

Ecological Focus Areas

Enhancing the contribution of European farms to biodiversity and ecosystem services

Background

Farming has a central role to play in the delivery of a number of desirable ecosystem services and the enhancement of biodiversity. However, despite the fact that there has been significant emphasis placed on environment and biodiversity in policy over the years, it is generally accepted that there is still some way to go if the industry is to deliver what is expected of it in this regard. Most notably for example, populations of farmland birds and mammals have declined across the EU over recent



decades. It is hoped that the introduction of **Ecological Focus Areas (EFAs)** on the farm will aid in delivering tangible environmental improvements, but this is to some extent dependent on the EFA elements a farmer selects, and their appropriateness to the local environment. Consequently, the **European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC)** is funding a project to develop a tool which will help farmers select EFA elements that can deliver the optimal environmental benefit.

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EFAs are one of suite of measures that are being introduced as part of 'greening' of the European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Farmers will need to declare 5% of their farm area as an EFA as part of their Basic Payment Scheme application under the CAP. Eligible EFA elements include: fallow land; terraces; hedges; trees; ponds; field margins; buffer strips; agroforestry; short-rotation coppice; forest edges; catch and cover crops; and nitrogen fixing crops. The exact choice of EFA elements and their implementation rules will vary between European countries in order for each Member State to allow for specific regional priorities within respect to environmental protection.



The Project

The aim of this project is to develop a software application for European farmers. The software will firstly help farmers calculate the contribution of different EFA element to their 5% target. Secondly, it will take into account the farms site specific characteristics and assess the contribution of EFA elements to biodiversity and a range of ecosystem services. This will help ensure that the EFA elements selected by a farmer offer optimal benefits in terms of **ecosystem services and biodiversity** and are pragmatic in terms of **farm management**. It will result in a user friendly system that will allow farmers to consider complex environmental issues within their decision making processes, without the need for in-depth scientific knowledge.

The project started January 2015 and will finish in October 2015, and there will be an international scientific workshop to discuss the tool and the underlying science in June 2015 at the JRC in Italy. The software tool that emerges from the project will be made freely available online to all farmers. For further details visit: <http://sitem.herts.ac.uk/aeru/projects/efa/>

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