

High Nature Value Farming in South-Eastern Europe

Summary of Networking Meeting

and Next Steps

Participants

The meeting was held on 6-8 December 2010 in Sofia. There were 17 participants from four countries – Bulgaria, Macedonia, Serbia and Germany. They were representatives from environmental NGOs, agriculture and environmental institutes and agencies, as well as farmers' advisor. Each participant brought her/his specific experience and knowledge about the High Nature Value farming and farming systems from the region which made the meeting a good place for experience exchange and sharing of ideas.



Background

The HNV farming in SEE network meeting was a continuation of a similar meeting held back in early 2006 in Belgrade. Many of the HNV farming findings and recommendations from 2006 are still holding true for South-Eastern Europe. However, there are also some important developments that took place since then.

Recommended Actions about HNV Farming in Western Balkans in February, 2006

1. Translate HNV farming into the Western-Balkan languages, finding words to express the concept adequately
2. Compile more precise information on
 - the character and distribution of HNV farmland in the region, and
 - assess the way in which these systems are changing, and
 - what the related implications for nature conservation are.
3. Ministries of Agriculture and Institutes of Nature Conservation are crucial players
4. At the same time, build awareness and clarify misunderstandings before talking about policy measures. Actions may include:
 - Preparing simple literature and/or a website to explain/share concepts
 - Use specific examples so people can relate to them
 - Consider 'demonstration' farms to illustrate the concept, especially outside of designated areas
 - 'Train the trainers' workshops
 - Link HNVF explicitly to international agreements and EU law
 - Cultivate pressure and support from high-profile international organisations (WWF, IUCN..) to reinforce local messages
 - Get international institutions, including the EU, FAO and World Bank to support overall message
 - Do not forget Ministries of Finance!
5. Discuss HNVF informally with other stakeholders and
 - Use their reaction to develop coalitions of stakeholders which together can make critical mass to which ministries often respond better.
 - Stress urgency of task;
 - Build link in farmers' minds between HNV and economic viability;
 - Make link to the EU and EU accession process;
 - Have a communications strategy aimed at the general public to build support and understanding; and
 - Use consumer power.
6. Involve actors from Croatia and Bulgaria, since they are at different stages of EU accession and have valuable experience
7. Make the most of the Beograd Environment for Europe conference as an awareness-raising opportunity in itself and as a reason for governments to do something now
8. For all this work, get know-how, support and help from foreign, experienced organizations, last but not least for fundraising
9. Let's meet again before the end of 2006

Source: WWF DCP, EFNCP, UNEP, 2006, HNV Farming in the Western Balkans, final report

The HNV farming situation in 2010 (summary of meeting's presentations)

HNV farming in Bulgaria

First (zonal) designation of HNV Farmland in Bulgaria was done in 2007. A map was produced for defining the scope of the Agri-environmental measures for support of HNV grasslands and arable land within the Rural Development Program 2007-2013. The measures proved out to be the most attractive ones for the farmers, but their uptake is still limited. Several initiatives of the different NGOs also took place (some of them are still on-going):

- “HNV farmlands: recognizing the importance of South East European landscapes” - The project was implemented by WWF Danube-Carpathian programme (WWFDPC) and European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP) between 2006-2008. The project consisted of six local workshops, three each in Bulgaria (Strandzha, Rusenski Lom and Western Stara Planina) and Romania (Sibiu, Mehedinti and Galati), and a reporting seminar in Brussels. The project linked the developing concept of High Nature Value farming to the reality of farming and considered the practicalities of implementing the EU commitments on identifying and supporting HNV farming in different local situations.
- “Conservation of globally important biodiversity in high nature value semi-natural grasslands through support for the traditional local economy”- the project is implemented by Bulgarian society for the Protection of Birds for a 4-year period (July 2007-June 2011). The project’s main goal is to ensure long-term conservation of high nature value grasslands in Bulgaria by stimulation of stock breeding in two regions – Ponor mountain and Besaparski Hills (also special protected Natura 2000 areas under EU Birds Directive). At local level, the project will contribute to further social development and economic growth in grassland areas by involving the business in biodiversity conservation. Grant Scheme for financing of small farmers projects is developed and implemented . The scheme consists of both area-based (Agri-environment and Natura 2000) payments and non-productive investments for preservation of HNV farmland. Two mobile advisory centers are created thus helping the farmers to meet the preconditions and standards and to apply in the agri-environmental schemes (both national and under the project).



Photos 2-4: High Nature Value grasslands, sheep grazing and hay making in Ponor Mountains, BSPB photos

HNV farming in Macedonia

The concept of HNV farmland and farming systems is a new one for Macedonia. At the moment some initial steps (projects) in identifying the HNV farmland in pilot regions are taken by environmental NGOs.

- “Promoting “High Nature Value” (HNV) Farming and Agri-environment Payments through Civil Society Organisations in Macedonia” – The project is implemented by the Avalon Foundation, the Institute of European Environmental Policy , the Ecologist’s Movement of Macedonia (DEM) and the Center for Civic Initiative (CCI) for 2,5 years (October 2009 – March 2012). The project focuses on introducing the concepts of HNV farming and agri-environment payments and applying them to the Macedonian context. A draft (zonal) map for potential HNV farmland areas is developed under the project as well as case studies of 3 pilot areas (Lakavica, Mariovo and Bistra) further indentifying the HNV systems in the areas and the traditional practices related to them. The project also aims at raising awareness and developing understanding amongst key policy-makers about the importance of HNV farming systems for biodiversity conservation in Macedonia and proposing supporting measures for their conservation.
- Nature conservation with special emphasis on biodiversity is one of the main objectives (tasks) of the Macedonian Ecological society (MES). MES is implementing different biodiversity conservation projects that also contribute for monitoring of HNV areas in Macedonia: Common birds as an indicator of the changes of the environment; Wing across Balkans: preparation of the West Balkans area for the implementation of the Bird Directive; Balkan Lynx recovery programme; Conservation and monitoring of the Egyptian vulture; Protection of vultures in Demirkapiskata Klisura; Pilot project in Sar planina; Osogovo mountain in the Balkan Green belt; Development of National Ecological network. In December 2010 MES submitted new proposal to Birdlife international for 21 IBA covering 25,43% of Macedonian territory (6 558 km²). There are 42 Important plant areas covering 17,9% of Macedonian territory (459 425 ha). Forest are found in 85% of the IPA; grasslands – in 67% - dry, alpine and sub-alpine pastures are the most common grasslands habitats.



