



UNISECO



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# Addressing barriers of culture, mindset and institutions through effective co-creation forums and networking, in North-east Scotland, UK

Photograph: David Miller,  
James Hutton Institute

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

POLICY BRIEF

Culture and mindset can be barriers to transitions to agro-ecological farming systems. Farmers, institutions, authorities, businesses and other actors in value chains often rely on familiarity with existing approaches and experience-based outputs. Resistance to change, unproven approaches, or inertia in changing position, inhibits uptake of new ideas and practices.

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

Opportunities to learn, challenge and debate new evidence from different perspectives provides one component of tackling barriers to the uptake of agro-ecological practices. Forums that facilitate effective sharing of knowledge offer potential to inform influencers within institutions (e.g. farmers, public authorities, business, research). An example of an effective mechanism of this process is the North-East Scotland Agriculture Advisory Group (NESAAAG).

NESAAAG is one model of a Multi-Actor Platform, focusing on real problems, co-creating knowledge for the land-based sector and rural areas. It facilitates effective communication channels with political and policy actors, and shared understanding of positions on topics, and arguments for those positions, including on transitions to agro-ecological farming systems. It is a cross-sectoral forum comprising elected representatives and officers of public authorities, businesses in food processing and supply chains, land managers and research organisations. Members are drawn from across four local authorities within which agriculture and forestry are significant land uses or contributors to value chains. Its remit is to provide support and advice to the agricultural sector and the wider rural economy of North-East Scotland and lobbying on behalf of the sector.

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UK Multi-Actor Platform workshop on market instruments and policies

Photograph: Carol Kyle, James Hutton Institute

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Partnerships of public, private, research and civil society sectors should be operationalised at levels of governance relevant to locally significant systems of farming or land use systems. The aim should be an accelerated uptake and implementation of agro-ecological farm practices through the progressive changing of mindsets and attitudes of actors throughout the farming system towards their role in tackling societal challenges (e.g. climate change, biodiversity loss, social rights). They should provide formally constituted forums which would focus on broadening and deepening the shared understanding of issues relating to agro-ecological systems, linking principles with experiences on-the-ground.

In some places, such forums would co-exist with other organisations with broadly similar interests but representing particular sectors. A long-term outcome of such forums can be the acceptance of their benefits as actors in their own right in which participants co-construct approaches that are recognised as taking account of the interests of all sectors.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

The role of the North-East Scotland Agriculture Advisory Group as an actor in knowledge exchange and information flows in the UK case study area is described alongside those of other actors in Vanni *et al.* (2019).

Vanni *et al.* (2019). [Governance Networks Supporting Agro-Ecological Farming Systems. D5.2, UNISECO](#), Report to European Commission, 66pp

Further information is available on the United Kingdom Case Study page of the UNISECO project: <https://uniseco-project.eu/case-study/united-kingdom>

### 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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