

Bulgaria – innovation example 1

RDP Natura 2000 MEASURE FOR AGRICULTURAL LAND: annual payments for restrictions laid down in designation orders of Natura 2000 sites

Society for Territorial and Environmental Prosperity (STEP)

www.step-bg.bg/en/

- **Location:** Natura 2000 designated sites in Bulgaria (33% of the national territory)
- **HNV system:** Extensive grazing and mowing
- **Scale of operation:** 333,884 ha in Natura 2000 areas were supported in 2014. The number of the applicants was 10,217.
- **Timespan:** The measure was implemented for the first time in 2011 and will be in force till the end of the current programming period (2020).
- **Keys to success:** Government commitment and funding, annual payments that don't bind farmers with long-term commitments, NGO insistence on implementing the measure.

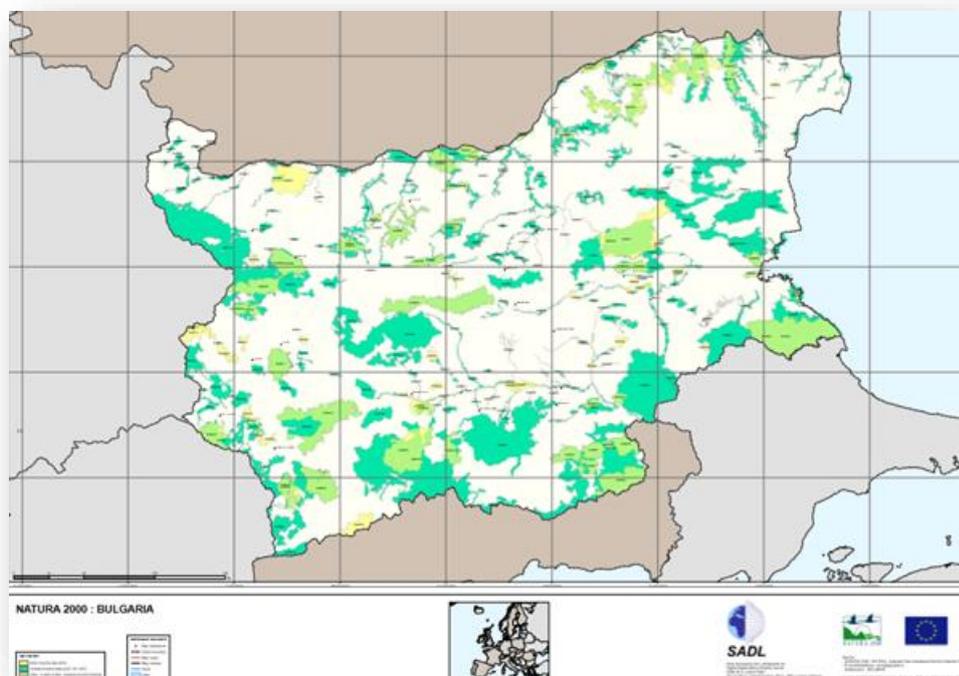


Figure 1 Natura 2000 sites in Bulgaria (Source: EU Commission)

Problems addressed by this example

Natura 2000 measure offers support for HNV farmers in Natura 2000 areas. Farmers can apply for support even if their land is not eligible for direct payments. Natura 2000 measure compensates the farmers in designated Natura 2000 sites for the following restrictions:

- Ban on the removal of landscape features (hedges, single and group trees);
- Prohibition of mowing before 1 July;
- Prohibition of ploughing and afforesting meadows, pastures and commons and turning them into arable land and/or permanent crops;
- Prohibition on the use of pesticides and mineral fertilisers in pastures and meadows;
- Prohibition of mowing before 15 June or 15 July (depending on the region) from the periphery to the centre with fast-moving technology.



Story in a nutshell

Natura 2000 measure is designed for sites with designation orders in force and where there are specific restrictions on agricultural land use. The payments depend on the restrictions that are listed in the designation orders as well as the geographical location of the site. Currently the measure covers only the SPAs. For grasslands the payments vary between €17 and €108/ha. Payments for Natura 2000 sites in ANC are lower than the areas that are not designated as ANC (the assumption being that the loss of income is lower). Similar RDP measure is implemented only in 14 member states.

