How to Achieve Efficient Conservation of Traditional Landscape

A recent German study has addressed current conservation problems in Europe’s agricultural countryside in terms of modern economics. The author concludes that in the long run subsidies would be untenable, and therefore, they should progressively be transformed into remunerations for ecological services including conservation. To this end, it will be necessary to change society’s perception of ecological products and conservation services.

Europe’s agricultural landscape is remarkable thanks to its large variety and species richness. Its conservation is necessary to preserve biodiversity and cultural heritage. Nowadays, traditional agricultural practices and countryside are seriously threatened by modern agricultural practices that, in spite of their higher productivity, are incompatible with the goal of preserving traditional countryside. The current economic situation of the agricultural sector is likely to justify heavy subsidies for many years to come, especially in the case of traditional agriculture due to their lower production and less competitive prices. Furthermore, important quantities of money are spent every year in agri-environmental measures so that farmers receive payments for environmental services, including conservation. High sums have been spent under the EU Directives 2078/92 and 1257/99 with the intention of distributing income rather than receiving and generating high-quality ecological services. In fact, with minor exceptions, the administrative subsidies are independent of the results achieved.

Previous studies have analysed and addressed problems for traditional agriculture conservation from a social and environmental protection perspective, without taking into consideration the economic one. A recent German study has applied economic analysis to find a solution to the conservation problem of traditional agriculture in Europe.

After the analysis of the current situation of traditional agriculture, the author proposes some changes that should be introduced in order to reach an economic solution to the traditional agriculture conservation problem in Europe, including:

- Payments without any service in return (subsidies) should be abolished and re-oriented for the remuneration of ecological services.
- Property rights should be defined more precisely, in such a way they define the duties land users have to fulfil according to “good agricultural” practices.
- Economic incentives are essential and, therefore, land users could be compensated for the results of their activity rather than indemnified for additional costs.
- An economic valuation must proceed and the obtained results should persuade the public and the administrations. Therefore, monetary value for ecological products must be developed.
- Institutions have to promote a better understanding of the value of ecological and conservation services and goods by the society.

Overall, the current study proposes an economic approach to address the Europe’s current agricultural countryside conservation problems.


Contact: hampicke@uni-greifswald.de

Theme(s): Agriculture, sustainable development and policy assessment

Additional Information: The EU LIFE programme has funded many projects which focus on the conservation of traditional agricultural landscapes. For further reading on this topic, refer to the “LIFE and agri-environment supporting Natura 2000” brochure which can be found on the LIFE website: http://ec.europa.eu/environment/life/home.htm.

Opinions expressed in this News Alert do not necessarily reflect those of the European Commission