



RURAL EUROPEAN PLATFORM
connecting grassroots and policy

- stable farmer income
- regional development
- biodiversity, natural beauty
- open space



Ulster Wildlife Trust



**THE
NATIONAL
TRUST**

Workshop

Cooperation between farmers and nature conservation in Europe

Location: Belfast, N. Ireland

Period: 23-24th April 2009

Organization: Ulster Wildlife Trust and The National Trust in cooperation with the Rural European Platform

The Ulster Wildlife Trust is a nature conservation charity which works to achieve an environment rich in wildlife and valued by all. The National Trust looks after special places, for ever, for everyone, throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland and is Europe's biggest conservation organization. The Rural European Platform is an independent pan-European platform for farmers, landowners, nature conservationists, policy-makers and scientists. It is a platform to exchange ideas on rural development in Europe, providing examples that convince and policies that work.

OBJECTIVE and OUTCOME

To assess the results and explore the opportunities for cooperation between farming and nature conservation organizations with respect to the development of low input farming systems for managing amongst others the Natura 2000 network, generating and supporting environmental services in Europe. The workshop will provide opportunities for participants to

- share case studies and ideas
- generate new ideas for potential co-operation at the regional and European level between farmers and nature conservation organizations .
- to contribute to a draft REP position paper on multifunctional farming in the EU to be presented as an outcome of the meeting to the EU commissioner of agriculture and rural development.

INITIATORS.

Ulster Wildlife Trust and Geldersch landschap in cooperation with the EU HEATH InterReg NW project, Lifescape InterReg NW project following discussions with farming organizations facilitated by the Rural European Platform during the Eemland European Versatile Countryside in 2008.

JUSTIFICATION.

In the late twentieth century European farmers were spectacularly successful in increasing their productivity with the result that European food security has been achieved and the farming industry has contributed to Europe's economic growth. In the late 1940s about 25 percent of a family's income was required for food compared to about 10 percent at present. With the increased intensification and efficiency of farming less land and less labour is now needed to meet Europe's food demands than in any previous period of history. The other side of this success story of increasing efficiency is land abandonment where commodity-based farming becomes economically marginal at a given location. Such land abandonment may matter little to global commodity markets but it has regional consequences for European society in terms of the other public goods produced by agriculture as well as for social cohesion in these regions.

Public policy development at European Union, Member State and regional level is paying increasing attention to the unique role of farmers in shaping the countryside and in providing public goods and services that benefit both the rural and the city dwellers within a region. This includes, for example, the role of farmed landscapes in water regulation and flood control. Emphasis is being placed on the multifunctional nature of agriculture with a demand for more balance in the production of market and non-market goods. At present there is potential for part of the farmland resources in Europe to be used to restore the functional connections between farming, biodiversity, management of water resources and cultural heritage. Europe differs from many other parts of the world in that most of its biodiversity and the diversity of its scenic landscapes are the result of traditional low (external) input farming systems. Such landscapes are part of our common European cultural heritage. European society and its citizens seek attractive countryside as well as the other public goods such as water supply and flood alleviation, biodiversity enhancement and mitigation of the impacts of climate change. Payments for environmental services have the potential to become opportunities for income for those farmers operating low input systems but there should also be opportunities for high input farming to provide environmental services above cross-compliance level.

The workshop will explore the opportunities for developing farming systems which also provide environmental services. This is a matter of urgency given potential changes to the Single Farm Payment. Payments for environmental services have the potential to become new options to provide income for low input farming systems, but there are also opportunities for high input farming to provide environmental services above cross compliance level. The development of such integrated, multifunctional approaches to

agricultural systems will require co-operation between the city and its region and between stakeholder groups including farming organizations, nature conservation organizations and the research community as well as local and regional political representatives.

The development of low input farming systems, payment systems and marketing has already been pioneered by EU Interreg projects, including HEATH, Lifescape and Farming4Nature. In the Netherlands, a first step has been taken with the farming organization LTO and the Geldersch Landschap Trust cooperating with respect to developing low input farming systems and innovative financing systems. It is expected that the outcome will assist nature organizations to achieve their objectives at low cost and provide new options for farmers to generate income.

Why does the Ulster Wildlife Trust wish to organize this meeting?

- Our farmed landscapes are important for biodiversity and for contributing to the European Union's commitment to halting the loss of biodiversity by 2010.
- 70% of the agricultural area of our region is classified as Less Favoured Area (LFA). This includes, for example, upland heather moorland which is recognized as a priority habitat for conservation.
- A 2007 report on the red meat industry here concluded that current hill-sheep and suckler-origin beef farming is not economically viable although this assessment did not include revenue from subsidies in the economic modeling.

PROGRAMME

The agenda for the meeting will include one day of field visits and one day for discussion. The outcome of the meeting is hoped to be an initiative for international cooperation. Details follow within 2 weeks time. Please confirm your presence to Liesbeth.Steenhuisen@wur.nl with two weeks from now. .

COSTS

Preparation costs and excursions will be paid from funding received from various sources including the Ulster Wildlife Trust and Alterra. Dinners and hotel costs (about 100 euro/night) are to be covered by participants, apart from individual arrangements. s.