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Ziemeļu Ministru padomes
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TRINET Workshop

Building Nordic-Baltic and European partnership in grassland farming for biodiversity

Sigulda, Latvia, Oct. 11-12 2007

Agreement to continue as a group

The participants to the workshop (see attached list) agree to continue as a group under a single name, but without any formal structure or statutes at this stage (I.e. as a *de facto*, not a *de iure*, association).

For some participants, commitment to the network will depend on agreement internally with managers within the organisation they belong to.

There is however always a possibility to participate as an individual, instead of as an official representative of an organisation.

Partnership as underlying factor

For many decades, farmers and nature conservationists stood in opposition to each other. There is now a transition under way towards a new partnership model, where farmers and nature conservation bodies work together to restore and maintain high nature value grasslands. **Partnership** implies:

1. Together finding the most effective ways of delivering biodiversity (= creativity in management techniques and monitoring of results);
2. Together evaluating Rural Development and other tools which are available, comparing between countries as well as examining their efficacy (for biodiversity) and user-friendliness, in order to suggest improvements which benefit both partners;
3. Together building up systems to make farming for landscapes and biodiversity economically sustainable, so that farmers get a just reward for their work and greater independence from subsidies.

The tourism sector, or, to be exact, that part of it which deals in rural and nature-based tourism and recreation, benefits from the preservation of landscape and biodiversity. Therefore, as follow-up, establish links to representatives of the tourism sector (**partnership broadening**).

Three partnership themes

Theme 1: Finding the most effective ways of delivering biodiversity

This covers two interlinked activities:

1) **Developing and implementing grassland management and restoration techniques.** As a suggestion for practical follow-up to the workshop, exchange information on grassland management and restoration techniques, especially of innovative and unusual solutions and ideas. These ought to be distinguished clearly from common practice which is already being implemented in many countries and grassland contexts. It would also be interesting to know about cases where common practices have proven themselves to be wrong for certain areas or nature values. A number of clearly innovative techniques or tools were already mentioned during the workshop, and more could be envisaged – e.g. experiments with animals (donkeys, goats) which have a strong preference for nibbling woody plants, as an alternative to cows and sheep in grasslands which are heavily overgrown.

There is also a **fundamental need for improved communication strategies** – i.e. how do we effectively learn from/communicate to farmers regarding ‘farming for conservation’ strategies and the significance of heritage features? (‘Technology Transfer’).

Also for the mediation between the scientific and the practical land use levels (see below, end of Theme 2), improving communication is one of the most important points. Here the Austrian system – direct contact and working directly on the farm – offers a good example with high acceptance. It is like being married – talk to your partner or you will lose the partnership!

2) **Monitoring the impact of grassland management and restoration techniques** (grazing/mowing, etc) on habitats and species. Not just in terms of numbers of individuals, e.g. birds, present, but also in terms of their reproductive success, e.g. % of birds successfully breeding. There is a widespread and chronic lack of funds to do this kind of efficacy research. Funding, when given, is often short-term – more longer-term funding to support long-term monitoring is needed.

Therefore, as a **suggestion for practical follow-up to the workshop**, set up a system to exchange data on what has already been done or is under way, in order to avoid duplication of research and to maximise the dissemination of what has already been discovered. This will help allocate the scarce funds for monitoring towards those areas where there is a major gap across European countries.

Exchanging data ought to also extend to data on monitoring techniques. For the Baltic States at least, it is very important to start improving remote sensing techniques for monitoring – satellite images, laser scanning, aerial photographs with infrared input, are all effective tools to estimate the conservation status. Information about processing such data should be shared.

Joint monitoring should also be considered, at least from time to time – e.g. considering meadows as stopping places for migratory birds, it would be interesting to know about the use of the meadows along the migratory routes, etc... The TRINET network would offer a good opportunity for announcing-organising parallel-joint monitoring.

A new EU-wide monitoring of the success of certain measures in grassland farming (and other management measures) has just been built up, as all EU member states have to report on the success of their Natura 2000 site management plans to the EU. (OIKOS did such reporting work for the Environment Ministry in Austria in 2007 and is therefore familiar with the procedures, forms etc). This monitoring system was worked out in close cooperation between 21 EU countries. So it is important not to try to “invent the wheel” for a second time – but instead to try to adapt it better to extensive grassland.

