

Stories from FRAMEwork's Farmer Clusters Across Europe

CULTIVATING BIODIVERSITY TOGETHER

GRASSROOTS ACTION,
GREENER FUTURES

CLUSTERS CULTIVATING
ECOLOGICAL CHANGE

FARMING LANDSCAPES,
GROWING CONNECTIONS





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KEYWORDS

Farmer cluster, biodiversity, citizen science

DESCRIPTION

This report presents a rich collection of narratives from eleven Farmer Clusters established across nine European countries as part of the FRAMEwork project. It highlights how farmers, facilitators, and communities collaborated to implement biodiversity-friendly practices, monitor ecological change, and foster knowledge exchange. Through diverse landscapes and local challenges, the clusters demonstrate the power of grassroots action in restoring farmland biodiversity and shaping sustainable agricultural futures.

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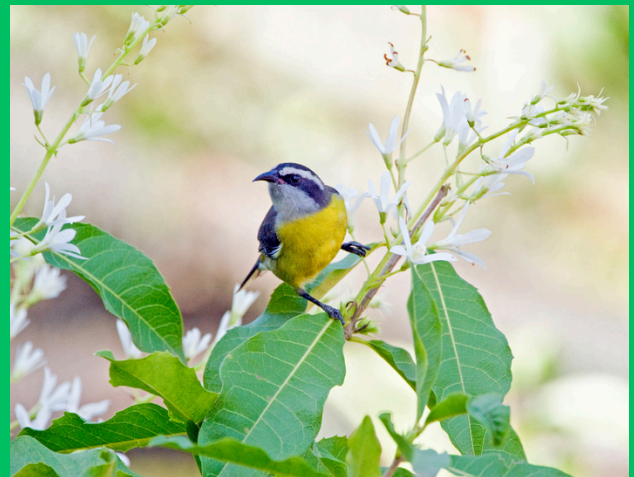


This Project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 862731.

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WHY BIODIVERSITY MATTERS?



Across Europe's fields and hedgerows, a quiet revolution is taking root. Farmland covers nearly half of the continent, shaping the landscapes we love and the food we eat. But these same fields have seen a steep decline in wildlife—songbirds, pollinators, and wildflowers that once thrived are disappearing. Scientists warn that biodiversity loss is one of the greatest environmental challenges of our time, threatening not only nature but also the resilience of our food systems.

Why does this matter? Biodiversity underpins everything: healthy soils, clean water, crop pollination, and natural pest control. When these systems falter, farming becomes harder and less sustainable. The good news? Farmers are uniquely placed to turn the tide. With the right support and collaboration, farmland can become a lifeline for nature.

Farming: Part of the Challenge, Part of the Solution

Modern agriculture has brought incredible productivity—but often at a cost. Intensive practices, habitat loss, and chemical inputs have squeezed out the diversity that once thrived on farms. Yet farmers also hold the keys to recovery. Every hedge planted, every wildflower strip sown, every pond restored can help rebuild ecosystems. The challenge is scale: one farm acting alone can only do so much. To make a real difference, we need joined-up action across landscapes.



WHAT IS A FARMER CLUSTER?

A 'Farmer Cluster' is a community of local farmers who share knowledge, support and motivate to improve biodiversity and the ecological health of their farms, cluster landscape and beyond!

Farmers are supported by a 'facilitator' who provides environmental expertise and helps with cluster tasks and administration. Clusters often welcome volunteers and partner organisations, creating a network of people united by a common goal: bringing life back to the land.

FRAMEwork's Farmer Clusters

FRAMEwork established eleven Farmer Clusters across nine countries in Europe (England, Scotland, Austria, The Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Estonia, Luxembourg, France and Czechia), each serving as a living demonstration of farmer-led biodiversity initiatives.

The clusters introduced biodiversity friendly practices across their landscapes such as cover cropping, modified margin cutting regimes, and the installation of nest boxes for birds and bats. Their actions were underpinned by extensive biodiversity monitoring efforts. Professional and citizen scientists surveyed hundreds of kilometres of transects and collected data across more than 240 square kilometres. Behind these figures are 1,476 days of boots-on-the-ground dedication, a reflection of the deep commitment shared by all involved.



BOXES, BATS, AND BLOSSOMS: A CLUSTER'S PATH TO ECOLOGICAL RESILIENCE

Basse-Durance Farmer Cluster, France

BY PIERRE FRANCK AND
FRANCOIS WARLOP

In the heart of Provence, where orchards stretch across the valleys of Sénas and Orgon, a group of fruit growers embarked on a journey to reimagine pest control through the lens of biodiversity. These nine farmers, tending apple and pear orchards across 440 hectares, had already been working together under the banner of the Basse Durance GIEE — a collective formed to reduce chemical inputs and support France's Ecophyto national plan. But when the FRAMEwork project arrived, it offered something new: a chance to explore nature-based solutions, not just as a concept, but as a practical path forward.

The early days were slow and cautious. Farmers had different priorities, different schedules, and varying levels of trust in the project's ambitions. But through patient dialogue and the steady support of GRCETA — the local advisory body — a shared vision began to take shape.

Birds and bats, long-time allies of the orchard, became the focus. Their potential to control pests like codling moths, aphids, and voles was compelling, and their presence could be encouraged without disrupting the delicate balance of orchard management.

By early 2022, the cluster had installed 300 bird nest boxes and 300 bat boxes along orchard borders, thanks to a partnership with AGRINICHOIRS. Some farmers went further, planting flower strips to support pollinators and enrich the landscape. These were not unfamiliar practices, but what had been missing was evidence — hard data to show that these interventions could truly reduce pest damage. Without it, enthusiasm remained cautious.



