

Summary

The report was prepared in the scope of the Ongoing Evaluation System (OES) of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013 (RDP 2007-2013) on grassland plant diversity in the grasslands applied for Single Area Payments (SAP) or any other support of RDP 2007-2013 (Measure 2.1.2: Payments to Farmers in the Areas with Handicaps, other than Mountain Areas (LFA), 2.1.3: Natura 2000 payments and the payments linked to Directive 2000/60/ECC (Natura 2000); Agri-environment measure 2.1.4./1: Development of Organic Farming (DOF)), except for sub-measure (Maintaining Biodiversity in Grasslands –MBG) of the Agri-environment measure 2.1.4./3.

The results of the survey of grasslands performed in 2014 and the data from the Rural Support Service (RSS) and Nature Conservation Agency (NCA) was used in the scope of evaluation.

The botanical diversity of biologically valuable grasslands (grassland habitats of EU importance) and regular grasslands (permanent grasslands) was evaluated during the study. The purpose of the study was to evaluate botanical diversity of permanent grasslands and semi-natural grassland habitats protected in EU which were managed under various support schemes with no specific requirements to maintain biodiversity.

The results of the survey show that three cases can be outlined in respect of the botanical diversity:

- 1) botanical diversity of the grasslands that were mowed and/or grinded late (regardless of the received payments – SAP/LFA, Natura 2000, DOF, etc.) was low with a large coverage of expansive species;
- 2) botanical diversity of the grasslands that were managed either by extensive grazing or single mowing with the collection of hay at the end of June-beginning of July in average was better than in the previous group;
- 3) botanical diversity of intensively managed grasslands (intensive grazing or frequent mowing) was low.

DOF support has provided the most significant positive impact on maintaining of EU grassland habitats, but a pronounced negative impact of overgrazing or sowing in pastures on the plant diversity was however observed in DOF supported pastures.

Natura 2000 support had the least impact in ensuring conservation of habitats, but it most probably played a significant role in the increase of the managed areas of EU grassland habitats in Natura 2000 areas to the level that exists outside the Natura 2000 areas.

MBG measure needs to be improved in order to maintain and increase the biodiversity of the grasslands of EU importance to ensure that the owners are

motivated to apply their grasslands for this measure. A condition that the grassland habitats of EU importance in the agricultural holding must be managed pursuant to the terms for preservation of grassland biodiversity must be introduced in the DOF measure. Additional support must be planned for such grasslands in DOF measure to ensure that they are not getting intensively modified or overgrazed.

The findings of the previous study performed in 2013 were confirmed in the scope of evaluation that many imprecisions exist in the current mapping of the grassland habitats of EU importance. Approximately 41 % of grassland habitats of EU importance surveyed in this study did not comply with the criteria and were no longer treated as EU habitats. Updating of the data layer on EU grassland habitats (BVG) is therefore necessary with the introduction of new RDP, re-evaluating all existing BVG.

27% of all surveyed permanent grasslands so far not included in the layer of EU grassland habitats complied with the criteria for EU grassland habitats, which shows that unidentified EU grassland habitats still exist in the country, and that in case of some EU grassland habitats, these habitats due to the impact of the current management have formed anew in place of the former fallows and cultivated grasslands as the result of their proper management. The volume of data set in this study does not allow drawing conclusions regarding the area ratio of unidentified and newly formed EU grasslands habitats.

The report was prepared by *dr. geogr.* Solvita Rūsiņa. Lauma Kupča and the employees of LSIAE - Pēteris Lakovskis and Liene Dambiņa participated in analysis of individual data, preparation of descriptions and some figures, as well as development of databases and data entry.