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biodiversity and agriculture

the natural abc: nurturing knowledge, regenerating life and protecting the land

CONCLUSIONS

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SEO/BirdLife is the pioneering organisation for nature and biodiversity conservation in Spain. It was founded in 1954 under the name "Sociedad Española de Ornitología", with the aim of working towards the conservation of birds and their habitats.

Our work is based on three main pillars: science, conservation and public outreach. Conservation relies on sound scientific knowledge and the support of society; therefore, research, conservation action and public awareness are all essential.

Our ultimate goal is to achieve a world rich in biodiversity, where humans and nature coexist in harmony.

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FOR FURTHER INFORMATION, PLEASE CONSULT THE ICBA BOOK OF ABSTRACTS AT THE FOLLOWING LINK

THEMATIC AREA 1

SCIENCE FOR SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS

- Agriculture must play an active role in addressing biodiversity loss, considering the relevance of agricultural systems within the territory, and particularly the importance of High Nature Value farming systems.

- Basic scientific research in fields such as agroecology, landscape ecology or conservation biology remains essential to understand the complex interplay between agriculture and biodiversity and to design effective conservation and restoration measures.

- Within the sustainability debate, biodiversity continues to play a secondary role compared to climate change and other environmental issues, despite being the driving force behind ecosystem services, which sustain agricultural production and agroecosystems as a whole.

- Current agricultural policies are generally failing to halt biodiversity loss in agroecosystems, highlighting the need to review both their ambition and effectiveness.

- The effective integration of biodiversity conservation into agriculture requires policies and instruments grounded in scientific evidence, with clear, measurable, and result-oriented indicators capable of credibly assessing their impact.

- The inappropriate selection of indicators may undermine the effectiveness of measures aimed at restoring biodiversity in agricultural systems and foster inconsistent or merely declaratory approaches.

- Biodiversity loss leads to a reduction in ecosystem services, increasing dependence on external inputs and the economic and geopolitical vulnerability of the agricultural system, which eventually jeopardises its sustainability.

THEMATIC AREA 2

KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER AND IMPLEMENTATION

- Theory and empirical evidence guiding actions for biodiversity recovery in agroecosystems are increasingly available. Yet, a structural gap persists between scientific knowledge and its practical application on farms. This gap is reflected in the lack of sufficiently operational technical tolls to transfer this knowledge to the field, and in the need to better align research with the real conditions, priorities and needs of the agricultural sector.

- Biodiversity conservation interventions in agricultural environments must be clear, applicable, verifiable and transferable in order to facilitate their adoption by farmers.

- Knowledge transfer should not be limited to the dissemination of good practices, but should be translated into diagnostic, planning, monitoring and evaluation methodologies that help farmers make concrete decisions about what to do on their farms, where to intervene, when to act and for what purpose.

- Agricultural vocational training should specifically incorporate content on biodiversity management, ecosystem services, cover crops, ecological infrastructure, natural pest regulation, monitoring indicators and production models based on added value.

- Practical and accessible training together with continuous technical support from the administration are key to scaling up proven models.

- Knowledge transfer between farmers, demonstration projects and experience-sharing initiatives are especially effective in driving real changes in agricultural management.

THEMATIC AREA 3

STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS FOR CHANGE IN FARMING SYSTEMS

- Transforming the farming model requires a multi-level approach capable of aligning public policies, production systems and market dynamics.

- The effective implementation of biodiversity-friendly measures on farms requires clear incentives and stable long-term policy and regulatory frameworks that ensure conditions remain consistent over time once measures are adopted.

- There are structural barriers and resistances within the agricultural system that hinder progress towards new agricultural models, and these must be considered when designing agricultural policies.

- Agricultural modernisation should not be understood solely in terms of intensification, technological development and increased scale; it should also include the restoration of ecological functionality, nature-based solutions and production models that improve farm resilience.

- Interventions that integrate biodiversity into farms are often met with resistance by many farmers, who perceive them as impositions from public administrations and associate them with additional costs, increased bureaucracy and lower yields. This underlines the importance of improving how these interventions are framed, communicating their benefits more effectively and ensuring greater coherence across public policies to increase their acceptance.

- Access to machinery and equipment adapted to the needs of biodiversity-friendly farming models, together with adequate financing, is a key structural condition for enabling changes in farming practices.

- There is a lack of alignment between individual practices and policies, preventing biodiversity-oriented measures to have a broad geographic impact.

- The public and private promotion of agricultural biodiversity requires greater budgetary and strategic coherence, so that nature-based solutions are not sidelined in favour of modernisation pathways primarily geared towards productive intensification.

- Communication and collaboration between the administration, technicians, scientists, and farmers are essential to develop conservation actions effective for preserving biodiversity and attractive to farmers.

- Farmers are not only food producers. Their agricultural activities are central for preserving biodiversity and the multiple ecosystem services that biodiversity supports for human well-being, a role that should be acknowledged and supported through public policies and incentives.

THEMATIC AREA 4

FARMERS' DECISIONS, MOTIVATIONS AND ECONOMIC VIABILITY

- Biodiversity can only become a lasting part of farm management when it is compatible with farm profitability.

- Farmers respond to a combination of economic incentives, market signals and social and ethical values.

- Management decisions are constrained by economic uncertainty, regulatory and market pressures, as well as the cultural and productive context of each farm. Within this framework, the perceived risk associated with changing practices has a decisive influence on the transition towards biodiversity-friendly models; building trust is therefore key to facilitating their adoption.

- Production intensification is often a structural response to low-margin market conditions, with limited labour availability further reinforcing the preference for more intensive production models over less productive but potentially higher-value alternatives.