Citizen science brought a fresh energy. Students and locals joined bat monitoring events, peering into boxes with endoscopic cameras and learning firsthand about the lives of these nocturnal guardians. The students, in particular, were captivated — not just by the bats, but by the chance to connect research with real farming challenges. Their curiosity and engagement added a layer of meaning to the project that went beyond metrics.

Training sessions helped farmers learn how to maintain the boxes and monitor their use. Yet despite these efforts, occupation rates stayed low, and the momentum faltered. One farmer, who had led the cluster, left fruit production altogether, removing his orchards and leaving a gap in leadership. The remaining growers, while interested in biodiversity, were reluctant to risk short-term productivity or invest time in practices that didn't promise immediate returns.

Still, the project had its victories. It brought together a diverse network of stakeholders — researchers from INRAE and GRAB, advisors from regional stations, nature conservation groups, and representatives from natural parks. These connections laid the groundwork for future collaboration, even if the cluster itself struggled to function as a cohesive unit.

As the FRAMEwork project concludes, the future of the Basse Durance Cluster remains uncertain. The boxes will stay in place, quiet sentinels in the trees, and GRCETA will continue to advise farmers on conservation biological control. But the deeper question — how to foster collective action in a region where independence runs deep — lingers. Perhaps the answer lies not in grand gestures, but in small, steady steps. In the work of building trust, sharing stories, and showing that biodiversity isn't just good for nature — it's good for farming too.



To learn more about the Basse-Durance Farmer Cluster



Policy Brief 'Groupes d'agriculteurs: travailler ensemble pour renforcer le contrôle des ravageurs en préservant la biodiversité'





BY MARCO BEYER, CLAUDIO PETUCCO, YOURI MARTIN

ORCHARDS IN HARMONY: HOW LUXEMBOURG'S CIDER GROWERS ARE FARMING FOR BIODIVERSITY

Born Farmer Cluster, Luxembourg

In the valley of the river Sûre in Eastern Luxembourg, a quiet but meaningful transformation has been unfolding among a group of fruit growers. The Born Farmer Cluster, established in 2021, brings together eight farms—some large and commercially focused, others smaller and managed part-time—united by a shared commitment to traditional high-stem orchards and the production of distinctive cider apples, pears, plums, and quinces. These orchards, covering around 500 hectares, supply fruit to Ramborn Cider Co., a local producer whose headquarters sit nestled among the trees and serve as the meeting place for the cluster.

The journey began with a spark of opportunity. A scientist from LIST reached out to the national horticultural administration, which led to a partnership with Ramborn. From the outset, Ramborn expressed a strong interest in enhancing biodiversity within the orchards and suggested a lead farmer to guide the group. This farmer's openness to innovation helped set the tone for the cluster's development. However, the early stages were not without hurdles. COVID-19 restrictions made recruitment and engagement difficult, with digital communication proving less effective than face-to-face interactions. Gradually, through direct meetings and shared goals, the cluster took shape.

The rhythm of the cluster settled into a pattern of spring meetings—often aligned with the City Nature Challenge—and winter gatherings. These seasonal touchpoints became opportunities not only for farmers to connect but also for representatives from NGOs and government bodies to share insights into funding schemes and biodiversity initiatives.

Throughout the project, the farmers embraced a range of biodiversity-friendly practices. Some transitioned to organic farming, while Ramborn itself achieved B-Corp certification—a designation awarded to companies that meet high standards of social and environmental performance, transparency, and accountability. The “adopt-a-tree” initiative was launched to crowdfund the preservation of traditional fruit cultivars, many of which are prized for their unique flavours but unsuitable for table consumption.

Scientific monitoring in 2022 and 2024 captured thousands of data points on pollinators and vegetation, contributing to a robust European-wide biodiversity index. Meanwhile, citizen science flourished through the City Nature Challenge events, where 178 participants documented over 2,000 observations using the iNaturalist app. These snapshots of life in the orchards—plants, insects, and more—offered a vivid picture of the ecosystem and underscored the value of public engagement. Camera trap monitoring revealed rare bird and mammal species in the orchards, highlighting their ecological richness.

Despite these successes, maintaining engagement proved challenging. As the project progressed, some farmers found it difficult to balance biodiversity efforts with the realities of running a farm. The initial momentum slowed, and participation in certain activities declined. This experience offered valuable lessons: direct, in-person contact is essential for building trust; biodiversity initiatives must align with sustaining involvement.



farmers’ operational needs; and flexibility in scheduling and expectations is key to sustaining involvement.

Looking ahead, the Born Farmer Cluster will continue to thrive through its connection to Ramborn. The cider company’s B-Corp status and the shift toward organic practices provide a strong foundation for ongoing biodiversity-sensitive farming. The “adopt-a-tree” initiative will help preserve the genetic diversity of traditional cultivars, and the cluster’s future will likely be shaped by consumer demand for cider and related products. With beer and wine consumption plateauing in many regions, Ramborn has begun producing juices, opening new avenues for growth.

