

E-5676/09EN
Answer given by Mrs Fischer Boel
on behalf of the Commission
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Across the EU, agricultural land management has created a rich landscape diversity, including a mosaic of woodlands, wetlands, and extensive tracts of an open countryside.

High Nature Value (HNV) Farming is a concept that recognises the causality between certain types of farming activity and natural values, such as high levels of biodiversity or the presence of species and habitats of conservation concern. Typically farming practices preserving and enhancing biodiversity are associated with low intensity grazing or mowing practices on semi-natural vegetation. But also more intensive agricultural landscapes can be beneficial with respect to biodiversity as certain farmland features can provide for nesting and breeding sites, food sources and migratory corridors. There are also examples of entirely intensively managed farming areas that sustain large populations of species important for nature conservation.

The environmental assets of landscapes generated through agricultural land management have the characteristic of public goods. Policy measures are needed to ensure delivery. Particularly important in this respect are the agri-environment measures of the Rural Development policy. The Community strategic priorities for Rural Development include the preservation and development of high nature value farming and forestry systems and traditional agricultural landscapes. National and regional authorities have to address this priority in their design of the Rural Development programmes and through appropriate measures reflecting their regional needs.

The agri-environment scheme is the policy measure that addresses the preservation and enhancement of high nature value farming in a targeted manner. Payments are calculated to cover the additional costs and income foregone and may thus vary depending on the land use.

However, other measures need to be considered in this context: Direct Payments enhance the economic viability of farms. In combination with cross-compliance, direct payments contribute to keeping sustainable farming in place. Securing continued land management is a basic condition also for preserving high nature values through agriculture. Furthermore, it is the very precondition for applying more targeted Rural Development measures.

In view of addressing the objectives of sustainable agriculture, a broad range of complementary Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) instruments are necessary and appropriate. Various policy options will need to be assessed in view of optimizing the use of these instruments and achieving the aims of the future CAP in the most efficient way.