SUMMARY

The Rural Development Evaluation Department (RDED) of the Latvian State Institute of Agrarian Economics (LSIAE) in 2014 prepared a report on the methodology for differentiation of biologically valuable grasslands and the classification of biologically valuable grasslands (BVG) performed earlier. The topicality of the evaluation is related to the fact that a differentiated payment for maintaining biodiversity in grasslands (MBG) in sub-measure based on the management difficulty category is planned to be introduced in the next period in the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 (RDP 2014-2020). It is therefore essential to find out whether the methodology for BVG classification developed in 2007 may be used for the planned differentiation of grasslands based on level of the management difficulty, and what actions need to be taken in order to perform BVG classification pursuant to a plan established in RDP 2014-2020. The purpose of this report is to evaluate already prepared methodology and classification results, and to prepare recommendations for the introduction of MBG differentiation.

A preparation of the report for most part is based on the analysis of two reports prepared upon request of the Ministry of Agriculture „Classification Methodology of Biologically Valuable Grasslands" (Latvian Fund for Nature, 2007) and „Classification of Biologically Valuable Grasslands" („Envirotech" Ltd., 2009). The performance of work included an involvement of the experts of the respective fields, surveys of rural areas, analysis of the support rate calculation and interviewing of the representatives of the stakeholders.

The report was prepared under the supervision of Dr. geogr. Peteris Lakovskis, the researcher of LSAEI. The following experts were involved in the preparation of the report – Prof. Dz. Kreišmane in the matters on productivity and management of grasslands, Dr. geogr. S. Rūsiņa – on biodiversity and management of grasslands, Dr. oec. V. Bratka – on calculation of the rate in MBG sub-measure. The results and findings of the report were presented in the work group meeting of the Ministry of Agriculture (MA) on MBG measure.

The principles described in the methodology of BVG classification in general conform to the classification of BVG based on the difficulty degree of their management, but the solutions proposed in the methodology should be updated based on the current data quality and knowledge. BVG categories established in 2009 with so high degree of error (i.e. approximately 60% of the grassland areas have inconsistencies between the data calculated remotely and the data established in field surveys) cannot currently be introduced into practice pursuant to the plans made in MBG sub-measure of RDP 2014-2020. Recalculation of BVG categories must be performed in order to introduce the differentiated rate, but it requires updated data on BVG. Currently such data are available only for a part of BVG areas.

A conclusion was drawn that updating of support rate calculation must also be carried out, using the data of recent years on the costs, including all management costs of the grasslands and specifying the calculation formulas and assumptions.

The indicators characterizing biodiversity must also be taken into account when performing the classification of BVG in future.

A possibility to waive the ploughing risk factor in the classification of BVG must also be evaluated because the established sub-factors and their breakdown by categories are too subjective. An alternative could be their revision, supplementing them with the risk factors of grassland abandonment.

Introduction of differentiated rate and maintaining of existing activity in BVG management will require more financing in MBG sub-measure than it is currently planned in RDP 2014 – 2020.

Significant pre-conditions for the introduction of differentiated rate is the repeated survey of the existing BVG and repeated BVG classification. Differentiated rate can be introduced gradually, currently classifying the grasslands with available up-to-date survey data.