

Implementability of agro-environmental targets in Poland

BALTIC COMPASS promotes sustainable agriculture in the Baltic Sea Region. The 90 million people living in the region deserve locally produced, high-quality food, but it is also important to protect the very vulnerable Baltic Sea. Baltic Compass fosters win-win solutions for the agricultural and environmental sectors to promote a more sustainable rural economy and healthier ecosystems. This policy brief focuses on agro-environmental targets as a basis for combating eutrophication in the Baltic Sea caused by agricultural run-off.

Key agro-environmental targets

Poland's policies on environmental protection, sustainable development of agriculture and biodiversity preservation are governed by the directives adopted since the country's accession to the European Union: the Water Framework Directive, the Nitrate Directive, the Habitats Directive, and the Birds Directive. Plans have also been drawn up to improve water quality in specific river basins, and there are also national water and environmental programmes.

As part of the implementation of the Nitrates Directive, areas were designated as particularly vulnerable to nitrate pollution:

- In the first four years (2004-2007), 21 areas vulnerable to pollution by nitrogen (OSN) (totaling 6254.35 km² – about 2% of the country) were designated, and 21 action programmes (one for each area) were implemented.

- In the second four-year period (2008-2011), 19 OSN (4623.14 km² area – 1.49% of the country) and 19 action programmes were implemented.

The drop in OSN-designated land area was caused by, among others, the change of OSN borders – boundaries in the second period were based on river basin boundaries, rather than on the administrative boundaries of municipalities. The European Commission, according to experts report, considers that the measures taken in Poland are too modest and suggests a significant increase in OSN, so they cover at least 75% of the country. Latest analysis carried out by Polish experts suggest covering ca. 15 – 20% of the country by OSNs.

The Habitats Directive's Annex I identifies 69 natural habitat types in Poland. Mostly, there are extensively used farmlands. Currently there are plans of protection of the areas, which will have a definite impact on agricultural production.

The Birds Directive, issued as a regulation in 2008 by the Minister of the Environment, designated 141 the areas of birds protection as Natura 2000 sites. As with the habitat areas, plans are being developed to protect these sites. Occurrence of birds in the agricultural landscape depends on maintaining extensive farming, and the best instrument to achieve it may be an Agro-Environmental Program.

Agriculture and environment in Poland

Agricultural land makes up 60% of Poland's total area, and forests, another 30%. The remainder is water and urban areas. Soils in Poland are relatively acidic, and more than 33% are of the least fertile types (class V and VI of valuation). Fertile soils (I-III class) cover only 25% of the farmland. Over 25% of soils are at risk of wind erosion, and 28% are at risk of water erosion. Over 56% of all farms are smaller than 5 ha, while just over 4% are larger than 50 ha. About 21% of agricultural land is pasture. In areas dedicated to growing crops, three-quarters of the land is used for cereals.

Over 32% of the country is already covered by a conservation programme. There are 23 national parks and 120 landscape parks, and more than 1,368 nature reserves. Most of the sites proposed by Poland to be protected under the Natura 2000 network are located within these areas. It is unclear how protective measures under the Natura 2000 network will be implemented; it is assumed that they will require laws and regulations on land use and development. Currently, plans for management and nature protection within Natura 2000 network are under development.

Implementing actors of AE measures

Environmental regulation of agricultural production and facilities is done by the Ministry of Environment; agro-environmental measures are designed, implemented and monitored by the Ministry of Agriculture. However, the agricultural economy involves a much broader range of entities, directly or indirectly:

- Farmers: direct implementers
- Agricultural Advisory Centres (WODR): substantive assistance, training
- Stations of Soil Analysis (SCH-R): determination of soil fertility
- Environmental Inspectorates (WIOŚ): control of water quality
- Local government units at all levels, particularly at the municipal level: administration
- Environmental Protection and Water Management Funds (WFOŚiGW): financial aid
- Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture (ARiMR): management of assistance
- National Water Management Board (KZGW): water management plans at the country level
- Regional Water Management Boards (RZGW); regional water management
- Ministry of Environment (MŚ): national environmental oversight
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MRiRW): oversight of production
- Regional Boards of Land Reclamation Management and Water (WZMiUW): management and maintenance of drainage systems,
- Trade and agricultural associations: aid to farmers
- Independent environmental organizations such as the Institute for Sustainable Development, the National Society for Bird Protection, the Polish Ecological Club (Cracow), the Polish Society for Nature Protection "Salamandra", the Nature Society "Stork", and WWF Poland: advocacy and public awareness-building.

Methodology

This policy brief is based on a review of Polish ecological policy documents; forecasts of the impact of the Rural Development Programme (PROW) on the environment; information from the websites of the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Ministry of Environment, Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture (ARiMR); scientific studies; data from the Central Statistical Office (GUS); direct contacts with employees of ARiMR and the Agricultural Advisory Centres; and the authors' own

knowledge. The policy recommendations were discussed and agreed at a stakeholders meeting in Falenty in November 2010 with scientists, government representatives (Regional Water Management Board, Ministry of Agriculture and environmental protection inspectorates), an advisory board, local government officials, and one person representing an ecological organisation.

Key challenges

Our review and stakeholders meeting identified the following challenges in implementing agro-environmental targets:

- Most farms are too small for efficient management.
- Polish farms need more mechanisation as well as new, environment- friendly technologies.
- Organic farming needs to be more widely implemented and popularised.
- Advisory services for farmers at all scales need to be improved.
- There is a need for greater collaboration among the different entities involved in agriculture and environmental management.
- Compliance with regulations on the use of fertilisers and pesticides must be enforced.
- Pollutants from agricultural production and from municipal sources continue to be dispersed.

Policy recommendations

There are several ways in which Poland could further support progress towards agro-environmental targets:

- Invest in improvements to manure storage and application equipment in farms; financial support from the government should be provided.
- Work to increase the average size of farms in Poland by establishing mechanisms to take over small, inefficient farms (farms social) and consolidate them into larger, specialised and efficient farms that can implement good agricultural practices – and in turn, protect surface waters.
- Implement comprehensive regulations to implement the Water Framework Directive and the Nitrate Directive, with clearly defined opportunities for relevant authorities to oversee agricultural activities and effectively enforce the law.
- Within the framework of the current Rural Development Plan (PROW), and in the following plan, plan a course of action to promote sustainable farming and environmental protection – including water quality and maintenance of biodiversity in Polish agriculture.

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