



Media Release

Last chance to save the EU's most environmentally sustainable farmers

Brussels, 07 September 2010 – NGOs make a strong call to reform the CAP by shifting substantial financial support to farmers who manage their land sustainably and deliver biodiversity and ecosystem services as well as healthy food, but often have a low income. Launching a vision for supporting low intensity farming in the EU [1], BirdLife International [2], Butterfly Conservation Europe [3], the European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism [4] and WWF [5] turn the spotlight on the urgent need to preserve our High Nature Value (HNV) [6] farming systems, essential both for preserving biodiversity and people's livelihood in many European rural areas.

The term HNV is used to describe broad types of farming that, because of their characteristics, are inherently high in biodiversity. These farms often are small-scale ones sustained by family labour valued below the minimum wage. HNV farmers mostly have lower incomes than non-HNV ones because they are not as intensive, hence cannot produce for the market at such low costs, and because the support provided by the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is weighted against them.

Even if the importance of maintaining High Nature Value farming to halt biodiversity decline, provide public goods and ecosystem services is now recognized by the EU, it still faces enormous socio-economic challenges. Every day these environmentally sustainable farmers face stark choices between abandonment and intensification and too often end up having to sell their farms. These landscapes rich in biodiversity and culture will be lost to abandonment or intensification unless the EU starts to take its responsibility for people and biodiversity seriously.

The new strategy proposed by four environmental organisations provides the EU with concrete Europe wide tools to maintain HNV farming as a vital element to halt biodiversity decline by 2020 and spare whole rural areas in Europe from being abandoned.

“If the EU wants to meet its objectives, this is its last chance to take advantage of the current CAP reform to put in place a pan-EU payment scheme to support HNV farming” commented Guy Beaufoy, Policy Manager at EFNCP. “If it fails, HNV farming will continue to decline and disappear, along with its wealth of environmental values”.

Member States committed themselves to identify and maintain HNV farming, but there are no specific rules or quantified criteria established at EU level. It is therefore up to them to interpret the concept and to decide how best to apply it.

“Maintaining HNV farming and halting biodiversity loss are inseparably connected but the EU does not have a proper strategy to tackle it yet. Providing effective economic support to HNV farming implies a fundamental shift in the way the CAP operates, and in the way funds are distributed to European farming”, added Trees Robijns, EU Agriculture Policy Officer at BirdLife International.

“Monitoring shows that grassland butterflies have declined across Europe by nearly 70% since 1990 and serious declines have been observed in other species groups, including moths, bees, and birds” said Sue Collins, Policy Director of Butterfly Conservation Europe. “It is vital to provide better support for farmers to continue farming the HNV grassland that supports biodiversity, especially important pollinators such as moths.”

BirdLife International, EFNCP, WWF and BCE will launch their vision during an international conference in Romania, on 7-9 September 2010. In the new Member State HNV farming is still highly present as part of a living countryside and a vibrant rural world. In supporting HNV farming, the EU would at the same time support biodiversity and whole rural areas in Europe.

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Notes for the editor

[1] Download the position at

http://www.birdlife.org/eu/EU_policy/Agriculture/eu_agriculture6.html

[2] BirdLife International is a global Partnership of nature conservation organisations working in more than 100 countries and territories. BirdLife is the leading authority on the status of birds, their habitats and the problems affecting them, and is working on a wide range of environmental issues. BirdLife has 42 Partners in Europe, and is represented in all 27 Member States.

For more information about the work of the BirdLife European Division:

<http://europe.birdlife.org>

[3] Butterfly Conservation Europe (BCE) is a network of experts and NGOs from 31 countries across Europe who share a common aim to improve the conservation of butterflies and moths and their habitats. Members take practical conservation action and the network supports policy reforms which will increase ecosystem functionality and resilience and help the maintenance and recovery of biodiversity. For more information about BCE's work see www.bc-europe.org

[4] EFNCP

The European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism brings together ecologists, nature conservationists, farmers and policy makers. This non-profit network exists to increase understanding of the nature- conservation and cultural value of certain farming systems, and to inform work on their maintenance. For more information see www.efncp.org

[5] WWF

WWF is one of the world's largest and most respected independent conservation organizations, with almost 5 million supporters and a global network active in over 100 countries. WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the earth's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. For further information: <http://www.wwf.eu>

[6] The concept of High Nature Value farming was developed in the early '90s from a growing recognition that the conservation of biodiversity in Europe depends on the continuation of low-intensity farming systems across large areas of countryside. A fundamental shift in the distribution of CAP funds away from more intensive farming was recommended, in order to provide support for these beneficial landuses. With the exception of a minority of Member States, this shift has not yet occurred. HNV farming is characterized by a combination of low intensity of land use, presence of semi-natural vegetation and presence of a landscape mosaic.