



HAL
open science

Result-based payments for “Flowering Meadows” in France: Support tools and collective learning process

Christine de Sainte Marie

► To cite this version:

Christine de Sainte Marie. Result-based payments for “Flowering Meadows” in France: Support tools and collective learning process. Results Based Agri-environment Schemes: payments for biodiversity achievements in agriculture, Sep 2014, Bruxelles, Belgium. hal-01123200

HAL Id: hal-01123200

<https://hal.science/hal-01123200>

Submitted on 9 Mar 2017

HAL is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

IEEP Conference on Results Based Agri-environment Schemes: payments for biodiversity achievements in agriculture, Brussels, 23 – 24 September 2014

Result-based payments for “Flowering Meadows” in France: Support tools and collective learning process

Christine de Sainte Marie,
National Institute for Agricultural Research,
INRA UMR 1068 SAD APT,
65 boulevard de Brandebourg
94200 Ivry-sur-Seine

The shift from management prescriptions to result-oriented schemes in France emerged from the largely unpredicted success of collaboration between a team of scientists from INRA and Natural regional Parks that started in 2005 in the Northern Alps.

I'm a cofounder and promoter of the Flowering Meadows programme that I will present from a social sciences standpoint, focusing on what makes change happen and why it was well received by farmers. I will thus concentrate on the hidden work which played a crucial role in the success of the French scheme. Finally, I will show how the approach is evolving and point out the key factors and obstacles to effective RBPs.

Let's start with a brief outline of existing RBPs in France.

The first set of result-based measures aimed at maintaining the species richness of natural grasslands has been introduced in France in 2007.

I have to mention the GRASS_09, or “Pastoral management plan”, that aims at achieving specific features of the mosaic of vegetation strata by grazing herds. However, the agreements currently implemented are mostly action-based and hardly promotes a step-by-step adaptation of management specifications to achieve the desired outcome.

The desired ecological outcome of the flagship measure -GRASS_07, commonly known as “Flowering Meadows”, was modelled after the MEKA measure presented by Rainer Oppermann so I won't go into details. Unlike Germany, the list must be specific to local conditions

Key features

And unlike Germany, the French measures have been targeted on the special zones of conservation designated under the Habitats and Birds directives. Outside these target sites, local projects have to rely on self-financing.

This targeting results from the priority given to the national grassland support in the French programme. According to IEEP's typology, Flowering meadows is described as a hybrid measure combining management prescriptions, such as limitations in fertilizer and stocking densities with a premium for the achievement of the desired ecological outcome. The farmer entering into a Flowering meadows contract will receive 89 € per ha in addition to the baseline payment that means 165 €/ ha.

However, environmental payments are all subject to eligibility criteria, which incorporates action-based requirements, namely good agricultural and environmental conditions. Eligibility may conflict with the desired outcome.

Current state of implementation

An extensive survey carried out after three years of implementation showed that 17 Flowering Meadows schemes were implemented over 13,850 ha. Two different approaches are prevailing.

About two thirds of these local schemes were located within Natura 2000 sites and applied to what Rainer called "biotope grasslands", coloured in green on the pie chart. Most of the lists are specific to a rare or remarkable habitat. The scope of such schemes is fairly small, ranging from 8 to less than 100 hectares.

The most significant finding of the survey was the extent of the implementation of 'Flowering Meadows' projects outside or beyond the boundaries of targeted sites as well as their scale (more than one thousand ha each). The schemes managers, mostly Regional Parks, argued that "any grassland meeting the ecological requirements is legally eligible to the measure". Their priority is clearly ordinary biodiversity. These "territorial schemes", coloured in blue on the pie chart represented more than two thirds of the area under Flowering Meadows contracts and no doubt that it could have been more. Self-funding is clearly the main obstacle to the extension of such schemes, which got their financing from the Ministry of agriculture and local councils as pilot projects.

Recent data indicates that things have not significantly changed since then. In 2013, Flowering

Meadows schemes were implemented over twenty thousand hectares, involving about one thousand and three hundred farmers. This score seems quite low compared to Baden-Wurttemberg.

