



On the path to biodiversity recovery

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 has proposed a number of challenging targets that will inform policy, practice and research for the coming decades, including a number that are relevant to agriculture.

The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 has set ambitious targets that will require transformative change if they are to be achieved. In an unprecedented move, the Biodiversity Strategy was announced in tandem with the EU Farm to Fork Strategy, signalling the co-dependency of the two strategies in supporting human health, economic recovery and food security. Recognising the current global threat to biodiversity, the EU has committed to the Convention on Biological Diversity's aim to "ensure that by 2050 all of the world's ecosystems are restored, resilient, and adequately protected". In the meantime, the EU "aims to ensure that Europe's biodiversity will be on the path to recovery by 2030".

Strategic actions

The first strategic action of the EU Biodiversity Strategy aims to widen the network of protected areas and establish "a coherent network of protected areas". The aim is that at least 30 % of the land (an increase of 4 %) and 30 % of the sea (an increase of 19 %) will be protected and connected through ecological corridors as part of a European-wide network. It remains to be seen how this EU-level target will translate into targets for individual member states.

The second strategic action explicitly recognises that significant restoration actions will be required to reverse decades of biodiversity loss. This restoration will include, for example: strengthening the EU legal framework for nature restoration; bringing nature back to agricultural land; addressing land take and restoring soil ecosystems; increasing the quantity of forests and improving their health and resilience; restoring freshwater ecosystems; reducing pollution; and, addressing invasive alien species.

At least 30 % of EU land area will be protected and connected through ecological corridors, and at least 10 % of agricultural area under high-diversity landscape features.

Key commitments

There are key commitments associated with the above restoration themes, and the following have the strongest

interaction with land use and agricultural practices:

1. Legally binding EU nature restoration targets to be proposed in 2021, subject to an impact assessment. By 2030, significant areas of degraded and carbon-rich ecosystems to be restored, habitats and species to show no deterioration in conservation trends and status, and at least 30 % to reach favourable conservation status or at least show a positive trend.
2. The decline in pollinators to be reversed.
3. The risk and use of chemical pesticides to be reduced by 50 % and the use of more hazardous pesticides by 50 %.
4. At least 10 % of agricultural area to be under high-diversity landscape features.
5. At least 25 % of agricultural land to be under organic farming management, and the uptake of agro-ecological practices significantly increased.
6. Three billion new trees to be planted in the EU, in full respect of ecological principles.
7. Significant progress to be made in the remediation of contaminated soil sites.
8. At least 25,000 km of free-flowing rivers to be restored.
9. A 50 % reduction in the number of Red List species threatened by invasive alien species.
10. Losses of nutrients from fertilisers to be reduced by 50 %, resulting in the reduction of the use of fertilisers by at least 20 %.

The inclusion of habitats currently considered ‘ineligible’ under existing Cross Compliance (e.g., ponds, scrub, wetlands) will likely be a strong discussion point.

Impact on agriculture

Clearly, alignment with these key commitments can be expected to have significant impacts on the management practices of agricultural systems, for example through reduced use of pesticides and fertilisers. As mentioned above, the Farm to Fork Strategy contains and supports several of the same commitments, and can be expected to strongly influence Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) reform and choices about direct payments and rural development actions, especially the objectives and design of eco-schemes, agri-environment schemes and results-based payments. The aim for 10 % of agricultural area to be high-diversity landscape features will incorporate, e.g., buffer strips (Figure 1), rotational or non-rotational fallow land, hedges, non-productive trees, terrace walls, and ponds. The inclusion of habitats currently considered ‘ineligible’ under existing Cross Compliance (e.g., ponds, scrub, wetlands) will likely be a strong discussion point. The target of three billion new trees represents a major intervention in land use, and the Commission will develop guidelines on biodiversity-



FIGURE 1: The aim is for 10 % of agricultural area to be high-diversity landscape features, e.g., buffer strips.

friendly afforestation and reforestation, and closer-to-nature forestry practices (in parallel with the new EU Forest Strategy).

Transformative

The third strategic action aims to “enable transformative change”. This proposes new and improved governance frameworks that facilitate a system with effective indicators, progress assessment and corrective actions. This aims to significantly increase the implementation and enforcement of EU environmental legislation. In an innovative approach, the Commission envisages improved use of both public and private investments to financially incentivise nature-based solutions for biodiversity conservation and climate action. The fourth strategic action supports “an ambitious global biodiversity agenda” to improve international governance for the protection and restoration of biodiversity.

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