



UNISECO



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Supporting knowledge networks for sustainable farming practices in Lower Saxony

Photo: Carolus

Understanding and Improving the Sustainability of Agro-ecological Farming Systems in the EU

POLICY BRIEF

Targeted policy support for knowledge networks increases the uptake of sustainable land management practices

The Nienburg County in Lower Saxony comprises an intensive agricultural area that experiences sustainability issues regarding biodiversity loss and water quality. The proximity to neighbouring regions with the highest livestock densities in Germany leads to high land prices and legal restrictions on farm development options that expose farmers to a high degree of economic pressures. This has been a major driver for optimising strongly market-oriented conventional production systems that are dominating the area today.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The attitude of farmers towards agro-ecological farming is driven by a tradition of conventional practices and strong market orientation, which often reduces the willingness to adopt agro-ecological practices. Economic aspects outweigh the increasing awareness of biodiversity loss. The adoption of agro-ecological practices is further hindered by the uncertainty and limited observability of individual actions contributing to biodiversity or water quality.

The willingness to implement agro-ecological practices is shaped by trust between farmers and other actors. While the level of trust between the advisory services and farmers is often rather high, lack of trust is an issue when implementing or monitoring policy measures, such as agri-environmental schemes.

The attitude and beliefs of farmers are also negatively affected by knowledge gaps on suitable agro-ecological practices and their benefits. These gaps can be explained by low levels of cooperation and capacity building regarding agro-ecological practices, and due to farmers being unaware of funding opportunities for receiving suitable advice.

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Policy recommendations were co-constructed through a participatory process that engaged a multi-actor platform in a series of workshops and interviews

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations were co-constructed with local actors to address knowledge gaps and attitudes. Building trust between farmers and actors who are, or will, collaborate in the context of converting to agro-ecological farming is particularly important to also achieve the objectives of the “Lower Saxony Path”, a new agreement by the ministries, the agricultural sector and nature conservation associations to enhance biodiversity and water quality. Recommendations include:

- Establishing formal knowledge networks of farmers and other rural actors with trusted and skilled agro-ecology advisors as permanent network managers.
- Amplifying trusting relationships between farmers and advisors to facilitate the network development, and building on peer-to-peer engagement through farmers that are already experienced in cooperation.

Opportunities to provide targeted support for knowledge networks can be taken up according to Article 71 (cooperation) and Article 72 (knowledge exchange and information) of the proposed EU Regulation on the rules on support for the CAP Strategic Plans.

Support is required that facilitates the education and introduction of local network managers, the integration of advice into agri-environmental schemes, and improving agro-ecological know-how of advisors and controllers.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The German case study on the UNISECO project website: <https://uniseco-project.eu/case-study/germany>

Schwarz, G.; Lampkin, N.; Bellon, S. (2020): Policies for agroecology in Europe, building on experiences in France, Germany and the United Kingdom. *Journal of Sustainable and Organic Agricultural Systems* 70 (2), DOI:10.3220/LBF1611684471000

The Lower Saxony Path (Der Niedersächsische Weg) <https://www.niedersachsen.de/niedersaechsischer-weg>

ABOUT UNISECO:

UNISECO is a European research project aiming to develop innovative approaches to enhance the understanding of socio-economic and policy drivers and barriers for further development and implementation of agro-ecological practices in EU farming systems.

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<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773901>

<https://zenodo.org/communities/uniseco-h2020/>

UNISECO in the EIP-Agri projects database:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/understanding-and-improving-sustainability-agro>

VISIT THE UNISECO AGRO-ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE HUB: <https://uniseco-project.eu>



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