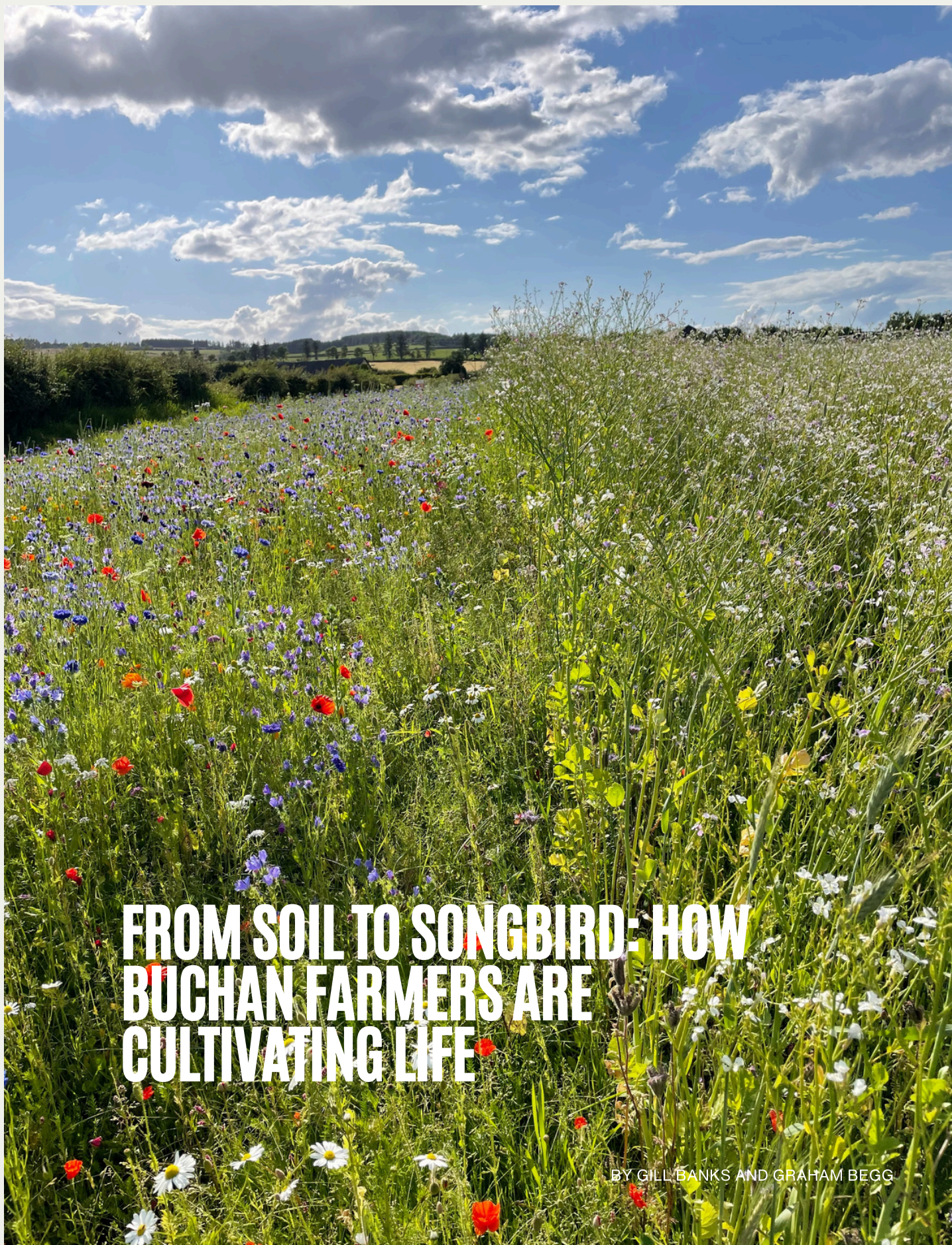
In Born, the orchards are more than just a source of fruit—they are living landscapes where tradition meets innovation, and where farmers, scientists, and citizens come together to nurture biodiversity. The story of this cluster is one of resilience, adaptation, and the enduring power of collaboration rooted in shared values and a love for the land.

To learn more about the Born Farmer Cluster



Policy Brief ‘Bridging gaps between rural and urban communities is key for progressing on biodiversity and preserving Europe’s farms’.





FROM SOIL TO SONGBIRD: HOW BUCHAN FARMERS ARE CULTIVATING LIFE

BY GILL BANKS AND GRAHAM BEGG

In the rolling landscapes of North East Scotland, a revolution has been taking root. It began modestly in 2022 with seven farms, scattered between inland fields and coastal pastures, banding together under a shared vision: to nurture the land not just for yield, but for life. By 2024, the Buchan Farm Cluster had grown to nine farms spanning over 2200 hectares, each one a testament to what can happen when farmers unite around a common purpose.

The journey of the Buchan Cluster has always been about connection. Connection to the land, to each other, and to the biodiversity that quietly sustains every harvest. The early days were shaped by the challenges of a post-Covid world, where online meetings felt distant and unfamiliar. But the turning point came when boots hit the ground and conversations unfolded in muddy fields and farmhouse kitchens. These in-person visits weren't just logistical, they were transformational. Trust was built not through presentations, but through shared meals, long walks, and honest talk about the trials and triumphs of farming.

At the heart of the cluster's work lies a deep commitment to biodiversity. The farmers didn't simply discuss soil health and pollinators, they took action. Field margins were left uncultivated, wildflower strips were sown, and cover crops took root to nourish the soil. Some farms embraced no-till practices, while others set aside land specifically for corn buntings, sowing RSPB-recommended mixes to support these charismatic birds. The landscape began to shift through steady, thoughtful changes that welcomed wildlife back into working farmland.



Monitoring became a shared endeavour, not a chore. Bird surveys, vegetation assessments, pollinator transects, and even worm counts were carried out with a sense of curiosity and pride. Farmers stepped into the role of citizen scientists, contributing to a growing body of knowledge about the ecosystems they steward. Events like the mini bioblitz in 2025 brought volunteers and farmers together, while public-facing activities invited communities to engage with nature in meaningful ways.

Training sessions and expert talks added depth to the cluster's efforts. From cover crop strategies to regenerative agriculture discussions, farmers were exposed to fresh ideas and practical insights.

