

Evaluation of Agri-environment measure (2.1.4.) of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) 2007-2013

Summary of the report

The Agri-environment measure is an important part of the Common Agricultural Policy. The public funding for RDP 2007-2013 Agri-environment measure comprises 39% of the Axis 2 funding and 15% of the total RDP 2007-2013 public funding in Latvia. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the contribution made by RDP 2007-2013 Agri-environment (measure 2.1.4). The report is prepared in the scope of RDP 2007-2013 Ongoing Evaluation System (OES) and analyzes Agri-environment sub-measures implemented in RDP 2007-2013 period – Development of organic farming (OF), Leaving winter stubbles in arable areas (WSAA), Maintaining biodiversity in grasslands (MBG), Introducing and promoting integrated horticulture (IPIH), Reduction of erosion (ER) and Establishment of buffer strips (BS).

Data of the Rural Support Service (RSS) from the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) were used for the purpose of the study. Analysis of the data regarding support recipients and the indicators of their agricultural holdings, and special data of the field blocks from the spatial perspective was conducted, using the approach of Geographic information system. The data on environmental indicators prepared by various institutions and current findings of LSIAE studies were used for evaluation of the results achieved and the impact of the Agri-environment sub-measures.

RDP 2007-2013 Agri-environment sub-measures are mostly related to such priorities as maintaining biodiversity and protection of water quality. The largest amount of public funding in Agri-environment measure is disbursed in OF sub-measure, even though approximately the same amount of the funding a while ago was annually disbursed also in ER sub-measure. Significant portion of the funding is disbursed also in MBG sub-measure and in WSAA sub-measure, wherein the amount of the disbursed funding has increased starting 2011, when the supported areas were significantly increased. Breakdown of supported areas by sub-measures is also similar to distribution of funding, because the largest number of areas is supported in OF, in recent years followed by WSAA and MBG sub-measures.

The findings of the evaluation of Agri-environment measure showed that even though the output indicators defined in RDP 2007-2013 are reached, the contribution of the Agri-environment sub-measures in general in Latvia is rated as moderately significant. The greatest contribution in improvement of environment by Agri-environment measures is related to general facilitation of management and maintenance of supported areas, including by reducing abandonment and overgrowing of UAA, thus supporting by RDP 2007-2013 public funding the use of environment-friendly methods in the agricultural activities (both in arable farming and animal husbandry) in the total area of approximately 250 thousand ha in RDP 2007-2013 Agri-environment measure. The main problems in implementing sub-measures are as follows: uneven territorial division of the areas applied for sub-measure, inadequate conditions of sub-measures (MBG) and low activity of the support recipients (WSAA, BS). Lack of purposefulness directed at the key environmental problems in individual sub-measures as well as lack of necessary environmental indicators, thereby limiting planning, efficient implementation and evaluation of the Agri-environment measure, must also be noted as a problem.

Evaluation of RDP 2007-2013 Agri-environment measure was prepared by Dr.geogr. Peteris Lakovskis (*Pēteris Lakovskis*), LSIAE expert in environment issues, in cooperation with the staff of the Rural Development Evaluation Department (RDED).

Conclusions

1. Justification of the Agri-environment sub-measures is often very general, planning for investment in several environmental priorities. Spatially precise target areas with their specific environmental problems are not provided in the justification of the Agri-environment sub-measures.
2. Controlled regulation of the conditions for receiving support, disbursed funding, rates, increase of areas, etc. is carried out during the implementation of Agri-environment sub-measures, affecting also the achieved result.
3. The output results specified in RDP 2007-2013 Agri-environment sub-measures in respect of supported areas are achieved and even exceeded, except for IPIH sub-measure, reaching 79% thereof.
4. Result indicators specified in RDP 2007-2013 are fully achieved in OF sub-measure, while in the sub-measures WSAA and IPIH sub-measure they are achieved only partially, and not achieved in MBG sub-measure.
5. An overall approach has so far been more frequently used in Agri-environment sub-measures, attributing sub-measures and their conditions to the entire territory of Latvia, and not to specific problematic areas and/or specific requirements.
6. The areas of Latvia supported by Agri-environment payments are characterized by uneven territorial division, which may not be rated positively. Agri-environment measures are least implemented in the areas with potentially greater impact of agriculture on the environment.
7. The contribution of RDP 2007-2013 Agri-environment measure in improvement of the condition of environment in general must be rated as moderately significant. The greatest contribution in improvement of environment by the Agri-environment measures is related to facilitation and maintaining the management of supported areas (250 thousand ha), and use of environment-friendly methods in agricultural activities (18 thousand farms/beneficiaries).
8. Analysis of OF sub-measure indicators shows that its impact on quality improvement of surface and underground water in Latvia in general is insignificant, but the sub-measure gives a greater contribution in maintaining biodiversity, which is ensured by relatively large proportion of extensively managed areas.
9. Results of the BVG inventory show that approximately 24% of all surveyed areas do not conform to BVG status. Great botanical diversity has been preserved only in approximately 15 % of all area managed in MBG measure. The current information regarding the total area of biologically valuable grasslands in the country does not conform to the real situation.
10. Relatively poor results in MBG sub-measure may be related to late mowing and grinding (mulching) of grass allowed by conditions of the sub-measure, carried out in approximately 50% of supported areas.
11. Low activity of support recipients is characteristic for BS and WSAA sub-measures in the priority areas with increased impact of releases from diffuse sources (including nitrates especially vulnerable territories).
12. Low quality of data (quality of soil and water, grassland biotopes) and lack of appropriate scientific justification, limiting more efficient use of public funding, impacts more purposeful implementation of Agri-environment measure with an efficient compensation system.
13. Evaluation of Agri-environment sub-measures in Latvia is significantly limited by lack of appropriate impact indicators and their actual values, because the appropriate data on initial condition is not available, and their constant monitoring is not carried out.

Recommendations

1. More detailed justification must be developed for the Agri-environment sub-measures, specifying precise target areas, i.e. the total area and location, especially in the measures directed toward improvement of water quality.
2. Specific conditions for receiving support should be changed and supplemented in the sub-measures, especially in the measures related to preserving and maintaining biodiversity (for example, suspension of MBG late mowing term, appropriate management of BVG in OF sub-measure, etc.).
3. Supported MBG areas must be repeatedly surveyed in 2014, upon starting the implementation of RDP 2014-2020, in order to evaluate their conformity with BVG status.
4. Additional informative measures must be carried out in relation to a possibility of improving the quality of surface water in the areas with increased diffuse pollution caused by the agricultural activities in the Agri-environment sub-measures.
5. In order to evaluate the efficiency of Agri-environment sub-measures, alternative result and impact indicators (for example, proportion of areas, where environment-friendly management methods are used, in EVT; reduction of use of fertilizer and plant protection products; proportion of grasslands, where maintaining and improvement of biodiversity is ensured, in the total area of biologically valuable grasslands) must be implemented, and the case studies performed.
6. Mapping of *High natural value farmland*, acting as significant indicator in planning, implementation and evaluation of the Agri-environment measure, must be carried out in Latvia.