

SWEDEN – KALMAR

Birdwatchers and farmers in cooperation

The project demonstrates agriculture's forward links to protection of the environment and protection of biodiversity, with an emphasis on birds.

1. Project details

Nature of the project

Purpose: The purpose of the project is to find new ways to protect and develop biodiversity (especially birdlife) on farmland without compromising economic development and sustainability.

Content: In the first stage, an inventory is conducted on the land of the farms involved. In the second phase, competence development and advisory services is carried out on the farms, aiming at increasing farmers competence of how to support birdlife on the farm and thereby improve biodiversity. After 2-3 years the inventories and suggested on-farm actions are followed up. Each farm also receives a map of the birds on their farm.

Inspiration: The idea originated from the UK where birdlife on 4,000 farms were mapped in 1999. The Swedish ornithological Association and the Rural Economy and Agricultural Society (HUSH) started the project in 2007.

Policy coherence: A rich and diversified farmland is one of the main targets of the national, regional and local rural development strategies. In Kalmar County the implementation of activities to increase biodiversity in rural areas is a priority. The Swedish parliament has decided to integrate its biodiversity strategies and action plans into the framework of the 16 environmental quality objectives, which were adopted in 1999.

Links between agriculture and the rest of the economy

Main agricultural sub-sectors involved: The main agriculture sector involved is arable farming (crop production, grassland). The other sub-sector directly involved is the non profit sector (the Swedish Ornithological Association).

Scale of the project

Size: 200 farms throughout Sweden participate in the project. In Kalmar 7 farms participate.

Time scale: The project is being carried out through the whole period 2007-2012, with annual decisions of funding.

Coverage: The project is national, with most of the participating farms in mid-Sweden.

Beneficiaries and supporters

Beneficiary: The Rural Economy and Agriculture Society and the Swedish Ornithological Association.

Supporters: Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (Swedish EPA) has co-funded the project and 150 bird watchers from the non profit sector were involved in the project on a voluntary basis. Indirectly, the Swedish Agriculture University has supported the project by research initiatives connected to the findings of the inventories.

Finance

Funding: The annual budget is approximately 90,000 EUR (900,000 SEK). The project is approved for the whole programming period, but funding has to be applied for on an annual basis.

50,000 EUR (500,000 SEK) is funded by the RDP, Axis 1 Competence Development and 40,000 EUR (400,000 SEK) by the Swedish EPA except for 2009 when some funding came from the SOA.

Results

Direct results: Inventories and advisory services have been carried out in 200 farms so far. In 2010 another 60 farms will be inventoried. Customised advice in order to improve and protect bird life has been suggested to each of the participating farms. They will be followed up after 2-3 years. In 2009/2010 the first follow-ups have been conducted on the activities undertaken. The result has been as expected or slightly lower than expected since not all the farms have carried out many or all of the proposed activities. Notwithstanding this, the commitment of the farmers appears to be higher than expected.

Main target: The targeted farms are typically of larger size. The average size on the farms being 150 ha (the average for Sweden is 37 ha) and 60% of the farms are larger than 100 ha. 68% of the participating farms are 'conventional' and 32% classified as 'ecological'. The national average of 'ecological' farms is about 11%. There is a high proportion, almost 45%, of farms with grassfed animals (sheep, horses and beef cattle) and 8% are dairy farms.

Wider benefits: The farmers have been very interested in participating in the project and bird watchers have been matched with farmers. Through the implementation of this project the farmers will also be recognised as resource for the protection of the environment instead of being perceived as the ones who endanger nature and environment.

The interest for birdlife and bird watching is global and there are niches in the tourism industry targeted for organising trips for bird watchers. The tourism business, including staying on farms, rural catering and restaurants potentially benefit from this project.

2. Relevance of case study experiences for others

Problems: The biggest problem has been in matching farmers and bird watchers, to lead to a sustainable relationship over the years to come.

Transferability and mainstreaming potential: The project has a potential of being transferred to other geographical areas and to include other species. The project management is interested in finding transnational partners for further development of the project and exchange of ideas and experiences. There has been interest from the research sector and from some farmers to cover butterflies and flowers in the inventories.

Innovation: The original idea, carried out in UK was all about inventories. In Sweden the project is in some aspect innovative by including advisory services and to some extent research and follow up on suggested actions.

Institutional aspects: The partnership was organised primarily between the Rural Economy and Agriculture Society and the Swedish Ornithological Association. Some attempts have been made to involve Farmers Union as well as the Swedish EPA (besides being funder of the project) but without success. The Swedish Agriculture University has been involved and has shown a great interest in the outcome of the project.

Social aspects: The project has not targeted any of the groups above. The huge amount of bird watchers involved (150 persons) represents a wide range of people from different circumstances, from young students to older senior citizens.

Sustainability: There have been spin-off effects, where the relations between bird watchers and farmers have progressed. The demand from farmers to be a part of the project is higher than its capacity, which might indicate a possibility to develop the services commercially. The partnership should be extended to involve more actors. For example the linkages to tourism should be further investigated, as well as the idea to develop a transnational partnership and extend the model and exchange of ideas more widely.

Lessons to pass on: With the amount of people involved, 150 bird watchers, it is important to develop clear guidelines for the work carried out. It is also important to have frequent contact with the farmers involved also after the services have been carried out. Within the project a newsletter is distributed twice per year with advice and news useful for the farmers.