the Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs) have the greatest potential to deliver a range of public benefits in the farmed countryside, provided that EFAs account for no less than 7% of the farm area and are made up of features and land use types which are beneficial to the environment.

CURRENT SITUATION

For the first time ever, Member State governments share decision-making powers with the European Parliament and it is vital that the negotiation process between these parties delivers a policy that:

- Directs public funding to farmers and land managers who provide society with vital, but undervalued, environmental public goods.
- Demonstrates efficient spend and value for money

Reforming the CAP so that it helps correct the market failure to value and reward the provision of environmental public goods is one clear way to do this, in addition to supporting the economic viability of UK farming.

WHY 'GREENING' AND EFAs ARE NEEDED

Despite some positive reforms to the CAP, such as the introduction of cross compliance² and particularly agri-environment schemes, the policy is still failing to drive more sustainable farming methods at the scale needed to reverse biodiversity declines and address wider environmental issues of resource degradation. As direct payments will continue to form the majority of the CAP budget after 2013 it is vital that they work much harder to deliver wider environmental benefits in return for public support for farming, particularly in this time of economic austerity and heightened scrutiny of public expenditure. The need for further greening of the CAP was explicitly recognised by the European Parliament in a recent report,³ and the importance of EFAs highlighted.

We believe that for the EFA approach to be most effective, it should have the following characteristics:

- Every farm has a role to play in protecting the environment; indeed this is the only sensible approach for a sector that depends on healthy and functioning natural processes. Therefore every farm should manage a modest percentage (no less than 7%) of its land for biodiversity and wider environmental protection and enhancement.

² Cross compliance is the set of basic requirements that farmers must meet in order to qualify for direct payments.

³ European Parliament, 'Our Life Insurance, Our Natural Capital: An EU biodiversity strategy to 2020', 2011/2307(INI)

#2 Greening: Ecological Focus Areas

- The current proposals for reform exclude grassland farms and we believe this should be rectified as grassland based farms also need to play their part in providing a healthy environment.
- EFA areas should include areas of uncropped arable land, woodland buffers, over-winter stubbles, landscape features⁴ and extensively managed farmland (such as extensively grazed permanent pasture or traditional orchards).
- Additional management of EFAs should be supported through the use of improved agri-environment schemes.

EFAs will **not harm** the productive capacity of the UK or the EU. In fact, protecting the environment is a vital part of securing our long-term food security. EFAs are not a return to set-aside and many farmers already have areas of their farm which would count towards EFAs such as hedgerows and buffer strips. Many current agri-environment options would also be suitable as EFA land and it is therefore important to ensure that farmers who are already doing the right thing are not penalised by greening proposals. It is, however, important to state that simply being in an agri-environment scheme should not be classed as meeting the greening requirements as this would not deliver additional benefits for the environment.

⁴ Including archaeological and historic sites

WHAT ACTION CAN MEPs TAKE?

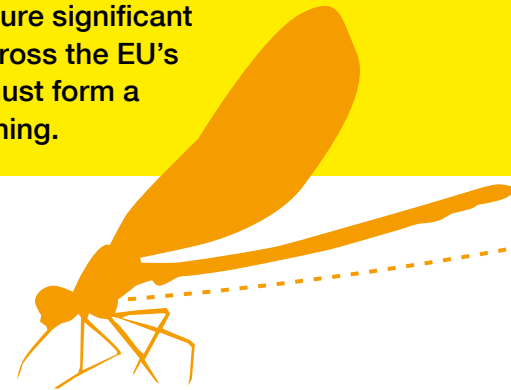
All future CAP payments must be linked to positive actions that deliver more sustainable land management. As the next CAP will continue to feature two separate sources of funding (Pillar I and Pillar II), positive action must be secured across both Pillars and through all payments.

The CAP reform proposals are being debated across 2012-2013 and it vitally important that meaningful greening measures are developed and agreed as part of this process. Of all the new proposals for CAP reform, EFAs have the most potential to secure significant environmental benefit across the EU's farmed landscape and must form a central part of CAP greening.

MEPs MUST ENSURE...

That this round of CAP reform secures:

- A robust 'greening' package of measures which requires EFAs on every farm
- EFAs that account for no less than 7% of the farm area
- EFAs that are comprised of land types that are environmentally beneficial, for example uncropped arable land, woodland buffers, over-winter stubbles, landscape features and extensively managed/semi-natural grassland



FOR MORE INFORMATION

Please contact **Julie Middleton** at **Wildlife and Countryside Link** on **020 7820 8600** or julie@wcl.org.uk

Briefings for MEPs on CAP Reform

WHO WE ARE

The UK's four Link organisations (the Joint Links) represent a suite of bodies working for the conservation, enjoyment and protection of wildlife, countryside and the marine environment. Our members practise and advocate environmentally sensitive land management and food production, and encourage respect for and enjoyment of landscapes and their features, the historic environment and biodiversity. We have been working together for many years to try and ensure that the CAP delivers all that it can for the countryside whilst rewarding those who embrace this responsibility in their management of the land.



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