

Common agricultural policy (CAP): direct payments to farmers under support schemes 2014-2020

2011/0280(COD) - 29/03/2017 - Follow-up document

In accordance with Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013, the Commission presents a report on the implementation of the ecological focus area obligation under the green direct payment scheme.

The 2013 reform of the common agricultural policy (CAP) introduced a green direct payment scheme ('greening'). The greening of the CAP requires farmers to reserve 5% of their arable land for ecological focus areas (EFAs). The EFA requirement's objective is to safeguard and improve biodiversity on farms.

Focusing on **2015 and 2016**, this report fulfils a legal requirement for the Commission to examine progress in implementing the EFA obligation.

Analysis of implementation: the EFA obligation covers the **vast majority of EU arable land (70%)**. Land coverage seems to be stable between 2015 and 2016 (69% in 2016.)

2016 was the second year of application of the EFA obligation. The data collected so far from 19 Member States suggests that **there was little change in the second year in the proportion of land under EFA**, the overall areas that farmers declared as EFA and the share of different EFA types in these areas.

The overall percentage of declared EFAs on arable land is **nearly double the 5% required at farm level**. In 2015, 8 million ha of land was declared as EFA, which accounted for 13% of the arable land falling under the obligation. In 2016 the figure was **15%**, with a slight increase of 130 000 ha. This has been achieved by **relying mostly on productive and potentially productive EFAs**: nitrogen-fixing crops, catch crops and land lying fallow. Other EFAs, including landscape features, contributed only slightly to the overall declared EFAs.

Analysis of **EFA composition** at Member State level and at NUTS-3 region level reveals several patterns:

- a substantial share of landscape features and buffer strips is found only in Ireland, the United Kingdom and Malta;
- land lying fallow is more present in Mediterranean countries like Spain, Portugal and Cyprus and in Member States located in the boreal biogeographical region, like Finland and Latvia;
- nitrogen-fixing crops are prevalent in Croatia, the Czech Republic, Italy, Poland and Romania;
- catch crops are more widespread in Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands.

EFAs' potential environmental and climatic effects: the assessment shows that landscape features and land lying fallow seem to be the most beneficial for biodiversity. Landscape features provide best results in terms of their potential positive impact on ecosystem services.

Other EFA types may have some positive impact on some ecosystem services, (catch crops, land lying fallow, nitrogen-fixing crops) especially **if certain management rules are put in place** and if the **choice of species sown** meets specific requirements.

From a climate adaptation perspective, the introduction of EFA could help farms' climate resilience, for example, through the increased provision of landscape features.

Way forward: the Commission put forward several changes to [secondary greening legislation](#), focusing mostly on **ecological focus areas**. These aimed to streamline and clarify the relevant rules while increasing their environmental effect. They should become applicable at the latest in 2018.

This report should contribute to the **wider evaluation of greening**, including the environmental benefits of EFAs, due for completion by the end of 2017 or early 2018. The evaluation will then feed into the next phase of modernising and simplifying the CAP.

On the basis of the above considerations, the Commission **does not propose to amend Regulation (EU) No 1307/2013** by increasing the percentage of EFA.