Stakeholders from across the region lent their support, from the NHS to biodiversity partnerships and environmental consultancies. This web of collaboration strengthened the cluster's foundation, but it was the farmers who carried the vision forward. Their desire to continue, even exploring private funding to sustain the cluster, speaks volumes about the impact of this grassroots movement.

Yet, challenges remain. The current funding system, which requires separate applications for each project, threatens the longevity of such clusters. Without streamlined support and dedicated facilitators, many farmers may hesitate to embark on collaborative journeys. But the Buchan Cluster stands as proof that with the right people, the right practices, and a shared purpose, farming can be a force for ecological renewal.

To learn more about the
Buchan Farmer Cluster



Burgenland Farmer Cluster, Austria

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THE BURGENLAND BLUEPRINT: FARMING WITH NATURE IN FOCUS

In the agricultural landscapes of Burgenland, Austria, a group of farmers has been rewriting the future of farming. Spread across 2,870 hectares, the Burgenland Farmer Cluster is an alliance of 11 farms—both organic and conventional—united by a shared mission: to make agriculture a powerful ally for biodiversity. Their fields and pastures are not just spaces for crops and livestock; they are living habitats for skylarks, pollinators, and wildflowers, rich in the textures and colours of a thriving ecosystem.



This was no small undertaking. The idea of a farmer cluster was new to Austria and building it from the ground up meant breaking through unfamiliar territory. It began with one large farm — estate farm Esterházy — becoming the anchor for the initiative, helping to bring together others with a passion for biodiversity. From that base, the cluster grew into a community of like-minded stewards of the land. Meetings, workshops, and shared monitoring efforts forged strong connections, even as early challenges tested the group's resilience.

There were leadership changes, logistical difficulties from scattered farm locations, and the steep learning curve of implementing biodiversity monitoring protocols.



Yet, each hurdle was met with adaptability and teamwork. Farmers took part in vegetation surveys, and pollinator tracking, learning first-hand how their management decisions shaped the living world around them. Alongside researchers and facilitators, they recorded the calls of rare and declining farmland birds like the Northern Lapwing and Corn Bunting, noting them as hopeful signs in the shifting agricultural landscape.

Beyond the numbers and data sheets, the cluster opened its gates to the public. Wild bee workshops, open farm days, and school events drew thousands of visitors, turning curiosity into understanding. Citizen science became a powerful tool—local people armed with smartphones helped document over 550 species during the City Nature Challenge, proving that conservation is strongest when it belongs to the whole community.

For the farmers, training went far beyond compliance or policy—it became a chance to sharpen skills and deepen connection to their land. They learned to identify earthworms as soil health indicators, to recognise the comeback of plants like *Stachys arvensis*, and to value butterflies like the Queen of Spain

fritillary as messengers of healthy habitats. They exchanged experiences in workshops and informal chats, building a knowledge network that will outlast any single project cycle.

The Burgenland Farmer Cluster stands as proof that agriculture and biodiversity can flourish together when guided by commitment, collaboration, and a willingness to learn. Though the current funding cycle is ending, the relationships built and the knowledge gained are set to endure. The farmers will carry forward the lessons, monitoring the life in their fields, sharing results, and showing that a landscape farmed with nature in mind is richer—not just in species, but in the resilience and pride of the people who work it.

From the rare birds wheeling overhead to the schoolchildren learning about bees, the legacy of the Burgenland Farmer Cluster is one of growth, both ecological and human.

To learn more about the
Burgenland Farmer Cluster



Policy Brief entitled 'Enhancing
Biodiversity Through Farmer
Clusters in Burgenland, Austria'





BY CARLOS SÁNCHEZ,
GONZALO VÁRAS

COVERING GROUND: A NEW CHAPTER FOR OLIVE FARMERS IN CORDOBA

Cazadores de Aguilar Farmer Cluster, Spain

In the rolling olive landscapes of Aguilar de la Frontera, a transformation has taken root—one that began not in a laboratory or government office, but in the shared concerns of farmers and hunters. The story of the farmer cluster “Cazadores de Aguilar” is a testament to what can happen when two groups, often seen as separate, unite around a common goal: restoring life to the land.

Back in 2000, when a project focused on agriculture and biodiversity was first proposed, Aguilar stood out—not just for its olive groves, but for the voice of Cristóbal Reina, a local olive farmer and president of the hunting association. He had long warned of the

ecological toll of intensive farming practices: the bare soils, the vanishing wildlife, the silence where birds once sang. In the pursuit of productivity, spontaneous vegetation had been treated as an enemy. Herbicides and tractors cleared every inch of ground beneath the trees, leaving little room for anything but olives.

But Cristóbal saw potential in the forgotten spaces. He rallied a group of farmers from the Madroño and Atalaya areas—people who were willing to try something different. Eleven farmers offered their plots as testing grounds for a new idea: could biodiversity be restored without compromising agricultural success? The answer began with a simple shift—reconsidering how ground cover was managed.

Traditionally, vegetation under olive trees was left until summer, removed only when necessary. But modern practices had stripped it bare year-round. The project proposed a return to older rhythms: letting ground cover grow until early July, allowing nature to breathe before the harvest began.

The first major action came in January 2021, when the team reinforced the seed bank using waste from a local spice-sorting company. These discarded seeds, native to the region, were scattered in alternating rows. Though the initial results were muted by drought, the following year brought a burst of life—diverse, flowering plants that stood in stark contrast to the sparse spontaneous growth of the past. Momentum grew. In autumn 2021, a new landowner joined, offering 45 hectares across five plots. That winter, four sowing strategies were tested: spice waste, two commercial seed mixes (one enriched with flowering species), and a ryegrass-vetch blend. Each cover was maintained until July, and each brought its own lessons.

