

Research for AGRI Committee – Farm certification schemes for sustainable agriculture: State of play and overview in the EU and key global producing countries, concepts and methods

Objectives and methodology of the study

This study, conducted from December 2021 to May 2022, aims at providing information to the Members of the AGRI Committee on the state of play of farm certification schemes (CS) and their contribution to sustainable agriculture:



- it presents the concepts and methods of farm CS and provides information on the main existing schemes in the EU and in third countries;
- it analyses how these schemes can help the EU reach its sustainability objectives in the farming sector and be instrumental in the implementation and monitoring of the related CAP instruments;
- it provides policy options to better integrate farm certification schemes in the CAP toolbox.

Based on desk research, this research projects maps the existing CS at EU level and in third countries, elaborates a typology and analyses how selected CS could be used by Member States in their national strategic plans before formulating policy recommendations.

The present document is the executive summary of the study on the study requested by the AGRI Committee on Farm certification schemes for sustainable agriculture: State of play and overview in the EU and in key global producing countries, concepts and methods. The full study, which is available in English can be downloaded at: <http://bit.ly/3AYQkiz>

Mapping and typology

A total of 198 CS at farm level have been identified. 86% of them are established in the EU (170 schemes) and 28 schemes in third countries. More than two-thirds have been set up by private bodies and one-third is owned by public entities. Most schemes apply to several types of products. The most represented sector is livestock, followed by fruits and vegetables, crops, wine and seafood.

A total of 9 profiles have been identified based on thematic areas covered by the schemes and 15 CS have been selected for further analysis. The profiles identified and the selected CS are:

- “Good agricultural practices”: Haute Valeur Environnementale (HVE), Integrowana Produkcja, IP Sigill, Leaf, Sistema di Qualità Nazionale di Produzione Integrata per le Produzioni Agricole (SQNPI);
- “Origin and quality of the final products”: geographical indications (GIs), protected designations of origin (PDOs) and protected geographical indications (PGIs);
- “Traceability and safety”: no CS from this type has been selected for detailed analysis;
- “Animal welfare and health”: Beter Leven, Initiative Tierwohl;
- “Organic +”: Naturland;
- “Climate”: Label Bas-Carbone, Wineries for Climate Protection (WfCP);
- “Multi-purpose”: Bord Bia Quality Mark, Certified Sustainable Beef Framework (CSBF), Equalitas and Global G.A.P. Integrated Farm Assurance (IFA);
- “Non-GMO”: no CS from this type has been selected for detailed analysis;
- “Fairtrade”: no CS from this type has been selected for detailed analysis.

Contribution of CS to EU sustainability objectives

Among the 15 CS analysed, some have a broad scope of commitments, and are likely to provide a direct or high contribution to nearly all EU sustainability objectives (for instance: IP Sigill, Leaf, Naturland and Equalitas). Other schemes have been tailored to address one to three EU objectives (mainly management of resources, protection of the environment, health and animal welfare and, less frequently, climate change). A few schemes specifically focus on one objective: animal welfare (Beter Leven and Initiative Tierwohl) or climate (Label Bas-Carbone).

Coherence between CS requirements and conditionality rules

A significant share of the 15 CS analysed covers some of the good agricultural and environmental conditions (GAECs) and statutory management requirements (SMRs) foreseen by the new conditionality provisions (with a similar or, in some cases higher level of ambition).

The level of coverage falls into the following categories:

- CS focusing on “good agricultural practices” (HVE, IP Sigill, Leaf) as well as “Organic +” (Naturland) demonstrate a high level of coverage;
- other CS focusing on other aspects cover a less significant number of GAECs and SMRs. This is the case for instance of Beter Leven (level 3), Bord Bia Quality Mark, CSBF and Global G.A.P.
- CS with a focus on practices defined on a case-by-case basis by stakeholders and which therefore do not cover any GAECs and SMRs: examples include Label Bas-Carbone, WfCP and PDOs/PGIs.

- a few other CS provide guarantees beyond the requirements of a significant number of GAECs/SMRs: HVE (including options), Beter Leven (level 3 of dairy cattle standard) and to a lesser extent IP Sigill, Leaf and Naturland.

CS used as potential eligibility or control criterion for the CAP: Agri-Environment-Climate Measures (AECM) and eco-schemes

The use of certification schemes as eligibility or control criterion has been analysed through their capacity to comply with the regulatory requirements defined by EU Regulations.

The certification schemes are generally suitable to be used in national strategic plans and fulfil most of the common and specific provisions for both AECMs and eco-schemes.

While some national strategic plans submitted by Member States (France, Ireland, Italy and Poland) already plan to use some CS to implement the new CAP, a wider use of CS schemes could be envisaged to lead to the adoption or maintenance of practices supported by the eco-schemes:

- most of the CS analysed cover some of the 22 agro-ecological farming practices proposed by the European Commission for eco-schemes in 2021¹. The number of practices encompassed by each CS varies and covers generally less than one-quarter of the 22 practices suggested;
- a few schemes cover even more than one-third of the practices: Naturland (68%), IP Sigill (option included, 50%) and Beter Leven (level 3, 41%) and HVE (including option, 36%).

Conversely, it does not sound relevant to use CS in the framework of the result indicators foreseen by the new CAP, as CS do not generally foresee a comprehensive and centralised monitoring system.

Risk of greenwashing and competition risks

Since the level of guarantees provided by the different CS on each environmental and climate area differs greatly, these risks must be assessed specifically for each CS and for each EU objective.

Overall, a limited risk of competition distortion has been identified as the CS are generally open to all producers and each CS is usually not compulsory to access a specific market.

Recommendations

Based on this analysis, the study recommends :

- To encourage the use of the relevant certifications' schemes within the CAP national strategic plans to achieve the EU sustainability objectives.
- To use certification schemes to implement the CAP and achieve CAP objectives : this would be particularly relevant for SMRs, GAECs, eco-schemes and AECMs. Practically, this could be supported by the development of tools such as:
 - An equivalence programme between certification schemes and CAP instruments (SMRs, GAECs, eco-schemes and AECMs).

¹ List of potential agricultural practices that eco-schemes could support DG AGRI, 2021 https://ec.europa.eu/info/news/commission-publishes-list-potential-eco-schemes-2021-jan-14_en

- Guidelines for the assessment of the equivalence of schemes with CAP instruments (SMRs, GAECs, eco-schemes and AECMs). These guidelines shall consider specifically:
 - the contribution to at least one environment or climatic objective of the CAP,
 - clear environmental or climatic added value (measurable achievements),
 - requirements with “clear added value” that are compulsory (and not optional) in the CS,
 - third-party control,
 - Implementation of a monitoring system which can feed into the EU monitoring system.
- To use some certification schemes in the risk analysis for CAP controls (to be assessed on a case-by-case basis).

Further information

This executive summary is available in the following languages: English, French, German, Italian and Spanish. The study, which is available in English, and the executive summaries can be downloaded at: <http://bit.ly/3AYQkiz>

More information on Policy Department research for AGRI: <https://research4committees.blog/agri/>



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