

Synthesis to Theme 3: Agri-environment payments and the establishment of trees on farms – past and future?

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This report forms part of a synthesis of the responses to an e-mail-based conference held between 5 and 26 May 2006. The conference, supported by the Farm Woodland Forum (www.agroforestry.ac.uk), was initiated as Single Farm Payments were being introduced across the European Union, and before the national implementation of the new Rural Development Regulation (2007-2013), which includes an Article (44) allowing payments for establishment of new agroforestry systems. The conference also considered the opportunities for new agri-environment and forest-environment payments.

The conference covered three topics.

- Topic 1 considered Article 44 of the Rural Development Regulation (2007-2013) and asked if member states will use this opportunity to establish new areas of agroforestry.
- Topic 2 considered the Single Farm Payment and whether member states would exclude areas with scattered tree cover from payment?
- Topic 3 considered the links between agri-environment payments and the establishment of trees on farms.

This report synthesises the results for topic 3.

Summary

Agri-environmental payments (AEP) are diverse, but broadly speaking, one could say that each measure has at least one of *two broad objectives: reducing environmental risks* associated with modern farming on the one hand, and *preserving nature and cultivated landscapes* on the other (EU, 2005ⁱ). Given that agroforestry systems have been frequently described as environmental-friendly systems, it could be expected that these systems benefit from this set of measures. Besides, in Europe some agroforestry systems still persist as traditional ways of farming (Eichhorn et al., 2006ⁱⁱ).

However, the environmental potential of agroforestry is still not realised in Europe and very few AEPs have been addressed directly to granting the environmental services of agroforestry in Europe. Apart from the well-known case of France, where direct agri-environmental payments were applied to agroforestry plots (new or already existing) in 2001-2002, a miscellany of measures potentially useful for the maintenance of in-farm trees has been applied in Europe. Many of them were already reported in the starting textⁱⁱⁱ.

During the three-week E-conference, very few new cases have been reported:

- a. In Ireland, the Rural Environment Protection Scheme (REPS) includes some agroforestry associated payments (i) Measure 8A “Landscaping around the farmyard” within the Measure “Maintain and improve visual appearance of farm and farmyard” favours the planting of well chosen surrounding/sheltering trees and shrubs; (ii) Supplementary Measure 2 “Traditional Irish orchards” seeks the creation and maintenance of apple orchards with specific varieties traditional to Ireland to ensure the survival of this unique resource; (iii) Supplementary Measure 4 “Riparian zones” aims to plant trees on up to 50% of the riparian zone with the following recommended species - oak, beech, willow, birch, ash, whitethorn, blackthorn or elder.

- b. AEPs are available in England, for restoration and creation of wood pasture, and for protection of ancient trees within arable fields and intensively managed grass fields.
- c. In Germany there are no AEPs for the promotion or conservation of agroforestry systems. Nevertheless, within the agri-environment-scheme, the Bloom-Stripe-Advancement funds at the rate of 372-540 Euro/ha/year when farmers lay out bloom-stripes (3 m wide) on an agricultural area. This payment is seen as potentially useful for the plantation of lines of trees in croplands.
- d. In Greece, the only measure that directly supports the maintenance of trees on farms is for tending hedges.

In conclusion, it can be said that regarding agroforestry, AEPs were widely (although not everywhere) applied only for the maintenance of hedges and on-farm isolated trees. For instance, in the Netherlands in 2002, agri-environment contracts included 22,000 pollarded trees and nearly 10,000 tall trees. By contrast, agri-environmental payments were probably insufficient to promote the implementation of new agroforestry plantings.

Problems have been identified in certain new Member States where fragmented land ownership and short-term rental contracts are excluding many farmers from participating in agri-environmental schemesⁱ. Indeed, there have been extremely large differences between countries in the proportion of farms benefiting from AEP and the level of these payments. For instance, in Greece, the measure on tending hedges has not had any success so far, partly due to inability or indifference of the local authorities to implement it. Moreover, there is a policy of the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food to implement arable land consolidation into about 100,000 ha units. If this is done, then considerable areas with trees or hedges will be destroyed. By contrast, there are currently 47,900 active participants within the REP scheme, covering 519,000 hectares, in Ireland (but there are no precise data on how many are involved in any of the aforementioned agroforestry measures). Anyway, a comprehensive picture of the effectiveness and efficiency of agri-environmental measures for the period 2000-2006 is not yet availableⁱ.

Future

Agri-environment commitments have to go beyond usual Good Farming Practice (*GFP*; defined as encompassing mandatory legal requirements and a level of environmental care that a reasonable farmer is expected to apply anyway). This means that a farmer can only be paid, for instance, for environmental commitments that go *beyond* statutory requirements defined in his regional Code of GFP.

Hence, a scientific effort is still needed to demonstrate that agroforestry systems can effectively bring to society diverse environmental services (e.g. erosion control, C capture, N leaching reduction, biodiversity, landscape amenity, etc). For these environmental-reasons, and for their inherent cultural value, all the traditional agroforestry systems should be eligible for AEPs, or any specific measure, throughout the European Union.

ⁱ Agri-environment Measures. Overview on General Principles, Types of Measures, and Application. European Commission. Directorate General for Agriculture and Rural Development. Unit G-4 - Evaluation of Measures applied to Agriculture, Studies. March 2005.

ⁱⁱ Eichhorn et al. 2006. Silvoarable systems in Europe – past, present and future prospects. *Agroforestry Systems* 67:29–50.

ⁱⁱⁱ www.jiscmail.ac.uk/AGROFORESTRYR_POLICY.html E-conference-Theme 3, in the File area for the list.