A new environmental footprint index for EU agriculture

New methodology to assess agri-environmental schemes will help create a unified approach across Europe and encourage farms to leave a lighter environmental footprint.

Agricultural farms can often leave a high footprint on the environment, prompting the need to identify the impact of each farm in order to help mitigate the damage. The EU-funded project AE-Footprint worked on defining an agri-environmental footprint index (AFI) for farms.

In the light of the multiple objectives of many agri-environment schemes, the index uses an approach in which indicators are weighted to reflect the importance placed on them by stakeholders with reference to the particular environmental issues and farm types prevalent in a particular agri-environmental context.

Farms are then given scores against each indicator, reflecting environmental performance, and the scores combined with the weights to give a structured index. Issues discussed included biodiversity, natural resources and landscape.

Today the AFI approach represents a standardised evaluation tool developed by stakeholders from many countries and tested in 15 case studies, covering a varied range of Europe's farming systems. The project team also considers AFI methodology as an auditing tool to assess environmental issues in different farms and regions in order to encourage sustainable rural development and multifunctional agriculture.

In other words, the emerging unified assessment methodology has considerably enhanced assessment of agri-environmental schemes (AES) in Europe. This is set to help integrate environmental concerns into the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), supporting policymakers, farming organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and other stakeholders to enhance sustainability and alleviate pressure on the environment.

Related information

Report Summary

Final Report Summary - AE-FOOTPRINT (The agri-environmental footprint: Development of a common generic methodology for evaluating the effectiveness of European agri-environmental schemes)

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