

# Who will manage the countryside in Europe?

Outcome of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Rural European Platform workshop in Falenty (Poland) ,15-18  
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## Prologue

**There is no longer an overriding economic reason to farm Europe's land for food.. However there are opportunities for other land use options, as most of the food in Europe is produced on only thirty percent of the farmland. The situation is that abandonment of farmland, leading to degradation by scrub or replacement by non-sustainable land use systems is becoming endemic throughout Europe.. In other parts biofuels may provide new opportunities. Multifunctional farming serving the demands of the cities also provides opportunities for reconciliation of farming with social cohesion policy and the environment . Multifunctional farming also provides new options for cost effective biodiversity management in semi-natural Natura 2000 areas.**

## Introduction

The Rural European Platform is identifying future options for managing land resources as well as finance mechanisms. It is bringing together regional administrators, scientists, land managers and farmers who are proposing a new rural development framework.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> workshop initiated by the EU Interreg projects Lifescape and Heath and the PIN-Matra project in Poland focussed on *good practice* of innovative land use in Europe as well as on finance mechanisms.

Participants came from Poland, Ukraine, Romania , Portugal, Norway, Germany , the United Kingdom and The Netherlands. Participants represented a cross-section of rural conditions in Europe and included regional policymakers, civil servants from ministries of agriculture and environment, agencies for rural innovation, representatives of national parks and a wide range of scientists.

## Common views

Views on land management were discussed during the workshop. Regional situations are very different, but in the following account a common denominator for discussions is becoming visible. Globalisation and the changes in EU Common Agricultural Policy are not only a threat, but can result in new opportunities for land management in Europe. Over 50 percent of farm land is not longer suitable for intensive farming and is effectively marginal land, which does not provide a full time labour income to the farmer. These marginal systems, however, can become productive , providing other goods and services and contributing to a sustainable economic growth in Europe. One may even ask whether without revitalisation of the countryside, economic growth can

become sustainable? One of the alternative options for land use are “low input ” multifunctional farming systems. In multifunctional farming systems the farm income is derived from services. Services and products such as bio-energy, biodiversity, water conservation, tourism, wellness and attractive habitation. Intensive farming systems should, however, not be considered as inappropriate. It is noted that through intensification, productivity in agriculture has tripled in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Transfer of labour force to other sectors became possible through intensification. These achievements, however, have come at the expense of water quality, the landscape and biodiversity. These trade-offs can be dealt with taking in account that less farm land is needed for food production, land resources which can be used for environment and biodiversity compatible land management systems. .

In conclusion one of the options solving most of the environmental problems is a situation with intensive farm systems occupy only a small percentage of the farm land and most agricultural land available for bioenergy, low input farming systems providing also services for the management of semi-natural ecosystems in protected areas and Natura 2000 areas.

What are the links between agriculture and biodiversity? With respect to biodiversity Europe is a unique continent. Most of its landscapes, wildlife and biodiversity exists as a result of farming. Probably 75 percent of birds and plant species depend on farming activities for their continued survival. A significant part of what are now national parks and nature areas in Europe, including heathlands in the west, dehesas in the south and the steppes in the central part of Europe, were previously part of low input farming systems. The lesson learned from the heathlands, dehesas and other man made ecosystems is that continuation of farming is essential. For instance although protected, heathlands in nature areas are encroached by woodlands in the absence of farming. The restoration of heathlands in the HEATH Interreg project is now focussed on restoring farming systems, including also grassland and arable land, which previously were used for intensive farming. Examples where farming continued that to the present day such as in Dartmoor in the UK and the Jerez in Portugal indicate that farming provides results. As said the good news is that because of also pasture and arable land is also becoming marginal from a food production point of view, heathlands reconciled with arable land and grassland make it possible to continue farming while restoring landscapes and biodiversity in a cost effective way.

**Summary of the results** The speakers provided an overview providing a wide range of options for low input farming, reconstruction of intensive farming systems, options for high productive organic farming through precision technology, bioenergy, farming for nature conservation and perspectives for regional branding and private-public finance mechanisms

The overviews presented for Poland and the Ukraine in the workshop confirm the view that farmland is becoming marginal as in the other parts of Europe. With respect to the Ukraine, may be 10 million hectare of farm land is marginal, but for the remaining 20 million hectare of land it is clear that intensive (irrigated ) agriculture has a future under

conditions where privatized agriculture is implemented and investments are made available. The presentations on Dutch agriculture also made clear that there are excellent opportunities for intensive farming. Reconstruction of the intensive farm sector and the demand of the cities for green space increases the opportunity options for multiple farming systems such as “Farming for Nature”. In this system payments are provided over a period of 3 times a period of 10 year for environment friendly farming. Annual payments are as high as 1000 Euro per hectare. Such payment on farm level also acts as an investment in the regional economy. Also agri-environmental payments of 150 Euro/ha in Poland have provided a positive effect on farm income as well as on biodiversity, keeping landscapes open. Contribution from Romania indicated that there is a direct need to start with payments such as in Poland.

The contribution from Germany highlighted the possibilities for using marshes for bioenergy. In particular in low population regions such as Pommern bioenergy provides opportunities, whereas in for instance Brandenburg the vicinity of Berlin options for low input farming systems such as in the Netherlands seems an attractive opportunity .

With respect to low input farming systems, calculations made for the Lifescape project in the presentation on marketing from the UK and information from the Netherlands indicate that regionalisation of the production through marketing of local produce can not provide sufficient income. Most of the income of a family farm in Europe must come from payments. Preliminary calculations were presented indicating that low input farming systems in Europe require annual payments of 200 -1000 Euro per hectare. The presentation from Portugal was most interesting providing a new view on marketing of a region. The aim in the Portuguese concept is to sell the region as an interesting place to go for a holiday or to live in. This concept is based not longer on selling regional products but promoting the region.

The finance mechanism “Regional Account”, which generates income for regional sustainable development indicate a business approach to generate funding, which was welcomed by various countries during the workshop. Apart from private funding it was suggested that public payments are indeed necessary. For instance if there is consensus in the EU that 100 million ha of marginal agricultural land should be kept open for reasons of social cohesion, biodiversity and regional economy it would cost at least 20 billion Euro per year. In the densely populated regions these payments would directly to the regional and EU economy and could be considered as an investment, but in other regions the payments will not generate revenue on regional level.

## **Conclusions**

It was concluded that there are already clear examples of innovative land management in Europe and REP will continue to provide examples of innovation and best practice on its website ([www.ruraleuropeanplatform.org](http://www.ruraleuropeanplatform.org)). Also the presentations will be made available on the website. It was decided to make preparations in the coming 6 months to assess the

possibilities to communicate the achievements on best practice towards the EU policymakers. **The decrease of profitability and job opportunities of agriculture with some 50 percent of the countryside on one hand and the opportunities to increase productivity on the most sustainable agricultural land on the other hand provide excellent opportunities to overcome the negative effects of modern agriculture on the environment, landscape and biodiversity in Europe. 2007 provides excellent opportunities to discuss the new opportunities for both farming and the environment in the european countryside with policymakers, before the revision of the CAP budget in 2008. It is for these reasons that REP should focus in 2007 on the political agenda in bringing forward the opportunities to change agricultural subsidies into payments for the countryside, which contribute to the overall EU economy.**

It is expected that workshops in 2007 in the Ukraine and Germany will provide sufficient momentum and preparation for a high level meeting in Portugal the end of 2007. In the meantime in December 2006 meetings have been arranged in Greifswald (Germany) and Oisterwijk (Netherlands) have been arranged. Power point presentations will be made available on the website. A list of decisions will be made available to the participants.