Permanent grassland – farming systems and policies

Proposals should develop integrated approaches for permanent grassland management which are cost-effective, environmentally sound and easily manageable. Synergies and trade-offs between productivity, biodiversity and continuity of the delivery of ecosystem services will be analysed in different contexts of intensification. Projects will develop farm-level decision support tools for the management of permanent grassland so as to enhance biomass production (for ruminant and/or innovative uses and markets) and the delivery of ecosystem services to society. Aspects of livestock health and welfare shall be given due consideration.

Activities will include the collection of relevant data to monitor, benchmark and analyse the performance of farming systems in terms of productivity, carbon sequestration, socio-economics, biodiversity and the delivery of ecosystem services. Proposals will develop and stratify farm networks reflecting relevant European pedo-climatic and socio-economic conditions and involve experimental stations, experimental farms and commercial farms to produce references and identify innovative approaches. Proposals could possibly use instrumented farm platforms to compare different forms of grassland management in order to determine the value of permanent grasslands as providers of food and other ecosystem services. Projects are expected to cover both conventional and organic sectors.

On the basis of the farm network output, work will help in the assessment of the effect of various grassland policies on biodiversity and delivery of ecosystem services including carbon sequestration. Taking into consideration the importance and the diversity of grasslands in Europe, this policy analysis could also be extended to relevant third countries. Innovative approaches to creating, maintaining and restoring permanent grassland should be proposed at the appropriate territorial
scale. Proposals should develop agri-environmental indicators (including soil carbon content) on grasslands and grassland-based systems as a basis for better recognition of the ecosystem goods and services that permanent grasslands can provide.

Proposals will use transdisciplinary research methods and should fall under the concept of the 'multi-actor approach'[[See definition of the 'multi-actor approach' in the introduction to this Work Programme part.]], involving the farming sector with a view to generating cross-fertilisation and co-ownership.

Proposals should ensure that the grassland classification and performance benchmarks proposed can be made compatible with, and/or improve, the information systems and procedures set up to monitor direct payments[[Land Parcel and Identification System (LPIS) of the Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) of the CAP (Council Regulation (EC) 73/2009).]] to help bridge the semantic gap between the Agriculture and Environment domains and to facilitate monitoring and reporting synergies.

The Commission considers that proposals requesting a contribution from the EU of up to EUR 10 million would allow this specific challenge to be addressed appropriately. Nonetheless, this does not preclude the submission and selection of proposals requesting other amounts. The duration of the project should take into consideration the need to coordinate and implement farm networks.

Permanent grasslands are associated with high biodiversity and the delivery of a wide range of ecosystem services (e.g. carbon sequestration, water quality, flood and erosion control). Permanent grassland is closely linked to the competitiveness of ruminant-based farming systems, but its maintenance is under threat, especially in areas where intensified farming systems or practices are feasible, but also in remote and high-mountain areas where it may be abandoned. Whether natural, semi-natural or agriculturally improved, long-term grasslands provide more ecosystem goods and services than short-term grasslands. The continuity and permanence of grasslands is key to ensuring the conservation of biodiversity and the provision of ecosystem services. There is an urgent need to recognise and add value to the multiple ecological functions of grasslands. In turn, this requires the generation of a wide range of data to characterise and benchmark sustainable farming systems based on permanent grassland, taking into consideration the various socio-economic and pedo-climatic conditions in Europe.

- benchmarking of grassland outputs based on local and regional site conditions across Europe;
- provision of farm-level tools for the management of permanent grasslands taking into account environmental, economic and social dimensions;
- enhanced cooperation and knowledge exchange;
• improved policy instruments for the conservation of biodiversity and delivery of identified ecosystem services and climate action provided by permanent grasslands and appropriate incentives to reduce conflict between productivity objectives in primary production, biodiversity conservation, carbon sequestration and the delivery of such services;
• integrated scientific support for relevant EU policies (e.g. CAP, WFD, CC objectives);

strengthening of transdisciplinary research and long-lasting implementation of the results obtained through the implementation of the multi-actor approach.

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