Developing closer relations with <http://www.cbd.int/default.shtml> and all its national organisations like <http://www.biodiv.XX/> ought also to be considered.

Within monitoring, priority ought to be given to monitoring the rate of success of the management methods employed for high nature value grasslands. This means a broad monitoring across species and plant communities, instead of a narrow monitoring of the impact of management on specific taxa and species. I.e., not so much: “this is species/taxon., how is it affected by grassland management?”, but more: “who is affected in what way by this particular form of grassland management?”. Important is to check whether observed effects are purely local (due to local circumstances) or are indeed valid across biogeographic regions.

In turn, this will help identify **indicators of success** for each technical type of grassland management.

These indicators of (biological) success can act as alternatives to the fixed instructions (mow at that date, graze LU per hectare) which are typical of current support measures for grassland farming (and which have standardising effects – see below). These indicators mean a results-based approach: this is what we want to achieve, and what will be paid for. How to get there, how to achieve the desired result, is left entirely flexible.

Indicators of success, once defined, could be proposed to the authorities and stakeholders as a new pathway in support for farmers committed to managing high nature value grassland (see next theme).

It should be noted that such indicators do, at least, exist in Austria, where they fit into the Natura 2000 monitoring system mentioned above.

Universities and similar bodies have the capability to carry out fundamental research on the effects of different management techniques, and there are already large-scale research projects (EU Research Framework Programme, national science programmes). There does appear to be a problem with dissemination of the research results and take-up of recommendations from this research by farmers and conservation managers of sites. Conversely, those engaged in practical work may not be succeeding in getting the questions which they have about management forms and their impact, transmitted to the scientific research projects. This could be an issue to investigate for **possible practical follow-up (mediation between the scientific and the practical land use levels)**.

Concerning this mediation between the scientific and the practical land use levels:

- the need for management knowledge almost inevitably implies research work
- it is very important that management methods should always be research- and experience-based...or "evidence-based".

Theme 2: Evaluating Rural Development and other support tools which are available

This theme covers agri-environment and other Rural Development support mechanisms; suckler cow premia (where they still exist); support measures for restoration; etc.

A **suggestion for practical follow-up to the workshop** is to examine differences between countries. Such analysis can be used to help members of the group in countries where support is not adequate to the requirements of grassland use for nature, by showing what is possible within the framework of the CAP Second Pillar or other structures. This can strengthen their position towards their ministry of agriculture and other competent authorities or interest groups.

This analysis of similarities and differences between countries can also be useful, at national and EU level, for the **mid-term review of the CAP, the debate on rural development after 2013** (which is starting now!)....The group could seek contacts and meetings with the European Commission and Parliament, national ministries, European-level farmer associations, national and European Rural Development Networks which must be set up according to Regulation 1698/2005, etc.

Connected to this, is the “**standardisation of grassland management**”, a topic which came up several times during different presentations in the workshop. What does it mean? Because of the terms of agri-environment measures, there is a tendency for all farmers in a given district to mow on the same date, or employ the same stocking density when grazing, etc. The consequence is that grasslands tend to become extensive, but uniform across space and/or at certain critical points in time (e.g. a week after July 1 every hectare of grassland in a site has been mown short). This is not good for biodiversity. More flexibility would be preferable for landscape and biodiversity values (mowing pieces of the same land at different times, for instance, means more diverse structures). It is also to the advantage of the farmer, who is then better able to use his or her practical knowledge of the farm and of the right way to react to weather and other conditions.

As a **suggestion for practical follow-up to the workshop**, this point could be worked out in more detail, with examples and evidence, and transmitted to the competent authorities and political decision-makers.

The issue of standardisation is connected to the support mechanism tools available within each country – e.g. the 200 different agri-environment measures in Austria mean that there is more likely to be a diversity of grassland management within a single district, as farmers have a bigger ‘menu’ to choose from, than in a country with only 5 or 10 measures. The experience in Austria with a system of many measures is that it has a very high acceptance and demand from interested farmers exceeds the capacity of the programme. So, flexibility leads to a more complex system, and this system is kept running simply through good communication by well-trained experts. If a high-quality product is offered to the farmer, the farmer retains flexibility, which is very important in conditions which change very rapidly even within one year. On the other hand, a seven-year contract (with fixed monetary payments) gives the farmer the possibility for a continuous planning on his or her farm.