Today, the Cazadores de Aguilar are more than a cluster—they're a catalyst. Their fields have become living demonstrations, inspiring other farmers to rethink their approach. The shift isn't just philosophical; it's practical. Ground cover has shown its worth in reducing erosion, improving water infiltration, moderating soil temperature, and supporting beneficial insects. It's not just good for biodiversity—it's good for olives.

Perhaps the most profound change is in mindset. Farmers who once saw vegetation as a threat now see it as an ally. The land, once stripped and silent, is beginning to hum again—with insects, birds, and the satisfaction of a harvest grown in harmony with nature. The success in Aguilar de la Frontera offers a hopeful blueprint. It shows that change doesn't require abandoning tradition—it requires remembering it, adapting it, and working together. And it reminds us that sometimes, the best way forward is to let the ground speak for itself.



To learn more about the
Cazadores de Aguilar Farmer
Cluster



Policy Brief entitled 'Farmer
Clusters: A first step to tackle the
biodiversity (and farming)
collapse in olive groves'



FIELDS IN BLOOM: HEDGELINES AND LIFELINES: THE CRANBORNE CHASE CLUSTER'S PRACTICAL PATH TO RECOVERY

Cranborne Chase Farmer Cluster, England, UK

In the heart of Dorset's Cranborne Chase National Landscape, a revolution in farming has been unfolding—one rooted in community, curiosity and a deep respect for the land. The Cranborne Chase Farmer Cluster, now 21 members strong, began its journey with a bold vision: to improve landscape and habitat connectivity across nearly 10,000 hectares of diverse farmland. From arable fields and dairy herds to orchards and farm shops, the cluster represents a tapestry of agricultural life, woven together by a shared commitment to nature-friendly farming.

The spark that ignited the cluster came from a neighbouring cluster's presentation, inspiring local farmers to take the reins and form their own group. With Clare Scott, already a trusted environmental adviser, stepping in as facilitator, the cluster found its footing quickly—even as the COVID-19 pandemic posed early challenges.

Clare's one-on-one farm visits helped build trust and tailor the cluster's goals to each member's unique landscape and business aspirations. As restrictions eased, the appetite for connection and learning surged, especially around soil health and carbon management.

Over time, a core group of 13 farm businesses emerged, driving the cluster's momentum. Collaboration with neighbouring clusters became a powerful strategy, enabling joint meetings that sparked lively discussions and broadened perspectives. One such gathering on arable plants drew praise as "the best cluster meeting I've been to," underscoring the value of shared knowledge and camaraderie.

Funding played a pivotal role in deepening engagement, e.g., for shared equipment. These tangible resources helped bring less active members into the fold and made environmental education more accessible.



The cluster's biodiversity efforts have been both ambitious and inspiring. With support from The Tree Council and other partners, members planted 2,700 meters of hedgerow, installed Barn Owl boxes, and set up swift and bat boxes. Training in farmland bird identification and participation in the GWCT Big Farmland Bird Count helped farmers connect with the wildlife on their land. Projects targeting corn buntings and harvest mice, along with arable plant plots and pollinator surveys, have brought science into the soil, guided by both experts and enthusiastic volunteers.

Citizen science has flourished within the Cranborne Chase Farmer Cluster. Volunteers trained in species identification and habitat surveys have contributed valuable data, enriching the cluster's understanding of its ecological impact. Farmers, too, have embraced learning, attending workshops on hedgerow management, soil carbon, water quality, woodland health, and even predator control. Topics like white-tailed eagle sightings and beaver reintroduction have sparked curiosity and broadened horizons.

Stakeholder engagement has been robust, with support from Cranborne Chase National Landscape, FWAG SW, Natural England, and Wessex Water. The River Allen Landscape Recovery Project now includes 16 cluster farms, and proposals for further collaboration are underway. The cluster's own website serves as a hub for updates and outreach, connecting members and the wider community.

Looking ahead, the Farmer Cluster is poised to continue its journey. A modest annual subscription from members helps cover essential costs, and a new chairman has stepped up to guide the next chapter. While awaiting future funding schemes, the cluster remains resilient, sustained by its shared values and the relationships it has cultivated. In Cranborne Chase, farming is no longer just about yields—it's about stewardship, connection, and the power of working together.

In Cranborne Chase, farming is no longer just about yields—it's about stewardship, connection, and the power of working together. The Cranborne Chase cluster story is a testament to what can happen when farmers lead with vision, supported by science and community.



To learn more about
the Cranborne Chase
Farmer Cluster



Policy Brief entitled
'Farmer Clusters:
Landscape scale
collaboration to
address the
biodiversity crisis on
English farmland'



Kanepi kihlkund Farmer Cluster, Estonia

BY RIINA KAASIK AND EVE VEROMANN



FIELDS IN BLOOM: HOW ESTONIAN FARMERS ARE CULTIVATING NATURE'S COMEBACK

In the rolling landscapes of Kanepi Kihlkund, a transformation has been taking root—one that speaks to the power of collaboration, curiosity, and care for the land. What began as a modest initiative involving 14 farmers managing over 3,000 hectares of organic and conventional fields has blossomed into a vibrant cluster of agricultural stewards, united by a shared mission: to protect and enhance the biodiversity that breathes life into their farms.

These farmers, raising sheep and cattle and cultivating cereals and animal feed, were drawn together not by financial incentives but by a deeper calling—to safeguard native species and restore the wildflowers that once painted their fields with colour. Flowers like the globeflower and bird's-eye primrose, long absent from the Estonian countryside, became symbols of what could be regained through thoughtful land management and ecological awareness.



Yet, the journey was not without its challenges. In a culture where independence is prized and collaboration often hinges on tangible rewards, building trust and momentum required patience and persistence. The cluster's facilitator played a crucial role, dedicating themselves wholly to the initiative in its fragile early stages. Their commitment helped bridge the gap between scientific knowledge and practical farming, fostering a space where farmers felt heard, supported, and empowered to explore new ideas.