SUPPORT TOOLS AND LEARNING PROCESS. The Flowering Meadows competition

However, the current state of implementation of the measure does not actually reflect the audience of the Flowering Meadows programme. Let's go into the basic work that paved the way to the commitment of farmers and nature managers to a radically new approach to biodiversity conservation on farmland - that is the Flowering Meadows competition

A competition of professional excellence

The Flowering Meadows contest was initially designed as a field test for assessing both the ecological relevance of a local list of indicator plants and the social appropriation of the desired outcome by farmers. For this reason, it was designed as a competition of professional excellence, which has been the strongest symbolic incentive to the agricultural modernization process. Typically, agricultural competitions in France have celebrated productivity, whether it is of stock animals or grassland yields. By contrast, the 'Flowering Meadows' competition rewarded the best agri-ecological balance found within species-rich meadows and pastures managed by livestock farmers.

A new style of co-operation between environmentalists and farmers

While professional agricultural excellence is generally assessed by peers, the jury assembled for this competition consisted of both agricultural and ecological experts, together with a beekeeper and other local participants - a restaurateur, an official, an environmentalist and a hiker -, all of whose individual skills contributed to the selection of the winners. Moreover, the organiser was a nature park that farmers regarded principally as an environmentalist institution.

The first competition was organised in 2007, in a mid-height mountain range, the Massif des Bauges. Against all expectations, the contest was a big success among local farmers: half of them applied to participate. More conclusive to all participants was the fact that the majority of the meadows assessed obtained high scores both on agricultural and ecological values. The results obtained thus demonstrated that species richness could be combined with a viable fodder production, thereby challenging the traditional paradigm that had long governed the relationship between naturalists and farmers.

A major step forward was taken in 2010, with the decision by the sister federations of Nature Regional Parks and National Park to generalise this programme, by organising a national agroecological excellence competition with the local preselection of entrants.

Reshaping the notion of 'desired outcome' in agri-ecological terms

The re-shaping the "desired outcome" in agri-ecological terms resulted in an entirely new mode of co-operation between groups that had been traditionally wary of each other. Agriculturalists and conservationists, scientists and practitioners were charged with developing a common method and assessment criteria.

From 2010 until 2014, the working group has produced successive versions of a set of assessment sheets and guidelines. They were tested by forty local juries and the national jury. Regional training sessions have been organized for new entrants each year. Feedback sessions have been held with organizers and participants farmers and questionnaires were systemically addressed to jury members. This two-way dialogue, between the users and developers of the of the method could be analysed as a collective learning process. A website and an annual bulletin were created to promote the Flowering Meadows competition

Intense media coverage

However, the popularity of the Flowering Meadow contest amongst farmers largely resulted from intense media coverage by TV channels and the regional newspapers. Participant farmers and winners are proud to be presented as model farmers to their neighbourhood and the wider public.

Last, but not least, faced with the success of the Flowering Meadows contest, the mainstream professional press finally jumped on the wagon.

Scaling up of the agri-ecological network

Since the first edition in 2007, Flowering meadows have blossomed across France and beyond.

Thirty three out of forty six Regional Parks and the six national Parks, representing a wide range of grasslands, have organized a local contest - some of them associating parks on European borders. More than two thousand and half experts have experienced a destabilizing way of working. Four times as many farmers have experienced the outcome-based approach for which most of them were not eligible. So,

So, what makes Flowering Meadows so Different, so appealing to French farmers?

The feed-back studies we have carried out on farmers involved in local schemes clearly show that Flowering Meadows measure was initially regarded with great suspicion. The main reason was its name and its focus on wild flowers, a kind of plant that environmentalists value but that farmers have been taught is useless.

In what they say now, you can notice a drastic change: they made Flowering Meadows theirs.

“We were not calling them « Flowering meadows » but we were doing just that”

*“The **good farmer will be rewarded** and the bad one won't be. Until now, you could do a terrible job and still be OK as long as you were doing your paper work”*

*“Our work is really recognized for once. It's **very important to us to show we aren't « big polluters!**”*

Positive meaning of Result-based payments

Farmers' interviews reveal that the shift to result-based payments conveys a bunch of positive meanings

For once, participation in a biodiversity conservation scheme does not mean additional constraints. Farmers are free to tend their grassland as they want so long as they meet the ecological outcome. This outcome has been defined in a very simple way: photographs of indicator plants that are easy to identify - some of them being known as fodder plants, such as clover and honeysuckle.