Under Theme 2 there is also an ongoing need to **promote the significance of high nature value (HNV) farming at official levels to ensure that it is treated as significant in the context of other potentially contradictory policy drivers** (e.g. climate change strategies – more forest, less farms?).

It should also be worthwhile to press for **including management measures for species conservation into grassland management programmes** – e.g. step-by-step mowing for corncrakes and other meadow birds, pond management (mowing) for amphibians etc. These support mechanisms for species could be an additional but very valuable layer of grassland support.

Theme 3: Building up systems to make farming for landscapes and biodiversity economically sustainable

The workshop showed that in England, Sweden, Belgium and Germany there is parallel work being done on:

- selling meat and other produce from nature-oriented grassland farming directly to interested consumers,
- motivating consumers to buy it,
- investigating the health benefits of grassland meat,
- promoting regional economic cycles.

Large-scale examples also exist in Austria, e.g. the Almenland Project (<http://www.feinkost-schirrhofer.at/cms/index.php?ep1ix657-542w-5p6a-hajd-foelcj55f8>).

This could be built upon to:

- 1) Exchange experience on obstacles (such as restrictions on mobile slaughterhouses or the need to develop appropriate fodder for fattening) and successes (notably in building up consumer loyalty and extracting maximum value from grassland produce).
- 2) Through this exchange of experience, it would also be possible to make available best practice to others who want to start marketing initiatives in their countries.
- 3) Finally, obstacles which are connected to legislation or administrative regulations (such as the barriers to on-farm slaughter) or to fiscal policy (such as property taxes which are biased against high nature value grassland because they are based on assessed income from more productive land) could be drawn to the attention of the appropriate authorities and political bodies.

(Suggestion for practical follow-up to the workshop).

Such work is also very important to make grassland farming less dependent on subsidies. As much independence from subsidies as possible, is to the advantage of both farmers and conservationists, as it means that grassland farming for nature is less vulnerable to political and financial changes to Rural Development Programmes and other support systems.

Besides the marketing of meat and other animal produce, there are two other areas with potential to give economic returns to farmers engaged in managing high nature value grassland:

1. Tourism and recreation (farm holidays; provision of meat/milk etc to local hotels and restaurants; farm visits/on-farm catering/farm adventure tours/horse riding etc for people staying in nearby villages...)
2. Biomass-based energy – biogas from manure/fermented hay etc, but also wood chips, from clearing land of overgrowth, as a source of (heating) energy
3. Conservation work – in the Burren, for instance, many farmers are now earning money doing ‘conservation work’ on other farms (building walls, cutting scrub etc).

These could be investigated further (**suggestion for practical follow-up to the workshop**).

Practical suggestions on how to carry out the tasks proposed under the three themes:

Networking:

Continue **meetings and on-site excursions** as at Sigulda. Possibly with Bulgaria and Romania as priorities for the next meeting, so that best practice (in land use, agri-environment programming and marketing of produce) developed elsewhere can be directly exchanged with stakeholders in these two new EU member states where huge areas of high nature value grassland are under threat. Such a meeting in Romania or Bulgaria would also be an opportunity to work out, on the spot, realistic practical pilot projects, submittable for funding. This could be feasible if the meeting is held in a district with potential for grassland work at all levels (land management, stakeholder partnership, economic follow-up) - working groups and site visits would be the tools to elaborate a pilot project.

Contacting other grassland groups.

The TRINET network can invite other local initiatives, similar to those already participating in the Sigulda meeting, to participate in future meetings.

Other groups exist which, like TRINET, deal with grassland topics at a transnational level (Grazing Animals Project in UK, BirdLife’s Farming for Life campaign, the European Grasslands Federation or the European Forum for Nature Conservation and Pastoralism). A Swedish research programme (see <http://www-hagmarksmistra.slu.se/eng/index.htm>) is carrying out work which is highly relevant to Theme 1 (monitoring and management issues). A meeting was held in Tartu (Estonia) in 2005 which covered a number of topics also covered by the Sigulda meeting (see <http://www.europeangrassland.org>). The Agriculture University in Uppsala is organising a European Grasslands Federation meeting in May 2008. Cooperation with Eurosite could also bring benefit to TRINET.