What does Natura 2000 measure achieve for HNV farming?

- HNV farmland covered by this measure constantly increases. In 2015 410,442 ha were supported (an increase of 18 % compared to 2014).
- Natura 2000 measure supports also grasslands outside of SAPS Pillar 1 eligibility layer

Achievements

The interest for this measure constantly increases. In 2016 the claims for support were 11,543, compared to 10,787 in 2015. The measure is probably the one with easiest application procedures and is preferred by farmers in HNV and Natura 2000 areas. The measure also increases indirectly the knowledge of farmers about nature friendly farming practices.

Economics of HNV farming

Currently the measure covers only the SPAs. For grasslands the payments vary between €17 and €108/ha; but these are provided irrespective of the intensity of the farming system.

Maintaining or improving HNV values

The measure was specifically designed to achieve Natura 2000 conservation objectives for agricultural land, by supporting farmers to implement nature (biodiversity) friendly agricultural practices. However, the payments are not sufficient to motivate the farmers to claim their land for support only under this measure and in many cases they try to make the land “fit” to receive also payments under Pillar 1 support schemes, which means clearance of scrub and trees.

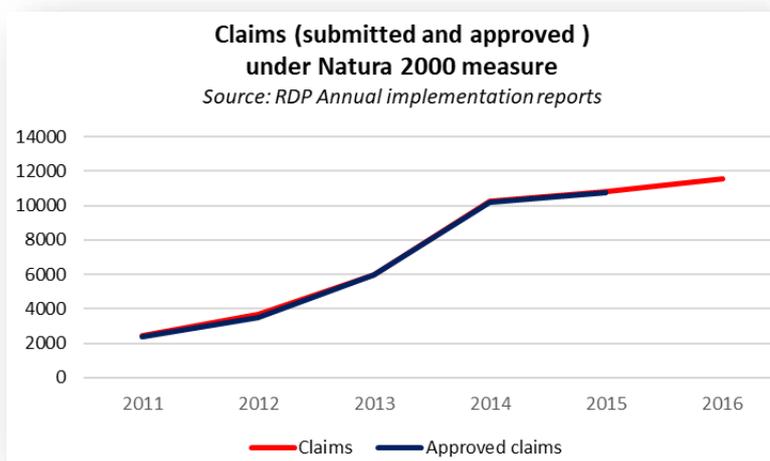


Figure 2

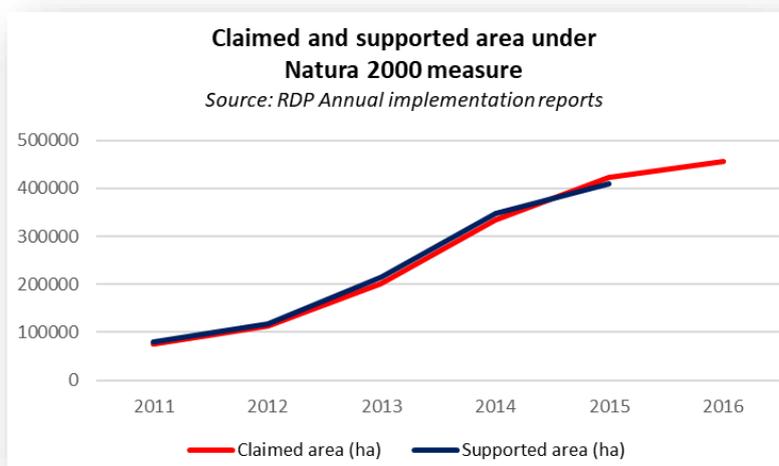


Figure 3



How does Natura 2000 respond to the HNV LINK innovation themes?

