



## Proposals for Pillar 2 Farm-environment Local Partnership Projects

### ***Art xx. Local partnership projects addressing environmental priorities***

Grants shall be made available to finance 100% of the costs of local projects to address priority environmental issues in an integrated manner.

RDPs will identify the priority issues which these projects must pursue, and may also identify priority geographical areas and farming systems. The priority issues must relate directly to one or more EU policy goals concerning biodiversity, water, soil and climate change.

Projects will be proposed by local partnerships and will take an integrated approach to delivering, at local level, one or more of the environmental priorities identified in the RDP.

Project approval will be conditional on presentation of a plan demonstrating how the project aims to deliver, at local level, specific objectives identified in the RDP.

All projects must include establishment of a local, multi-disciplinary, qualified team to deliver:

- proactive farm advice on environmental, agronomic, administrative and commercial issues
- locally adapted agri-environment schemes and investment aid (productive and non-productive) – farmer applications to be facilitated by the project advisors but administered by the usual authorities

Projects will include quantitative targets and indicators aligned with the objectives established in the RDP.

Eligible groups will be constituted by partnerships of environmental NGOs and farmers, with expert bodies such as universities and other research centres providing scientific input. Public authorities may also be included in these partnerships.

An initial pilot project is obligatory and will be funded for 1 year in order to study the local challenges to achieving the specific RDP objectives, and to develop an appropriate project proposal.

Eligible groups will present project proposals to regional or national authorities. Authorities will apply a rigorous and totally transparent selection process of projects to be funded.

Eligible costs include project staff and office costs, up to a maximum percentage of the project costs. EU co-finance rate will be 90-100%

Rural Development Networks will be used to promote the project concept and methodology, and to establish a project network for disseminating and learning from good practice.

Projects will be established for 3-6 years, with the option to extend in subsequent programme periods.

Projects should count towards the 50% Pillar 2 expenditure on agri-environment proposed by NGOs.

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## Key issues

EU environment goals for farming cannot be met solely by top-down payment schemes to farmers, plus cross-compliance. This is especially true in more extreme situations, for example areas with extreme environmental challenges, and with extreme marginality and depopulation.

Local, integrated projects that work pro-actively with farmers can have outstandingly positive results. In areas of HNV farming they can address a range of socio-economic issues, leading to greater social recognition and motivation of farmers, and ensuring a critical mass of sustainable activity, farmer succession and improved living conditions.

Local projects working with farmers to tackle environmental challenges already exist, but they are just small hotspots of positive action, usually funded from non-RDP sources such as LIFE, NGOs and private funds. The very fact of their existence shows that RDPs are failing to provide what is needed.

Local people wanting to work together with farmers for positive environmental change currently are forced to turn to non-RDP funding sources (often very limited) to provide what is really needed on the ground. When the funds run out, the projects cease.

Examples of outstanding local projects working for socio-economic and ecological sustainability of HNV farming systems, all established with non-RDP funding, include:

- Conservation of HNV Grasslands – Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds  
[http://bspb.org/grasslands/index\\_en.htm](http://bspb.org/grasslands/index_en.htm)
- Biodiversity conservation and community development in Transylvania – Fundatia ADEPT  
<http://www.fundatia-adept.org/>
- Farming for conservation in the Burren – BurrenLife  
<http://www.burrenlife.com/>

Mainstreaming and continuity of these approaches is needed urgently. Only the CAP has the funds and coverage to achieve this. A new specific measure in the EU regulations is needed to make this idea operational.

LEADER has potential to deliver this approach, but in many countries LEADER projects and programmes are completely divorced from farming and from farmers, and often from environmental NGOs also. A new explicit measure is needed that applies the LEADER approach explicitly to working with farmers on priority environmental objectives.

The new regulation for RDPs should provide explicitly for Member States to allocate grants to local projects run by NGOs and farmers, in partnership with expert bodies such as universities. These should start as pilot projects to assess the needs of specific areas of high priority for addressing environmental and/or territorial challenges, e.g. localities with exceptional biodiversity, water or soil challenges, localities with very severe depopulation.

The RDP should establish a financial envelope for this measure, and criteria by which it will assess the applications and target funding. These processes should be totally transparent, with all applications and evaluations published on authority websites.

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Why is this proposed measure so different from existing Pillar 2 measures, such as farm advisory services, or LEADER? Because it is:

- Targeted on delivering concrete environmental objectives as set out in the RDP, not just for general rural development.
- Targeted on farmers and NGOs, with public authority involvement optional but not obligatory
- Targeted on critical issues areas (including Natura 2000, Water Framework Directive, Soils Strategy...)
- Obligatory farm advisory function and contracting of qualified experts to do this.
- Obligatory role in delivering tailored agri-environment and other RDP support schemes to farmers.

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