More information is needed about what the relations to other, similar groupings or organisations might be. There is a possible "danger" of doing exactly the same as these other groups. There is also the risk of ending up in the sort of situation one encounters elsewhere, such as in some species protection contexts, where different groups argue on what are the aims and best methods for conservation. Finally, if there are several groups there is a risk of wasting resources which could be used more effectively

Therefore, the TRINET group should investigate these other groups to see where there is overlap and where TRINET is dealing with new themes. On the basis of this evaluation, a direct contact with these other groups must take place in a spirit of complementing each other's work. The Sigulda workshop report should be circulated to them. The TRINET group can ask to be invited, as group, to their seminars. Daniel Green has already informed Mr Åke Berg at the Agriculture University in Uppsala, who is organising the Grassland Federation meeting in May 2008, of the Sigulda meeting and its participants, so that an invitation to the TRINET participants may be sent.

Pooling information and disseminating it:

Spreading information: there is a lot of information available within this group, but the key question is how to make it available to the professional and interested lay public in the best and most convenient way. Some kind of web portal, if constructed with careful planning, might be very effective in this respect.

Set up a **data base on grasslands** – not to collect large amounts of information but to display good examples of grassland management. This data base ought to be accessible through the Internet so that it can be used as a platform towards other organisations (authorities, interest groups, other stakeholders). Each member of the group invests a few hours to fill in its contribution, e.g. through a questionnaire, using the themes decided by the group.

The existing ManTra data base (Association for Traditional Rural Landscapes in Southwest Finland) could be used as the foundation for this data base of good examples. The data base could equally cover issues of monitoring, indicators of success, comparisons of support mechanisms, etc.

From this data base, a **handbook of best practice examples** of grazing and mowing could be produced.

The focus ought to be on innovative ideas and techniques, which should be prominent in the data base and the handbook. A small panel from within the group ought to be in charge of filtering out what is innovative ('peer review' system).

Set up a **distribution channel** so that each can see what others are doing, and those who need it or want it can get advice and help from those who have already built up more experience in a particular field. The Veeakker (Belgium) informatics system is offered as host for such a distribution channel for information exchanges, especially on themes such as meat quality, hay and fodder, marketing and business models. The ManTra-network, or www.landscape.fi, (Finland) could be a good tool in knowledge and experience exchange concerning grassland management, notably for Theme 1 ("mediation between the scientific and the practical land use levels").:

It is by asking questions that one gets answers. Therefore, similar to the Grazing Animals Project 'Nibblers' system, an **e-mail based chat system** could be developed in which people pose questions, to an e-mail list, about grassland restoration, management, monitoring or marketing problems they encounter. They then get replies from others on this list. This could start within and between members of the group, and hopefully it snowballs as others join in.

Organisation and financing

The proposals for pooling and disseminating information in the previous section mean that a **dedicated website** for the group may be necessary, with links to e.g. the data base or the chatroom (if these are hosted by different members of the group). Such a dedicated website will make the group and its work known to the outside world.

However, some form of **coordination** will be needed to run the website and to bring together the contributions from the group. If a professional coordinator is required (as opposed to voluntary work) then funding will need to be found.

One way to obtain financing is to **elaborate a proposal for a group project** which can be funded, e.g. through Interreg, LIFE+, through regional funding opportunities (e.g. Nordic Council of Ministers) or through national funds. This implies looking for possible funds and finding out how they work. A coordinator is important, and this might be possible to fund via e.g. Interreg. A lesson which is already clear from past Interreg experience in Estonia: do not have too many project partners. Instead, have a few bodies officially in charge of the project and bring the rest in as subcontractors or suchlike.

Elaborating a project proposal for funding could be outsourced to official institutes, such as exist in certain countries, which do all the administrative work for formulating an Interreg project application etc. In return, these institutes take some money from the project, but this should never be that high compared to paying a private company for such assistance.

Whereas help between members of the group must be free, a consultancy fee ought to be charged if **technical assistance** requests are received from outside organisations (e.g. as a result of publicity through the website). In practice, this might mean establishing an "expert group" one can book or contact. Precise rules will then have to be made to ensure that the division of each such consultancy work between those members of the group technically able to deal with the particular task, is fair and correct. A part of the fees can be set aside to help finance the group network and its maintenance.

As a next step, a decision on priority actions should be elaborated by a TRINET specialist group/ working group/co-operation team, and referred back to the group.



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TRINET Workshop

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Sigulda, Latvia, Oct. 11-12 2007

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