Photos: HNVF landscapes and farmers, photos DEM

HNV farming in Serbia

Serbia has done the first steps in the identification of HNV farmlands. According to the data of the Environment Protection Agency in Serbia the HNV farmlands are 1.187 million ha or 19% of the total agricultural land. This is likely to be an underestimate of the total extent of HNV farmland in Serbia as it only captures the area of semi-natural vegetation. The biggest part are grasslands (around 1 million ha). The most presented and used are semi-natural grasslands, formed in the forest zone, and natural or primary ones, distributed as final vegetation stage on places inappropriate for forest cover, including high-mountains (above timberline) zone, flooded land in lowland valleys and xeric steppe and/or salinized habitats in the northern part of the country (Vojvodina). Different projects for identification and support of HNV farmland were implementing in Serbia:

- The HNV farmland map was a result of a BBI-Matra supported project “Support for Agri-environment Policies and Programming” in Serbia, implemented by Avalon, IUCN, IEEP and Natura Balkanika in 2009 and 2010. The project identified ten types of High Nature Value farming systems for Serbia falling into 3 main categories: livestock production, annual crops and permanent crops. The project also focused on development of 2 pilot agri-environment schemes for contrasting areas where the continuation of traditional agricultural practices is important for the conservation of biodiversity associated with high nature value (HNV) farming systems and farmland (Banat and Stara planina). An agri-environment handbook for Serbia was produced within the project.
- One of the most important GEF financed activities of the Serbian Transitional Agriculture Reform Project (STAR), implemented by the Ministry of agriculture, forestry and water management is re- introduction of grazing practices as a management tool for Stara Planina Nature Park highmountain pastures. Five pilot areas were selected (Muchibaba, Ponor, Kopren, Vrtibog, Kovachevo), and agrienvironmental measures for grassland management are implemented for the first time. More than 400 Livestock Units participate are supported in the pilot activity, 270 of which are autochthonous breeds. Additionally an investment support scheme for support the conservation of Stara Planina breeders of endangered autochthonous breeds is also implemented. The project ends in the beginning of 2012.



Photos 5-7: Busha cattle grazing on mountain pastures; Sheep grazing in extensive plum orchard and extensive mosaic landscape, Photos Suzana Djordjevic-Milosevic and Sergej Ivanov

Discussed Next Steps for the HNVF network in SEE

1. Enlarge the network members and partners

The participants welcomed the establishment of a more formal network on High Nature Value farming in South-Eastern Europe. It was also commonly agreed that more participants from the region should be invited to join. However, it was also indicated that these should be organizations which have a shared interest in nature conservation in farming and are supportive for the introduction of the concept of HNV farming in SEE.

The participants also suggested that the HNVF in SEE network should get in contact and identify common areas of interest with other networks already operating in the region such as the SEE Standing Working Group for Rural Development and the Dinaric Arc Initiative.

2. HNV Farming in SEE Policy Conference

There are several reasons to organize a policy conference for HNV farming in SEE in 2011. The importance and urgency of the needed policy actions for the survival of the High Nature Value farming and farming systems in the region is largely unknown by policy makers in SEE countries. The farming discussion is overwhelmed by agricultural competitiveness thus risking a large scale disappearance of critical socially and environmentally important farming systems.

Furthermore, the countries are advancing (although at difference pace) towards EU accession and are preparing to implement the EU Acquis. This requires special attention and action to identify and develop policy support measures for HNV farming as well.

3. Develop at least one HNV farming areas panorama per country from SEE

EFNCP is developing a new website focused on high visual presentation of HNV farming areas and systems across Europe. It was agreed that the HNV farming areas from SEE should also be integrated on it. Participants committed to support the development of HNV panorama from their countries.

4. HNVF mapping and identification –exchange of experience in SEE

So far, only Serbia has mapped its HNV farming areas. Furthermore, they compared the mapped HNV farming areas with the known HNV farming systems in the country.

Participants discussed that the experience for the identification of HNV farming areas and systems in the SEE countries need to be actively shared since the common issues between them were a lot more than the differences. Additionally it was agreed that there are further points for discussion and action such as:

- a) Integration of the SEE HNVF maps with the European HNVF map;
- b) Development of a regional (SEE) HNVF map.

5. HNV farming and food products demonstration days

Some of the strongest potential for promoting the HNVF concept among farmers and the public at large is to present it and link it to the food products coming from it.

This is best done at open / demonstration days. There is no need to create new events. It is better to link it existing rural events, especially events organized by the partners and members of the HNV network.

It was suggested that existing suitable rural events should be identified in order to develop a particular action in this respect.

6. Practical experience exchange for HNV training and farm advisors

Training of farmers and farm advisors in HNV farming areas is crucial for their survival. Overall, this is one of the major gaps in the system. At the same time, there are a few good models where NGOs have taken up this role and are very actively working with farmers.

Best practices from the region need to be identified and shared; as well as exchange experience between the NGOs and other interested actors such as farm advisors from state institutions.