To learn more about the Kanepi
Kihlkund Farmer Cluster



Policy Brief entitled 'Farmer Clusters:
Working together to address the
biodiversity crisis'



Through the FRAMEwork project, the cluster undertook extensive biodiversity monitoring, recording over 75 bird species across 104 km of transect counts and identifying more than 60 species of wild bees. These efforts were not just about data—they were about connection. Regular updates, even those based on simple observations rather than hard science, helped maintain engagement and reminded farmers that their insights and experiences mattered. Education and outreach became cornerstones of the cluster's success. At Väike-Hauka Organic Farm, high school students were invited to immerse themselves in the rhythms of sustainable farming, learning directly from seasoned farmers and participating in nature observation challenges. These events planted seeds of awareness in the next generation, showing them the intricate ties between agriculture and ecology.

Training sessions organized by EMÜ brought farmers face-to-face with experts and new ideas. From wildlife photography with Arne Ader to bumblebee identification with Professor Eve Veromann, these gatherings blended inspiration with practical knowledge. Farmers learned about ecosystem services, explored new CAP measures, and experimented

with native wild plant seed mixes to enrich their fields. At Kriisa Farm, they sowed wildflower seeds and discussed the ecological benefits of herbaceous field edges, gaining hands-on experience in monitoring ground-dwelling insects.

The cluster's influence extended beyond the farm gates. The Recodo In Real Life Policy event convened a diverse group of stakeholders—from government ministries to farmer associations—to tackle the pressing issue of balancing productivity with biodiversity. These discussions laid the groundwork for future collaboration, with follow-up roundtables planned to delve deeper into sustainable pest management and climate-resilient farming.

Today, the Kanepi Kihlkund cluster stands as a testament to what can be achieved when farmers, scientists, and policymakers come together with a shared vision. While the future of dedicated facilitation remains uncertain without government support, the spirit of the cluster endures. Farmers are more knowledgeable, more open to collaboration, and more connected to the land they nurture. And though the path ahead may require new goals and continued advocacy, the roots of change have already taken hold. In the fields of Kanepi Kihlkund, biodiversity is no longer a distant ideal—it is a living, growing part of the farming landscape.



BY DANIELA ABLINGER AND
WALTER STARTZ

TWELVE FARMS, ONE VISION: RESTORING LIFE TO THE LAND IN MOSTVIERTEL

Mostviertel Farmer Cluster, Austria

In the south-west corner of Lower Austria, where the hills roll gently between Amstetten and Vienna, twelve organic farms have been reshaping the relationship between agriculture and biodiversity. These farms—diverse in terrain, livestock, and philosophy—came together not through mandates or market pressures, but through a shared desire to bring life back to their meadows. From dairy operations in flatter regions to sheep farms nestled in rugged terrain, and even a permaculture haven, the Mostviertel Farmer Cluster is a mosaic of approaches united by one goal: to understand and enhance the biodiversity thriving beneath their boots.

It all began with a simple call for applicants in the BIO Austria's journal, inviting farmers to join the FRAMEwork project. The response was swift and enthusiastic. Twelve farms signed on, each bringing its own rhythm, challenges, and hopes. The first meeting, held online due to pandemic restrictions, was a cautious start. But once the team began visiting farms in person, the project truly came alive. Conversations flowed freely in barnyards and kitchens, and the farmers' ideas and aspirations shaped the direction of the cluster from the outset. Farm visits became energizing hubs of learning, where farmers shared ideas through hands-on experience rather than lectures. Despite time pressures, enthusiasm endured, and data sharing strengthened awareness of biodiversity and each farmer's role in sustaining it.

The changes on the ground were tangible. Species-rich meadows and flowering strips began to bloom. Nesting boxes appeared in orchard trees, and workshops on pruning techniques helped farmers care for their meadow orchards with biodiversity in mind. These weren't just aesthetic improvements—they were ecological investments. Monitoring confirmed what the farmers had hoped: their land was home to rare and remarkable species. Orchids like the narrow-leaved helleborine, burnt orchid, and white adder's mouth were recorded, their delicate presence a testament to the care being taken.

Citizen science became a bridge between farms and communities. At festivals, school visits, and conservation courses, farmers and neighbours alike discovered the richness of local meadows. Children marvelled at insects and wildflowers, and farmers saw firsthand how open days could become powerful tools for education and engagement. At the Citizen Science conference in Linz, the cluster shared its journey with researchers and practitioners, offering a glimpse into what collaborative, farmer-led science can achieve. Training sessions introduced farmers to tools like the iNaturalist app, empowering them to identify and document species on their land. Their observations revealed treasures that formal surveys had missed—giant emperor moths, marsh helleborines, and bull bush-crickets among them. By July 2025, the cluster had logged 589 observations across 318 species, a living archive of biodiversity built on the land. Support came from many corners—BIO Austria, ÖKL, ARGE Heumilch, and others. But the heart of the cluster was always the farmers themselves. Their motivation, openness, and willingness to experiment created a culture of care that will outlast any funding cycle.



Though the formal project has drawn to a close, the relationships forged in the fields and forests of Mostviertel remain strong. Farmers who connected deeply during the project continue to collaborate, especially those living nearby. The absence of funding for a facilitator is a loss, but the spirit of the cluster endures. Next time, they say, they'll harness social media to share their stories and stunning biodiversity photos with an even wider audience.

In Mostviertel, the meadows are more than pasture—they're living laboratories, sanctuaries, and classrooms. And thanks to a dozen farmers who chose to listen to their land, the flowers are returning, the insects are thriving, and the future of farming looks just a little more wild.