Finally, payment for achievements marks a clear break with compensation payments for complying with environmental prescriptions that most farmers consider as “bad farming” and even ecologically inefficient. By contrast, they can fully demonstrate their ability and professional skills now.

More significantly, farmers enjoy the removal of management prescriptions as it brought about significant changes in the position assigned to them.

In field inspection replacing CAP papers check, the burden of proof falls now on the administration - a role reversal which is very popular

Agriculturalists cannot play the expert's role no more because they know how to spoil a natural

grassland but not how to manage an agro-ecosystem

For their part, conservationists had to admit that biodiversity could be the result of careful management, making therefore a difference between production and productionism. However, the main opponents to the flowering meadows scheme still come from this professional group.

Finally, participant farmers find in the Flowering meadows scheme or in the competition that promotes it, a timely opportunity for redressing the image of their work in the public (big polluters).

The meaning of « positive »

However, a critical examination of the positive meanings of result-based payments reveals that it has to be referred to what positive means for participant farmers.

The feed-back data from the last edition of the national competition shows that sixty per cent of the entrants - the winners of the local contest are committed to organic farming, origin labelled products or other brands and quality labels. About fifty per cent of entrants are involved in direct sales of food products that are mostly processed on their farm. These rates are very unusual with regard to French standards.

In other words, farmers who have maintained species-rich grasslands across France are mostly alternative farmers and/or farmers who have resisted agricultural modernization. The meaning of positive stems from the connexion of the ecological qualities of grasslands with the production of healthy and tasty food rather than the provision of environmental goods and services. "Wild flower grower" is a totally different job that could be done by non-farmers as well.

So, LET A HUNDRED FLOWERS BLOOM?

We can consider that there is kind of scaling out of the result-based approach in France.

In 2014, the Flowering Meadows competition was integrated into the prestigious General Agriculture Competition. You can see here the first prize award ceremony chaired by the Minister of Agriculture himself at the Paris International Agricultural Show (850,000 visitors). This official recognition is of considerable symbolic importance for the participant farmers because it acknowledges know-how and productions that have traditionally been considered to underperform.

This official labelling by the Ministry of agriculture also means that the competition is no longer

the preserve of the Parks. As shown on the map, the list of local organizers has expanded to include agricultural organizations, local councils and environmentalists NGOs. In addition to this, a pilot contest has been organized for agricultural schools that train future farmers and farm advisors.

Grassland-based and pastoral systems scheme (under examination)

Payments for achievements are also moving forwards with the grassland based and pastoral systems scheme, which have been incorporated into the French programme currently under examination by the European authorities

This development is a direct result of the feedback from the Flowering Meadows competition concerning both the importance of replacing biodiverse grasslands and pasturelands within the context of the farming system and the need to open up participation beyond the boundaries of Natura 2000 sites.

The grassland-based and pastoral scheme has been designed at farm scale. Its key specifications can be summarized as follows:

- The result must be achieved over twenty per cent up to fifty per cent or more of the grassland acreage, depending on threats
- The desired outcome combines a nation-wide list of indicator plants that can be adapted to local conditions and a grid that characterizes the favourable impact of grazing herds on the mosaic of vegetation.

Payments are mainly based on opportunity costs, ranging from 58 to 117 € per hectare when risks of abandonment or ploughing out are high. These rate seems quite low compared to 165 € per hectare for Grass_07. However, the grassland-based and pastoral payment will apply to the area in permanent grassland.

The specifications are nation-wide but the grassland-based and pastoral scheme is not. Unlike the German Landers and the former grassland support, the French scheme is still targeted on environmentally sensitive area.

Concluding remarks: key issues for successful RBP Schemes

Making farmers matter in the design of the “desired outcome”

- Capability of conservationists to express biodiversity conservation objectives in a way that makes sense for farmers - in other words, to generate a public for public goods
- Ecological result must not be beyond farmer's action
- Public recognition of decried methods of farming as a desired outcome (**premium and prize**) and recognition by the public (**pride**) may be more decisive than lookalike market solutions (environmental goods and services)

Obstacles: support to existing ecologically sound farming methods is crucial but the current rationale of environmental payments makes it controversial.