

CAP – Common Agriculture Policy (2023-2027)

Why innovations matter for agroforestry?

Increased knowledge and the development of innovations in the agroforestry sector provide farmers with tools to improve the management, production and marketing of their products, thereby enhancing the value of these systems. The results of the Operational Groups developed in the areas of nutrition, natural regeneration, networking, use of new information technologies, plant health, etc., have provided agroforestry farmers with a wealth of important information that can be implemented in their activities, while also promoting the adaptation of these systems to climate change.

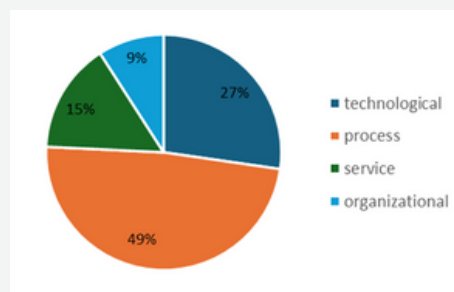


Figure 1: Innovation types for agroforestry



Key statement

Agroforestry, especially in Southern European countries, is due to the use of space by human communities, which have developed agricultural and pastoral activities in wooded areas, creating a complex and multi-purpose system. These agroforestry systems are a good way to adapt to climate change, as they are more resilient to rising temperatures, torrential rain, and long periods of drought, while also promoting resistance to plant pests and diseases. In theory, the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) could be the best instrument for promoting agroforestry in Europe, and farmers who develop these systems should be rewarded for their efforts in building or maintaining agroforestry systems. This would be justified by the significance of these management and production systems, enhancing the social, economic and ecological resilience of vast areas in the EU, mainly in southern Europe.

However, the CAP needs to be reviewed and updated to encourage the development of existing agroforestry areas and the creation of new ones. Indeed, agroforestry systems, which are typical of Southern Europe, are now increasingly acknowledged and a matter of interest in Central and Northern Europe. Nevertheless, it is essential to retrieve their different characteristics according to the regions where agroforestry is (or can be) implemented. Implementing such systems faces the competition of extremely intensive agriculture or forestry and some misunderstanding about their features, primarily their mixed characteristics, which often do not fit into the conventional models in many regions.

Who can do what?

Agroforestry systems are probably the best way for farmers to adapt to climate change, due to the multi features the system gives, providing a complete basket of opportunity, namely provision of ecosystem services, different sources and periods of cash flows, better protection against diseases and plagues, as well as climate edges.

Farmers should try to establish agroforestry by planting trees or promoting natural regeneration in agricultural areas. This objective can be reached by clearing forest trees to a low-density system. Subsequently, activities should be combined, including agriculture, grazing, and forestry, either together or in a dualistic manner.

On the other hand, it should encourage the maintenance of existing agroforestry systems, increasing tree density, favouring natural tree regeneration and densification with new tree plantations. It is also essential to encourage a reduction in soil disturbance by increasing the period of disturbance or by using direct sowing when establishing crops or permanent grasslands. Farmers should look for the adaptation of livestock caring capacity to the characteristics of different agroforestry systems to optimise their use and prevent any damage that animals may cause.





CAP should encourage the establishment of new agroforestry areas, with different types and multiple species, favouring the introduction of species other than traditional ones.

CAP should also encourage the adaptation of livestock caring capacity to the characteristics of different agroforestry systems to optimise their use and prevent any damage that animals may cause. Finally, the CAP should reward farmers who achieve good results in their activity, encouraging everyone to manage their agroforestry holdings better and improve their incomes.



Policy implications

CAP regulations are designed for agriculture or forestry but can be adapted to agroforestry systems. Such adaptations create incompatibilities, however, due to the ineligibility of situations common in agricultural or forestry systems, such as double subsidies for controlling scrub in certain areas, excessive tree density and the management of shrubby or woody weeds. As an example, currently, CAP penalises the maintenance of agroforestry systems by not allowing high levels of shade, i.e. it does not allow high tree densities, which could improve the physical and chemical conditions of the soil and reduce soil erosion processes.

Farmers expect more CAP support, allowing the maintenance of these systems, with a greater capacity to adapt to climate change than pure agricultural systems, and with a greater capacity to produce ecosystem services, such as atmospheric carbon capture and sequestration, water and soil conservation, maintenance of biodiversity levels and maintenance of cultural values associated with these systems. At least, they expect not to be harmed, which often happens.



Conclusions

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) is the preferred instrument for promoting the development of agroforestry areas, which are a very important system for counterbalancing the effects of climate change in Europe. It will have to focus on defining new support measures that enable the maintenance and development of new agroforestry areas, rewarding farmers who achieve good results for their work.

About FOREST4EU

The key objective of FOREST4EU, funded by the Horizon Europe program, is to connect Operational Groups across Europe, fostering synergies and facilitating the exchange of best practices. The project is actively collecting and disseminating valuable information developed by these OGs, creating a central resource for the forestry community.



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