To learn more about the
Mostviertel Farmer Cluster



Policy Brief entitled
'Farmer Clusters: Farmers
achieve more together in
the Mostviertel in the name
of biodiversity'



THE MONTE PISANO MODEL: BIODIVERSE FARMING FOR A CHANGING WORLD

Val Graziosa Farmer Cluster, Italy

BY CAMILLA MOONEN, VIRGINIA BAGNONI

Nestled at the foot of Monte Pisano in the municipality of Calci, the Val Graziosa Farmer Cluster began as a modest but passionate collective of olive growers. Spanning just 50 hectares and comprising 15 farmers—some professionals, others hobbyists—the cluster was united by a shared love for the land and its centuries-old tradition of olive cultivation. In this terraced landscape, where mechanization is nearly impossible, farming is a labour of love. Pruning, mowing, and harvesting are done by hand or with small tools, making olive oil production a costly endeavour with little financial return. Yet, the farmers persist, driven by dedication rather than profit.

The journey of the cluster was anything but straightforward. With diverse personalities and differing visions for olive grove management and oil production, cohesion was initially elusive.

Over time, however, a core group of committed growers emerged, joined by others from the Pisa Mountain area. As relationships deepened, so did the realization that their groves were not just agricultural plots—they were vital threads in the ecological fabric of Monte Pisano. A turning point came when one hobby farmer took a bold leap: purchasing and renting numerous local groves, reviving a long-closed olive mill, and investing in agritourism and infrastructure. His efforts sparked a ripple of optimism, though it was clear that one person alone could not sustain the system. The community began exploring Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), aiming to reward farmers who adopt biodiversity-friendly practices. This initiative could be a lifeline for sustainable farming in marginal areas like Monte Pisano, where traditional low-input methods support rich biodiversity that would vanish if the land were abandoned or rewilded.



Despite challenges, the cluster achieved notable outcomes. Though a mowing regime experiment had to be abandoned, the use of olive pomace as fertilizer showed promising results—enhancing soil fertility and resilience in olive trees. Biodiversity monitoring revealed that olive groves, alongside woodlands and herbaceous verges, play a crucial role in supporting plant and insect life. In fact, olive groves were found to host more insects than woodlands, underscoring their ecological importance.

Citizen science flourished through the Monte Pisano BioBlitz, part of the City Nature Challenge in 2023 and 2025. What began as a FRAMEwork event evolved into a beloved community tradition, co-organized by local institutions and drawing over 100 participants in 2025. Residents discovered the rich biodiversity of their region, including edible plants in olive groves—knowledge shared by one of the cluster’s farmers through engaging public workshops. Training sessions empowered farmers with practical skills, from monitoring olive fruit fly infestations using pheromone traps and the App Poderi, to olive oil tasting workshops that helped them identify and correct flaws in their production processes. These sessions were not just educational—they were transformative, enabling farmers to elevate the quality of their oil and better understand the delicate nature of their product. Stakeholder engagement was a cornerstone of the cluster’s success. From the outset, the group collaborated with other growers, local institutions, and community organizations committed to sustainable land management. Events were held in public spaces, open to all, fostering a sense of shared purpose and inclusivity.



Looking ahead, the Val Graziosa Farmer Cluster is poised to evolve into a local value chain cluster, championing biodiverse and sustainable land management. To prevent land abandonment and ensure the viability of low-input farming, community support and a well-functioning value chain are essential. Each farmer must carve out a unique identity and market niche, allowing collaboration without competition. The idea of PES continues to gain traction, offering a potential solution not just for Monte Pisano, but for marginal farming regions across Europe.

In the end, the story of Val Graziosa is one of resilience, innovation, and community spirit. It’s a testament to what can be achieved when farmers, citizens, and institutions come together—not just to preserve a way of life, but to nurture the land that sustains it.

To learn more about the Val
Graziosa Farmer Cluster



Policy Brief entitled ‘Farmer
Clusters: A great networking
opportunity for a biodiverse
and prosperous Monte Pisano’



ROOTED IN RESILIENCE: HOW A CZECH FARMER CLUSTER IS CULTIVATING BIODIVERSITY AND COMMUNITY

Velké Hostěrádky Farmer Cluster, Czechia

In the heart of South Moravia, Czech Republic, a group of farmers has quietly reshaped the landscape—not just physically, but philosophically. What began as a shared commitment to organic farming has grown into a movement that blends ecological integrity, community engagement, and scientific innovation. The Velké Hostěrádky Farmer Cluster emerged from the pioneering efforts of Martin Hutař, Martin Matěj, and Petr Travníček, who took over Ekofarma PROBIO in 2007 with a vision to farm not only organically, but ethically—with deep respect for the soil, biodiversity, and the surrounding landscape. Their leadership inspired a wave of organic conversion across the region, transforming Velké Hostěrádky into a unique BIO region in one of the Czech Republic's driest and warmest areas.

Though the farms were informally connected through shared values and practices, it wasn't until the FRAMEwork project that their collaboration was formalized. With nine farms managing over 2,500 hectares of arable land, vineyards, and vegetable fields, the cluster set out to prove that organic farming must go beyond certification—it must be done “the right way.” Over time, the cluster evolved. Some farms transitioned out, others retired, but five core farms remained, managing over 700 hectares, nearly all organically certified. These farms became living laboratories, testing and demonstrating biodiversity-friendly practices that could be replicated across Europe.





