

**Revaluating the role of High Biodiverse Farming and Livestock Systems  
at EU level in a changing climate post 2022**



**Wednesday 27th April 2022**

**Summary**

The purpose of this seminar was to bring together EU and national policy makers to reflect on the value and state of high nature value (HNV) farming systems, share best practice examples and consider the policy measures and strategies required post 2022 for the decade ahead.

It was organised by the Sustainable Land Use & Agriculture Interest Group, part of the European Network of Nature Conservation Agencies. An earlier evidence review carried out by the group showed the extent of decline of habitats of conservation value associated with HNV farming systems and dependent on extensive livestock grazing<sup>1</sup>. 'HNV' farming has been an indicator under the CAP but will be removed under the next cycle.

The seminar confirmed it remains an important concept for EU policy making. Farming is strongly connected with nature, it has negative and positive interactions with biodiversity that we need to integrate in policymaking.

For effective policy targeting, it is important to know which areas and types of farming retain highest biodiversity, in particular EU priority species and habitats (Annex 1 of Habitats Directive but at the landscape level).

European semi-natural habitats and landscapes have been shaped by extensive grazing, without these practices they would disappear. HNVF is threatened on one extreme by land abandonment and on the other agriculture intensification.

The EEA (European Environment Agency) has worked on an EU level approach to identifying HNV Farmland, publishing its first map in 2008. This map has been reviewed a number of times, and an updated version is expected later this year. Identification of what is HNV farmland is based on three main types:

- Type 1 - Farmland with a high proportion of semi-natural vegetation;
- Type 2 - Farmland with a mosaic of low intensity agriculture and natural and structural elements, such as field margins, hedgerows, stonewalls, patches of woodland or scrub, small rivers etc; and
- Type 3 - Farmland supporting rare species or a high proportion of European or World populations.

High Nature Value (HNV) farming has also been an environmental indicator under the CAP 2014-20 and the previous rural development framework (2007-13). The indicator has been based on the systems rather than land and defined at national level.<sup>2</sup>

Under the next CAP, it will be removed as a compulsory indicator, so there are concerns that this may be a step backwards. One of the arguments put forward was that, while it has been removed as a formal indicator, the new CAP provides a policy framework that may be more appropriate to support the needs of HNV areas, for example there is a more flexible definition of what is permanent grassland.

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<sup>1</sup> [Delivering environmental and biodiversity objectives through the CAP 2021-27: A synthesis of evidence by ENCA](#) Up to 86% of all grassland, habitat types assessed through the Article 17 report in 2013 were found to be in unfavourable conservation status.

<sup>2</sup> The indicator is defined as the percentage of Utilised Agricultural Area farmed to generate High Nature Value (HNV). See [Impact indicator](#) fiches for the Common Monitoring Evaluation Framework

It was explained that grazing systems are a very important component of HNV farming and farmland. For this reason the focus of ongoing EEA analysis in context of the EU Biodiversity Strategy 2030 restoration goals, i.e. in terms of nature conservation. Initial analysis by the EEA shows that in many EU countries the size of the extensive grazing livestock herd is smaller than that which would be required for the EU BDS restoration goals. There is a need to review EU livestock production in context of the EU Green Deal and the Biodiversity Strategy 2030.

In addition to identifying HNV farming systems and land, and providing more supportive policy and funding mechanisms, there is a third crucial element, which are the HNV farmers. Without them there would be no HNV farmland, so they need to be considered in the development of policies.

HNV farming systems differ across regions and countries because they are highly adapted to local conditions, but there are also differences between farms in terms of the proportion of HNV land use and management within the farm business.

Most HNV farming systems are economically and socially fragile. Recent experience and research has shown that there are some key elements that can influence the survival of an HNV farming system, from the farm family's point of view. These include farmer awareness of the value; opportunities to improve long-term economic viability of continued HNV management (some HNV farms are extremely small or part-time); recognition and validation of the farmers role by policy makers and farming organisations; and providing opportunities for peer support, learning and innovation.

Key points from the workshop discussions and conclusions:

- The HNMF indicator at EU level has worked well in terms of providing an incentive for national efforts. There are concerns that removal from the list of compulsory indicators under the CAP may see less attention and effort. However, while not an explicit indicator in the CAP, there are opportunities for the indicator to continue to exert a key role and in the EU policy context, we should look at the EU biodiversity framework as one of these opportunities.
- Good environmental data and identification/monitoring of biotypes and habitat is important to ensure we can monitor and support the management of HNMF.
- A common problem with HNV farming is abandonment due to lack of economic viability. HNV farming is vulnerable both economically and socially (rural communities). Education, building social capital and capacity building are important, and this includes developing awareness in farmers about the value of the habitats they manage and building relations between all those involved.
- For these reasons it requires a holistic policy approach from CAP and other public policies, that addresses the scale of the problem.
- A recurrent barrier for HNV systems is the low payment for participating in agri-environmental programmes. There is a need to find solutions that recognise the additional costs of looking after these areas and the real (full) costs of supporting HNV farming.
- There are examples of Member States defining land and agricultural practices eligible for direct payments under national plans in ways that are supportive of HNV farming, showing that it is possible to design direct payments to include habitats and farming systems of nature conservation value.