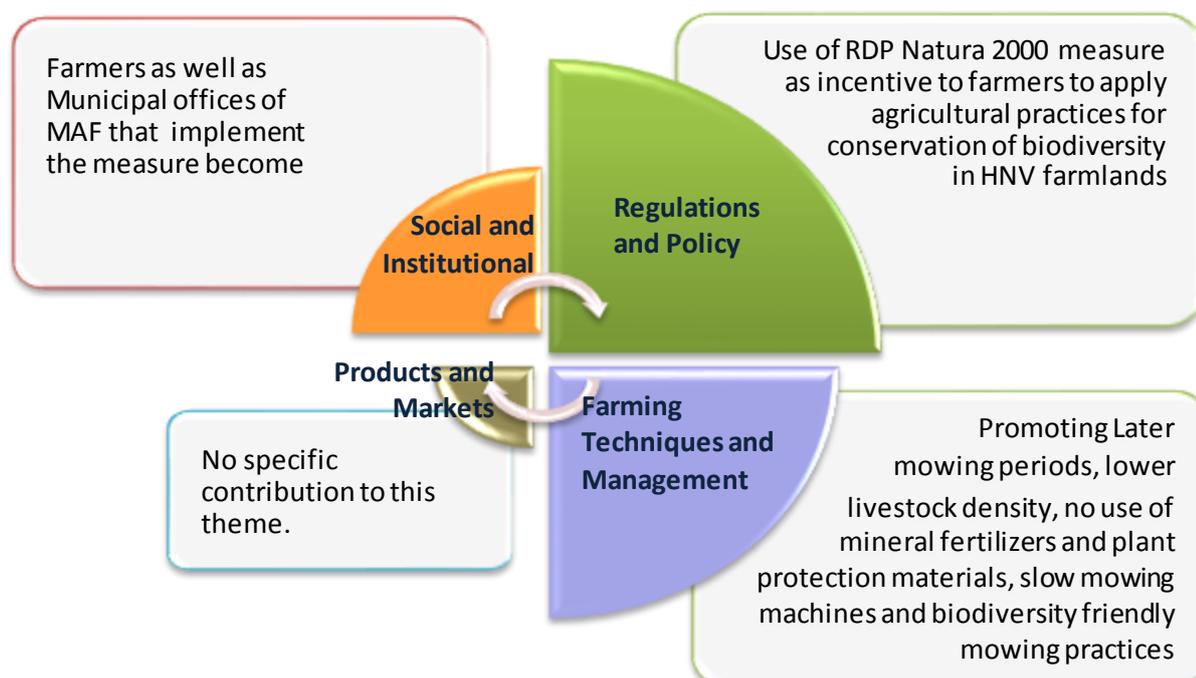


Figure 4 The framework HNV-Link used for evaluating innovations for high nature value farming.

The process that made it happen and critical factors for success

- The implementation of Natura 2000 measure was initiated by conservation NGOs and it was piloted in WSP and Besaparski hills SPAs by a GEF funded project, implemented by BSPB.
- Natura 2000 LPIS layer was incorporated in the LPIS thus making the application procedure very simple and understandable by the farmers
- The commitments under Natura 2000 measure are annual, so that many farmers prefer to apply for that measure rather than undertaking a five-year agri-environment commitment although, payments under Natura 2000 measure are lower than those available in the HNV AE scheme.

Institutional context that made it possible: The measure development is a result of the joint efforts of the Ministry of agriculture and food (MAF) and the Ministry of environment and waters (MoEW) on one side, and the conservation NGOs from the other. The measure was also used to promote the benefits from Natura 2000 sites designation.

Resources: BSPB GEF supported project and working staff in MAF and MoEW

Processes: The measure is implemented since 2011 (RPD 2007-2013) and continues in the current RDP (2014-2020)

Limiting factors, actual/potential problems, and how could they be overcome: Farmers' lack of information and/or interest. More importantly support does not distinguish between intensive and extensive farming systems and may lead to intensification of land use in some areas and farms.

Actors and roles: Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds, supported by the Bulgarian Ministry of Agriculture implemented a pilot grant scheme under a GEF funded project "Conservation of globally important biodiversity in HNV semi-natural grasslands through support for traditional local economy" that tested Natura 2000 measure in Ponor and Bessaparski hills SPAs. Meanwhile a working group with wide stakeholders' participation was created in the Ministry of Agriculture which helped the design the measure and its implementing procedure.