To learn more about the
Velké Hostěrádky Farmer
Cluster



Policy Brief entitled
‘Farmer Clusters:
Working Together for
Biodiversity and
Sustainable Agriculture
in the Czech Landscape’



The cluster’s achievements are both practical and poetic. Bird boxes were installed and monitored, with most becoming homes to local species. A 7-kilometre biodiversity path was created, linking farms and offering an interpretive journey through ecological practices, now featured on national outdoor recreation maps. The path features six educational panels and fruit trees planted along the trail, providing both habitat and learning opportunities. An 8-hectare agroforestry system was planted on erosion-prone land, incorporating fruit and forest species in one of the region’s first landscape-scale interventions. Large field blocks were subdivided to improve habitat connectivity, and experimental biocorridors were established in partnership with universities to identify optimal seed mixes for biodiversity. The cluster also developed a comprehensive plan to restore grey partridge populations, using habitat mapping and restoration tools.

Beyond the fields, the cluster embraced citizen science. Visitors were invited to log biodiversity observations using the iNaturalist app, resulting in over 1,300 entries—a remarkable achievement for a rural farming landscape. Public events like the Crimson Clover and Buckwheat Festivals drew hundreds of visitors, blending biodiversity education with celebration.

The biodiversity path became a venue for informal learning, school visits, and nature walks, turning the landscape itself into a classroom.

Farmer-to-farmer learning drove the cluster’s success, with over 20 open field days attracting 1,000 farmers for hands-on demonstrations and discussions on biodiversity and agroforestry. Backed by ministries, universities, and local businesses, Ekofarma PROBIO became a hub for collaboration, ensuring knowledge-sharing extended well beyond the farming community.

Though the FRAMEwork project has concluded, its legacy endures. The region has launched a new initiative based on the Living Lab model, focused on biodiversity, climate resilience, and food security. This new phase builds on the relationships, trust, and practical experience established through FRAMEwork. The farmers of Velké Hostěrádky continue to lead, proving that ecological farming is not just sustainable—it’s scalable, replicable, and deeply rooted in community.

Their story is a testament to what can happen when farmers come together with a shared purpose. They’ve shown that farming can be a force for ecological restoration, social connection, and scientific progress. And as their fields bloom with clover, buckwheat, and biodiversity, they remind us that the future of farming lies not in isolation, but in collaboration.

BIRDS, BEES, AND BIOBLITZES: A FARMER-LED REVOLUTION IN AGROBIODIVERSITY

Zeeasterweg
Farmer Cluster,
The Netherland

BY PAUL VAN RIJN,
LAURA MANSIER,
MARTINE SCHOONE

Along the Zeeasterweg in Flevoland, a determined movement has been growing—one rooted in the fertile soils reclaimed from the IJsselmeer and nurtured by a community of farmers who see biodiversity not as a burden, but as a partner in productivity. The Zeeasterweg Farmer Cluster, formed in 2014 and strengthened through the FRAMEwork project, is a testament to what can happen when tradition meets innovation, and when farmers, scientists, and advisors come together with a shared vision.



Stretching across approximately 600 hectares and comprising ten farms, the cluster is a mosaic of agricultural diversity. From cereals and potatoes to onions, pumpkins, and flower bulbs, the land is alive with cultivation. Half the farms are organic, the other half conventional, and some offer more than crops—free-range chickens, beef cattle, greenhouses, and even daycare facilities for people with intellectual disabilities. These farms are not just places of production; they are places of community, care, and creativity.

The cluster's journey through the FRAMEwork project was shaped by curiosity and collaboration.

Early efforts focused on enhancing agri-environmental schemes, particularly those supporting farmland birds like skylarks. But the farmers wanted more—they wanted to understand how biodiversity could help with natural pest control and pollination. This led to a series of research projects, including studies on thrips as pests in onion fields and the role of flower strips in attracting beneficial insects. Weekly updates kept farmers engaged, and while student availability limited continuity, the appetite for knowledge remained strong.

Meetings became moments of exchange and inspiration. From online gatherings during COVID-19 to hands-on demonstrations of soil insect monitoring and bee-friendly practices, the cluster embraced learning. Events like the National Bee Counting Day and moth monitoring nights brought farmers and citizens together, illuminating the hidden life of the land after dark. The involvement of experts from Earthwatch and the Butterfly Foundation added depth, offering tools and insights that farmers could apply directly to their fields.

Throughout the project, the farmers showed a keen interest in the results of biodiversity monitoring, even if they were hesitant to take on systematic data collection themselves. They understood the value of observing their crops for pests and pollinators, and many began to see their farmyards not just as functional spaces, but as habitats worth enhancing. Discussions around hedgerows, woody habitats, and flower-rich margins sparked ideas for future improvements.

The cluster's strength lies in its connection to BoerenNatuur Flevoland, the regional collective that coordinates agri-environmental schemes and collaborates with municipalities, provinces, and farmer organisations. This support structure ensures that the cluster's efforts are not isolated but part of a broader movement toward biodiversity restoration in Dutch agriculture. The province of Flevoland, with its own biodiversity programs and interest in bird monitoring, adds another layer of engagement and validation.



Looking ahead, the Zeeasterweg Farmer Cluster is poised to continue its work, guided by BoerenNatuur Flevoland and potentially linked to new national research initiatives like FAB Forward. The farmers have gained not only knowledge but confidence—confidence in their ability to make informed decisions that benefit both their crops and the ecosystems that surround them.

In Flevoland, the fields are more than rows of produce—they are living laboratories, places where science and soil meet, and where farmers are learning to farm with nature, not against it. The story of the Zeeasterweg Farmer Cluster is one of persistence, partnership, and the power of collective action. It reminds us that even along a single road, great things can grow.

To learn more about the
Zeeasterweg Farmer Cluster



Policy Brief entitled 'Farmer
Clusters: Working together to
address the biodiversity
crisis'





Funded by
the European Union