



THE VOICE OF EUROPEAN HUNTERS

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Improving small game and biodiversity on agricultural landscapes within the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)

Acknowledging that small wild game populations have declined considerably in recent decades on Europe's farmland, often associated with habitat and insect loss and a development towards a more homogenous landscape, often favouring generalist predators.

Aware that in Europe, over 80% of habitats are in poor condition while in Western, Central and Eastern Europe, wetlands have shrunk by 50% since 1970.

Recognising that the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is of major importance to ensure food security, safeguard farmers' income, keep rural areas vibrant, and support conservation efforts.

Taking into account that three important CAP objectives¹ focus on supporting farmers towards more sustainable agricultural practices.

Recalling that hunting is a widespread land use in Europe's countryside and a recognised tool for improving biodiversity and sustainable wildlife management.

Acknowledging that hunting provides a strong incentive for restoring natural features such as hedges, ecological corridors, riparian vegetation, field margins, biodiversity plots such as fallow, flower or buffer strips, and water for wildlife during drought, benefiting game as well as non-huntable species.

Further recalling the European Parliament's resolution on a long-term vision for the EU's rural areas – 'Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040' ([link](#)), which stresses "*the importance in social, economic, cultural and biodiversity conservation terms of sustainable game management for the future of rural areas*".

Aware that the current CAP provides significant flexibility to Member States to utilise funding according to their 'needs', which has both advantages and disadvantages depending on the level of environmental ambition of Member States (e.g. with agri-environmental and eco-schemes).

Acknowledging that the current CAP already contains important measures that aim to improve farmland biodiversity (see Annex I).

Noting that discussions are underway on the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) – covering the period 2028-2034 – with the Commission's proposals expected in July 2025.

¹ i) Environmental care, ii) preserving landscapes, iii) climate change actions.

In the context of delivering for biodiversity, small game, and Europe's farmers, below are FACE's calls for the next CAP, covering the period 2028-2034:

Policy alignment:

- A well-funded CAP should support the goals of the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 to reverse the decline of biodiversity on agricultural landscapes.
- In this context, the CAP should ensure that subsidies incentivise and reward farmers who produce according to the best environmental practices.

Environmental performance:

- A greater emphasis on environmental performance is required to support farmland biodiversity and the long-term viability of farming.
- Given the current state of nature on Europe's farmland, it is clear that higher ambition (above and beyond the current CAP conditionality requirements – see Annex I) is needed, including in the design of future Eco-schemes, agri-environmental climate measures, and support for High Nature Value (HNV) farming. This will require the appropriate targeting of payments that deliver for biodiversity.

Enhanced conditionality:

- Ensure a sufficient (science-based) percentage² of the EU's agricultural area is devoted to semi-natural vegetation (landscape features).
- Ensure the preservation of existing landscape elements and ecological infrastructure.
- Prevent the removal of key habitats, such as hedgerows, small wetlands, and ponds (satellite monitoring is key to accomplishing this).

Rewarding farmers:

- Include mechanisms to reward farmers who have not removed biodiversity-rich habitats. Context: Farmers who have retained biodiversity on their farms often miss out as options are only available for reinstating habitats.
- Reward farmers for the removal of Invasive Alien Species (IAS).

Enhanced eco-schemes:

- Ecosystems should be designed to reward farmers for establishing good-quality habitats, which will benefit various huntable and non-huntable species at the national level.
- This will require adequate incentives and rewards for farmers who decide to implement eco-schemes on their land, particularly those beneficial to biodiversity, such as measures that enhance ecological infrastructure, healthy crop rotations, soil carbon sequestration, and minimal soil disturbance.

Land eligibility:

- Ensure that wetlands and semi-natural vegetation are eligible for farm payments.
- Include mechanisms for CAP support to be available for biodiversity actions linked to certain hunting management practices, which are complementary and beneficial to CAP environmental objectives.

Agri-environmental schemes:

- Include an EU framework with minimum requirements ensuring that:

² Current scientific opinion suggests the need for 10% of farmland to be devoted to landscape features for biodiversity enhancement.

- Result-based agri-environmental schemes become more available to farmers with attractive financial incentives.
- A greater number of agri-environmental schemes are implemented that incentivise actions that improve water quality and restore wetlands.

Approved by FACE at its General Assembly of 24 September 2024.

Annex I:

In the Reg 2021/2115 (the so-called CAP Strategic Plan Regulation) before the entry into force of the Regulation (EU) 2024/1468 on the so-called CAP target review at the end of May 2024, important GAECs and their definitions for small game ([link](#)) were :

- *GAEC 1: Maintenance of the permanent grassland at the national level*
- *GAEC 2: Protection of peatlands and wetlands*
- *GAEC 3: Ban on burning arable stubble, except for plant health reasons.*
- *GAEC 4: Establishment of buffer strips along water courses*
- *GAEC 5: Tillage management, reducing the risk of soil degradation and erosion, including consideration of the slope gradient.*
- *GAEC 6: Minimum soil cover on arable land and permanent grassland between January 1 and February 15.*
- *GAEC 7: Crop rotation in arable land, except for crops growing under water.*
- *GAEC 8: A minimum 4% share of fallow land, protection of landscape elements, and a ban on cutting hedges and trees between February 20 and August 31. As an option, measures for avoiding invasive plant species.*
- *GAEC 9: Ban on converting or ploughing environmentally sensitive permanent grassland designated in Natura 2000 sites.*

Eco-schemes beneficial to small game ([FACE info note](#))

- Managed grass margins/strips and flower or seed strips/plots
- Uncultivated margins
- Planting and maintaining hedges
- Winter cover crops
- Delayed mowing/harvest
- Mixed grazing by more than one species.
- Lower stocking rates.
Reversal from silage to hay as a source of winter fodder. This would improve the success of ground nesting birds including game.

More general agriculture practices beneficial to small game ([FACE info note](#))

- Sustainable agriculture e.g. high nature value farming, agroecology, conservation agriculture, organic agriculture, nature inclusive agriculture, low external input agriculture etc.
- Extensive grasslands