Lessons learnt from this innovation example, and its potential replication

- Farmers want simple and understandable measures. They prefer short term commitments from their side rather than long-term ones on the same land.
- Although eligibility criteria for grasslands under Natura 2000 measure are less restrictive, the farmers still want to make their grasslands 'fit' to the rules for Pillar 1 SAPS support schemes. A possible approach to solve that is to increase Natura 2000 payments for areas that are not eligible for SAPS support.

Overall lessons from this example, especially from point of view of HNV farming?

Natura 2000 measure could be an efficient instrument to support both biodiversity conservation and farmers income in HNV farmland, but payments need to be re-calculated to take into account SAPS eligibility conditions of grasslands and intensity of farming systems.

Is the innovation unique to its territory and its characteristics, or is it replicable in other areas?

Currently the measure is implemented only in SPAs. It can be replicated for SCIs, when their orders for designation come into force.

Could it be rolled out on a bigger territorial scale?

Yes, the measure can be further elaborated to support also the recommended activities under Natura 2000 sites management plans.

What would be needed to do this successfully?

MAF experts should make efforts to follow and include in the measure the recommended activities of the approved management plans of Natura 2000 sites. Farmers should be better informed about the eligible conditions and the benefits of both nature and farming.



Table 1 Agri-environment scheme of the Bulgaria Grasslands Project Grant Scheme. This pilot initiated the development of RDP Natura 2000 payments. Source: Kazakova, Y., (2012) Evaluation of the overall implementation, impact and results of the project pilot grant scheme for support of HNV farmers in three Natura 2000 sites in Bulgaria: SPA “Ponor”, SPA “Bessaparski Hills” and SPA “West Balkan Mountains”, Evaluation Report for BSPB and UNDP, Sofia.

| Measures | Activities |
|---|---|
| Area-based measures – Compensatory payments per unit of area paid annually | |
| A. Natura 2000 compensatory payment | <p>A1. Grasslands management through grazing of habitats with codes 6210 Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates, 6220 Pseudo-steppe with grasses and annuals of the Thero-Brachypodietea , 6240 Sub-pannonic steppic grassland, 6250 Pannonic loess steppic grasslands, 62A0 Eastern sub-mediterranean dry grasslands , 62C0</p> <p>A2. Grasslands management – habitats with codes 6510 Lowland hay meadows and 6520 Mountain hay meadows through mowing</p> <p>A3. Grasslands management – habitats with codes 6510 Lowland hay meadows and 6520 Mountain hay meadows through grazing</p> |
| B. Agri-environment payment | <p>B.1. Transformation of arable land into extensive grasslands aimed at conservation of biodiversity.</p> <p>B.2. Reseeding the grasslands with hayseed in Bessaparski Hills</p> |
| Investment measures – financing (90%) is based on approved projects | |
| C. Non-productive investments | <p>The purchases of C.1. Slow grass cutting machines; and C.2. Electro-pastures;</p> <p>The establishment of: C.3. Shelters (cattle-pens) and huts for herds and people in the mountains aimed at stimulating pasture in remote areas;</p> <p>C.4. Watering-places;</p> <p>C.5 Pits for disinfection and prophylactics of the animals.</p> <p>The placement of C.6. Visibility signs; and C.7. Bird cages, platforms and perching posts; C.8. Designation of pedestrian and cycling routes;</p> <p>C.9. Maintenance and C.10. construction of small natural water basins in the grasslands;</p> <p>C.11. Planting of trees (single or group of trees) from local species and their maintenance for 2 years;</p> <p>C.12. Purchasing of shepherd dogs;</p> |
| D. Productive investments | <p>D.1. Modernization and improvement of the milk farm production</p> <p>D.2. Grassland management</p> <p>D.3. Activities connected with diversification of the agricultural activities and conservation of the local products</p> <p>D.4. Public awareness activities – brochures, open days for demonstration and popularisation of traditional products. Design and maintenance of the farm web site, on-line sales, etc.</p> |

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