

Manifesto of the Eurosite Agriculture, Biodiversity and Climate Working Group



The Agriculture, Biodiversity and Climate (ABC) working group is an initiative of Eurosite - the European Land Conservation Network (Eurosite). Since 2021 it brings together conservation practitioners, farmers and researchers. The working group aims to provide opportunities through meetings, webinars and workshops, for the participants to network and share knowledge.



Board Meeting – September 2022

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Sunday 25 September 2022 | Online | 16:00 – 18:00 hrs (CET)

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Prelude: We cheer the farmers who are choosing to operate in a nature-friendly* manner and become heroes of the 21st century, part of the solution to the ecological crisis. Working with nature, these ambassadors for future farming strive for good biodiversity outcomes, healthy soils, efficient water management, diverse and attractive connected landscapes and beneficial climate effects. Wedding ecology to economy, they seek a good living producing fresh, tasty and healthier food and providing industry with renewable materials not based on fossil carbon. We rejoice in such win-wins. * 'nature-friendly' is broadly synonymous with the term 'nature-positive'.

The Agriculture, Biodiversity and Climate (ABC) working group met for the first time in April 2021, at the initiative of Eurosite - the European Land Conservation Network (Eurosite). It gathers conservation practitioners, farmers and researchers. Its purpose is to provide opportunities, e.g., through meetings, webinars and workshops, for these constituencies to reach out to each other, and to learn from each other. And in so doing, to shine a bright light on nature-friendly farming and on the options and pathways ahead. Participation is open to all who want to join in these discussions and discoveries. Through Eurosite, we are embedded in the growing wider 'private land conservation' movement which is coming together worldwide around the International Land Conservation Network.



The ABC working group will look, without favouritism nor prejudice, for measures, tools and models which work in practice, proven by science and by effective results. It intends to promote exchange of knowledge and techniques between practitioners and farmers, highlighting excellence (as existing awards for 'farming and nature ambassadors' already do), and bearing in mind that peer-to-peer, hands-on learning works best. As farmers must be able to make a good income, we plan to explore new business and support models, such as market rewards through premium prices or quality labels, payments for carbon sequestration, results-based payments for biodiversity enhancement, fiscal advantages etc., and to identify promising and functioning examples especially at a more mainstream level, not only in niches. We know that agricultural production does not happen in a socio-economic or geopolitical vacuum, but we are convinced that long-term food security is best served by working with nature.

Starting with contributions from participants to the ABC working group, we aim to disseminate – on-line and on-site – all this experience and learning to those who can use it. Our longer-term project is to create platforms and networks between nature-friendly farmers within countries and across borders, and between them and conservation practitioners and researchers. Ultimately, the objective is to connect: people to practice, and to each other. And where we find common ground, to speak with one voice. To inspire those setting policy, and the public in general, that there is a wide movement of farmers and ecologists taking tangible action in favour of both agriculture and biodiversity and climate.



Time for action; not a moment too soon! Scientific research shows biodiversity, soil, water and climate as holistically interlinked, in dire straits, and generally getting worse. Whereas past low-intensity farming did create and maintain landscape and habitat mosaics, today's agriculture – whether maximum-output farming for markets or poverty-driven land clearance for subsistence - is a leading factor causing biodiversity loss. So also, in Europe, is land abandonment. Rural society faces challenges too: declining communities, unaffordable access to prime land, low producer prices and squeezed farm finances and lack of farm succession.

Yet an ever-increasing corpus of scientific, technical and practical knowledge, gained through more data collation, advancing technologies, integrating tools and experiences acquired over many decades, is highlighting solutions and opportunities. Applying them implies changing attitudes and awareness amongst agricultural producers, practitioners, food processors and retailers and consumers. Indications are growing that nature-friendly livestock farming produces quality food richer in certain (micro)nutrients and minerals. Demonstrated examples exist where improved farm ecology translates into better yields and soil and livestock health whilst lowering costs. Prosperous farms, including family-owned holdings with diversified activities and income streams, help revive rural society and act as backbones of their communities. Short supply chains, direct sales from farmer to end user and loops which bring agricultural waste back into productive circulation, all promise benefits.



Here again, scientific research has a vital role, to define and promote ecosystem management, verify outcomes through easy-to-apply indicators and monitoring and determine under which conditions a measure gives greatest benefit. Nature-friendly farmers want to know whether they are achieving results; processors, retailers, consumers and taxpayers paying for their produce and services need to know.

Any transition towards a more nature-based economy poses challenges.

These may be technical. They will surely be financial, such as ensuring income during investment phases. Or they could be societal: perceptions of unfair distribution of benefits and sacrifices, polarisation and resentment between stakeholders. Policy frameworks need to be aware and sensitive to this, to build on understanding and agreement, to highlight benefits as well as constraints. Paradigm shifts are needed to redirect any subsidies and public funding, so that they reward farms working for nature. Wherever practicable, the focus ought to be on outcomes, giving land users space and flexibility to be creative and innovate. After all, there is no magic toolbox of measures which fits each and every farm's needs everywhere alike. For there are many ecosystems, many kinds of farm and produce, many measures. Each requires adapted approaches. What works where when and how, is a process of trial and discovery. Imposing one system, principles or detailed rules for all, may easily become counterproductive. The ABC working group's conclusion is: listen to those working on-site and on-farm, at the interface with nature. They are the ones who must implement policies and regulations, drawing on their accumulated practical experience. Their stories ought to be heard!

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