
Environmental stakeholders suggestions for eco-schemes

— Five principles to follow —

ENRD workshop – 6 November 2019

Jabier Ruiz – *WWF European Policy Office*



No shortage of ideas being proposed at EU and national level for eco-schemes by Env. NGOs

Reducing the dependence on pesticides, sowing pollinator friendly crops and wildflower strips, enhancing the extent and management of hedgerows, rewarding the use of all forms of agroforestry, widening river buffer strips and enhancing their functionality, long-cycle crop rotations with leguminous crops, herbicide-free management of soil cover and reduced tillage options, farming for Nature 2000 conservation objectives, support to High Nature Value farming, extensive grazing for biodiversity and forest fire prevention, shifting to low water-consumption crops and reducing water allocations, low-input arable production, traditional orchards, organic farming, etc. etc. etc.



What are the principles behind them?

- There are so many actions to be implemented, that ring-fenced funds will be needed. Once secured the funding, these actions could be implemented as eco-schemes in the first pillar, or under rural development, whatever works best for each country/region and using the flexibility offered.
- Further measures (e.g., investments, cooperation, advisory services) will be needed to implement them appropriately and evaluate their success.
- Not worth going into the detail of each measure today; in any case, they need to be refined in collaboration with authorities and in dialogue with other stakeholders.
- So let's talk about the five main principles behind many of these measures.

Principle #1 > Eco-schemes should not pay for basic agronomic practices

- Basic agronomic principles like applying crop rotation, or having a fertilisation plan cannot be remunerated, their place is with conditionality.
- Even if some of the Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions proposed by the Commission (like GAEC 5 or GAEC 8) do not “survive” the co-decision process, it must not imply we should start paying for them.
- Eco-schemes should maintain their ambition: e.g., long-cycle rotations with leguminous crops, not just crop rotation.

Principle #2 > Eco-schemes should not be a top-up of basic income support for all farmers

- Eco-schemes should not follow the “greening logic” of being a payment that all farmers feel entitled to in exchange for some minimum commitments: otherwise, the lowest common denominator will apply, measures will be ineffective and poorly targeted to the needs.
- Eco-schemes should reward better those farmers going the extra-mile for the environment. This implies that there will be other farmers not taking part in eco-schemes, or that there must be different remuneration levels, in proportion to the level of engagement.

Principle #3 > Eco-schemes can pay for both the change and the maintenance of farming practices

- Changing impactful agronomic practices can be rewarded, to facilitate the transition to more sustainable farming, ideally with options that become structural (i.e., that do not risk going back to the previous practice as soon as the payment disappears)
- Maintaining virtuous farming practices can be remunerated, when the environmental benefits are clear (e.g., High Nature Value farming, organic farming), and the practices are at risk in the absence of policy support.

Principle #4> Eco-schemes should not remunerate farming practices with contested benefits

- Some farming practices remain contentions, due to their unclear or contested environmental benefits. Others may be positive for one environmental objective but very negative on another one, so they should also be excluded from eco-schemes.
- One example of this are purpose-grown energy crops: their claims on their climate benefits are largely questioned by the scientific community.
- Another example would be minimum tillage, or soil cover in permanent crops which depends on herbicides. There may be more carbon sequestration in the soil, but it would impede achieving other objectives.

Principle #5 > Eco-schemes should include interventions from EU environmental legislation

- EU environmental legislation, on biodiversity, water, climate, etc., has in many cases already identified (through the relevant planning tools) the interventions needed in the farming sector to achieve environmental objectives.
- Therefore, farming-relevant measures included in, for instance, Prioritised Action Frameworks, National Energy and Climate Plans, or River Basin Management Plans, should be considered and prioritised for funding under CAP eco-schemes.

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