- The appropriate adaptation of traditional practices can improve biodiversity without compromising economic viability.

- Biodiversity is truly incorporated into farm management only when it ceases to be perceived as a set of isolated practices and becomes part of the farmer's decision-making logic.

- When biodiversity is measured, planned and evaluated, it is no longer an intuitive bet and becomes a manageable variable, with potential effects on system stability, cost reduction, natural regulation and farm resilience.

THEMATIC AREA 5

ECOLOGICAL COMPLEXITY AND THE NEED FOR CONTEXT-SPECIFIC APPROACHES

- Evidence shows that biodiversity provides productive benefits, but there are no universal interventions: they must be adapted to each context.
- The effectiveness of biodiversity restoration interventions on farms depends on the ecological and landscape context, making it essential to identify which practices work best in each local context.
- Agricultural practices are not neutral: the same practice may simultaneously generate benefits and drawbacks, making it necessary to assess trade-offs.
- The positive effects of biodiversity restoration measures are thought to be cumulative and unfold over the long term, while evaluation periods are often too short to capture them adequately.

THEMATIC AREA 6

SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND GENERATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF THE TRANSITION

- The transition towards farming systems that integrate biodiversity requires social and cultural change, not merely a change in farming practices.
- Inherited practices, the dominance of conventional production models and concerns about the consequences of shifting away from them hinder the transition towards alternative farming models.
- Without generational renewal, the capacity to transform the agricultural system is limited.
- The transition towards biodiversity-friendly agricultural models also depends on the availability of trained people capable of developing them; generational renewal must therefore be addressed alongside professionalisation, technical training, improved working conditions and better social perception of agricultural work.
- Public policies and related support measures must better recognise and reward the efforts required by farmers and the risks they are expected to bear, to facilitate the transition towards alternative models while ensuring social fairness.

THEMATIC AREA 7

CONSUMERS, MARKETS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF BIODIVERSITY VALUE

- The main limitation to translating biodiversity into added value in food products is its limited visibility at the point of purchase, highlighting the need for clearer, more recognisable and easier-to-understand labelling systems.
- The problem is not the lack of consumer interest, but rather a food system that does not recognise biodiversity conservation as a meaningful criterion for consumer choice.
- Access to information on biodiversity and sustainability is uneven, which may limit some consumers' ability to incorporate these criteria into their purchasing decisions.
- Biodiversity should be communicated as a personal and tangible benefit, linked to health, well-being, resilience and/or quality of life, rather than as an abstract concept.
- The proliferation of labels and messages creates confusion, highlighting the need for simple, integrated, coherent, and credible systems.
- Traceability is essential to ensure that the value associated with biodiversity is not lost along the food chain.
- The valorisation of biodiversity should not depend solely on individual decisions by farmers or consumers; it requires collective structures, such as cooperatives, producer organisations and territorial alliances, capable of transferring this value along the food chain.
- Cooperatives can play a strategic role in building added value associated with biodiversity by pooling production, facilitating traceability, reducing certification costs, strengthening the credibility of the message and improving farmers' negotiating position.
- Price remains a barrier for a significant proportion of consumers, highlighting the need for policy and commercial measures that make products with added environmental value more accessible.

THEMATIC AREA 8

EUROPEAN COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY (CAP) AND TOOLS FOR SCALING UP FARMLAND BIODIVERSITY

- Effective public policies in critical areas must operate as stable and long-term state policies, capable of guaranteeing access to essential goods and promoting structural transformations.

- The decline of farmland biodiversity, evidenced by farmland bird indicators and the simplification of agricultural landscapes, underscores the inability of the current farming model to meet the environmental objectives of the CAP, despite the high volume of public funds allocated to the sector.

- The CAP has significant transformative potential, and it can generate positive results when incorporating eco-schemes, agri-environmental schemes, and well-designed payments that have been adopted by part of the sector.

- Nevertheless, the environmental progress achieved through the CAP remains fragile and tends to weaken in times of crisis, putting at risk conditionality, the safeguarding of environmental funding and the level of ambition for biodiversity and climate.

- In this regard, the CAP must be better aligned with the diverse realities of the agricultural sector, avoiding uniform designs that fail to respond to the productive, social, territorial and ecological conditions of farms, and directing its incentives towards models that generate greater public value in terms of biodiversity, soil, landscape, employment, territorial cohesion and resilience.

- The historical system of subsidies has generated structural distortions, including subsidy concentration, production intensification and land capitalisation, while failing to address the sector's core problems, particularly those related to profitability and access to land.

- To improve the environmental effectiveness of agricultural policy, it is necessary to move towards payments linked to environmental and social outcomes, strengthening the link between public support and positive externalities.

- Result-based payment schemes are particularly suitable for High Nature Value farming systems, although they require careful design, clear evaluation systems and technical support.

- Cooperative approaches and coordination at landscape scale can improve the ecological coherence and social acceptance of measures and should therefore be encouraged, especially when they provide a clear territorial added value.

- Instruments such as public procurement, taxation and subsidies can play a relevant role in positioning sustainable agricultural production.

- The visibility of concrete and replicable experiences is a key tool for building trust, facilitating adoption and scaling up biodiversity-friendly farming models.

- Strengthening European environmental standards requires mirror measures to prevent the relocation of environmental impacts and to ensure fair competition conditions, alongside strengthened international cooperation.

- Environmental certification systems, supported by strong legislative frameworks, are essential to reduce the risk of greenwashing and strengthen the credibility of environmental commitments.

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