

**Changing a floodplain grassland from intensive to  
extensive agricultural management**  
Waddensea Estuary Nature and Environment Improvement Project  
(WEP)

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## Description of the project area

- Unique estuary in the entire Waddensea area
- Designated as EEC Bird Protection Area, EEC Habitat Area, Ramsar Area and protected by the Danish Nature Protection Act.
- Until the 1950s, The area was important for a big number of birds and bird species.
- Gradually more efficient draining and intensification of agricultural management methods has resulted in a decline of nature values
- 2.700 hectare fresh and salt meadows
- Before the project there was approx. 400 private land owners

# Varde River Valley and Ho Bugt



# Implementation

- The WEP is based on voluntary participation from the land owners
- Land consolidation has been used to secure the necessary support from the land owners
- Agri-environment agreements with the farmers
  - Establishment of wetlands in average 400 € per hectare per year during 20 years
- Restoring of the hydrological dynamics
- The overall project management is delegated to a steering committee constituted by the local county; Danish Ministry of Food and Agriculture; Ministry of the Environment; local Farmers Union.

# Agri-environmental agreements in the area 1

- Extensify agricultural management methods:
  - no use of fertilizers
  - No use of pesticides
  - No re-laying of fields
  - Only grazing with ruminants and horses
  - Max. 0,8 LU per hectare out to graze
  - No cutting before 25 June
  - Agricultural use every year

# Agri-environmental agreements in the area 2

- Restore the hydrological dynamics in the project area:
  - 280 sluice gates have been established
  - 12 riffles have been established
  - Approx. 600 artificial ditches have been closed
- The result is one water level in may to october, where the farmers must use the area for agricultural purpose, and another water level from october to may in favorite for resting birds and other meadow organisms.

# One out of twelve riffles



# One out of 280 sluice gates





# Why were the farmers interested in the project?

- The idea was presented by the chairman for their own local farmers union
- From the beginning the farmers was involved in the discussions with the authorities about conditions and compensations
- In the meetings with the farmers about land consolidation and project development in local areas representatives from the farmers union were active.
- The application paper was carried out by the representative from the farmeres union in "the farmers kitchen"
- The economic compensation was attractive compared to the alternatives
- The farmers union was one of the actors. In the project periode there will be a short distance between farmer and the authorities.

# Environmental advantages of the project

- Agricultural management methods are intensified in more than 90 % of the project area. 2.500 hectares
- In the same parts the water level has been raised
- The habitat diversity are getting better ( the corn-crake is back)
- The leaching of nitrogen compounds to the aquatic environment have been reduced

# Corn-crake



# Advantages for the farmers

- The economic result is stable and good in a period with declining prices on products
- Grazing is more widespread – like back in the 60's. Managing of small fields between ditches is not for big machines in the modern danish agriculture.
- Hay from the meadows is an attractive product, especially for ecological cattle, sheep and horses.
- Branding. "Ho Bugt" and "Varde Ådal" is used in marketing of meat and cheese.

# Disadvantages for the farmers

- There is a disconnection between the idea of a high water level in the area and the requirement of agricultural use every year.
- If an area is dominated by other species than grasses, the farmer can't get the 400 € pr. year.
- What happens after 20 years with the project?

# Conclusions

- More than 90 % of the area is within the project although it's voluntary for the farmers
- There is a conflict between the project idea of high water level and the compensation depending on agricultural use every year and flora dominated by grasses.
- A good dialogue between the farmers and the authorities canalized through the farmers organisation.
- There is progress in the diversity of flora and fauna in the project area.