

SPAIN

Biodiversity's restoration, & preservation & enhancement

Location

Caravaca de la Cruz

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P4 – Ecosystems
management

Measure

M10 - Agri-Environment -
Climate

Funding (EUR)

2018 premia granted:
150 EUR / ha per action

Project duration

2016 – 2021

Project promoter

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n/a

A project that demonstrates how agri-environment support can significantly help the protection of the environment while also increasing the profitability of a farm.

Summary

A young farmer in the Region of Murcia, Spain applied for agri-environment support from the RDP in order to contribute to efforts to protect their local environment while also endeavouring to increase their farm's profitability.

They received support to switch to using biotechnology to protect their almond trees from pests while reducing the use of phytosanitary products. This new approach also protects the shelter and forage areas for birds in the protected steppe-habitat, by growing appropriate cereals and protecting the soil from water runoff with buffer strips.



Results

Buffer strips resulted in a notable reduction in loss of soil and water due to run-off. Moreover, there has been an increase in the water now available for crops.

The population of steppe-land birds in the area has increased.

The farmer's production costs have decreased due to their reduced use of phytosanitary products, while their yields remain at the same level.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ It is possible to improve profitability and efficiency in agriculture while still addressing the issue of environmental protection. By improving the environmental conditions on the farm, production costs are reduced and profits increase.
- ❑ RDP support provides positive incentives for farmers to switch to more environmentally sustainable practices that also foster and maintain their core agricultural activity.

Context

In 2016, the owner of this project took over the family's farm when their father decided to retire. They then took the opportunity to benefit from the support offered to young farmers by the PDR of Murcia while embracing a new environmentally-friendly approach. The beneficiary had previously worked in the agri-food industry, so they had knowledge and expertise in this area too.

The farm is located in Caravaca de la Cruz, Murcia. The area is mountainous, with 90% of cultivations on dry land and 10% focused on horticultural business. Another characteristic of the area is that it has relatively little - but torrential - rain. The family farm is made up of several plots ranging from 1.5 and 5 hectares. The most important crops of the farm are cereals and almonds, both of which are rainfed crops grown on dry land.

Objectives

The overall objective of the project was to improve the production conditions and increase profitability.

Specific objectives were:

- to reduce costs by using fewer phytosanitary products to control pests
- to increase the farm's profitability and thus maintain traditional agricultural activity in its mountainous area
- to implement sustainable environmental techniques which will have a positive impact on the environment.

Activities

The beneficiary received agri-environmental support to adopt an as-required approach to the application of phytosanitary products: observing the actual population of pests on the almond trees and applying phytosanitary products only when that population rose above a certain threshold. The system uses traps to count moths and butterflies and to check whether the population exceeds (or not) a reference figure established by technicians and experts. In this way, the use of phytosanitary products is limited to site-specific, targeted applications.

Support was also granted to the farmer for the protection of steppe birds by growing cereal crops. Such crops provide valuable cover and foraging ground in the birds' unique and endangered habitat. According to the support agreement, the harvesting of these crops can start only after the 15th of July, where 10% of them must be left to serve as cover and food for wildlife, with the stubble maintained until January.

A third agri-environmental agreement was undertaken concerning water and soil conservation, where buffer strips were established according to the land's existing plantation and elevation. These strips help to reduce runoff and subsequently protect against soil loss.

Main Results

Results were achieved both on the environmental front, but also in the profitability of the farm, thanks the support granted.

There has been a notable reduction in the loss of water, soil and nutrients due to runoff: fewer ravines have been observed, and there has been an increase in the amount of water available for crops.

The number of steppe birds in the area has also increased.

The beneficiary's production costs have decreased due to their reduced use of phytosanitary products, while the yields remain the at same level. There is no difference in productivity compared to when conventional production methods were applied.

Key lessons

It is possible to combine improvements in profitability and efficiency in agriculture with efforts to protect the environment. Improved environmental conditions can reduce production costs, which means increased profits for the business.

RDP support provides positive incentives to make sustainable practices more widespread, while fostering and maintaining agricultural activity.

Additional sources of information

n/a