

REPORT ON SURVEY RESULTS

SURVEY TO GRASLAND OWNERS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sub-Action A.6.2: Survey on compensation mechanisms

Grasslands are ecosystems in which plant biomass consists of perennial grasses, sedges and other plants and in which there is a constant removal of grass biomass from the ecosystem by means of animals or humans.¹ Put simply, these are meadows or pastures that people have used for their needs since ancient times. As agricultural intensification increases, the areas in which traditional grassland management methods are used are decreasing, as a result of which many valuable grasslands have been converted into arable land, forested, drained, built-up or have become poorer in plant species. With changes in the population structure and farming spheres, the grasslands in distant areas have been abandoned, which has led to the overgrowth of the areas with trees and bushes, as a result of which the landscape also changes.

In Latvia, grasslands occupy 33% of the total area of managed agricultural lands, of which 95% are sown, 5% are natural. Those agricultural meadows or pastures that have not been ploughed for at least five years are called perennial grasslands. The perennial grasslands have a very beneficial effect on nature and its diversity, so the European Commission has determined that each member state must ensure the preservation of the ratio of perennial grasslands to the total agricultural land. In order to maintain natural grasslands, they must be properly managed.

In order to find out the knowledge and experience of grassland owners or managers in Latvia about the management of grasslands, a survey was conducted according to a methodology developed by researchers in the period from July to December 2021, in which the opinions of 442 grassland owners or managers were determined, of which 16% stated that the grasslands they managed were located in specially protected natural areas (SPNA). The survey included questions about the maintenance of perennial grasslands, their management and business initiatives, the necessary types of support, involvement and cooperation with other grassland managers, etc.

The majority (59%) of the respondents were men, 53% of the respondents were in the age group from 45 to 65 years. 44% of those surveyed had a higher education, 32% had a secondary professional education, 40% of the respondents indicated that their previous education was related to agriculture. Evaluating their household income from agriculture, 38% of the respondents noted that it was insignificant (0-10% of total household income), while for 16% it was significant (>50% of total household income). Regarding their occupation, 35% of the respondents indicated that they manage a homestead household without specialization, 21% of the respondents indicated that it is a place of residence with a meadow as a scenic value, for 21% the main occupation is cattle farming. For 40% of the respondents, the farm was a source of additional income, for 30% it was a full-time farming or grassland management was a hobby.

The answers about the type of grasslands the respondents owned were ambiguous: it can be concluded that the respondents did not understand the differences between the types of grasslands.

The management of perennial grasslands was mostly (70%) organized by the owners themselves as natural persons, who (42%) had their own equipment for managing grasslands. 60% of the respondents mowed it, 35% managed it by a combined method. In most cases (48%) cut grass was given to neighbours/other people free of charge, used for fodder (47%). In the future, 93% of the respondents planned to continue managing the grasslands they owned. 37% of the respondents indicated that they had restored some perennial grassland in the last five years, while 17% of the respondents admitted that they had stopped maintaining some perennial grassland in the last five years. The most frequently mentioned requirements of regulatory acts that hinder the management of biologically valuable grasslands, indicated by the respondents, were: mowing term and frequency, prohibition of chopping in the field, mandatory collection/harvesting of hay, prohibition of levelling the field, permitted number of animals per 1 ha. The following factors were mentioned as the biggest obstacles to maintaining perennial grasslands: lack of appropriate equipment (51%), nowhere to put the cut grass (49%), grassland management requires too much money (46%), the profitability of other types of land use (42%). Evaluating cooperation with surrounding neighbours, in the last three years 48% of the respondents had received help/equipment/services from other persons, 43% - had not received, 14% - had provided services to others.

The most important values of perennial grasslands mentioned by the respondents were the following: improving the quality of the landscape by preserving the traditional rural landscape (61%); food for pollinating insects (61%); diversity of insects (54%), diversity of wild plants (52%). The respondents were asked to indicate which products they obtained from grasslands: fodder (74%), medicinal plants and herbal teas (50%), meat products (24%), milk and milk products (21%) and honey (20%). These products were mostly obtained for self-consumption or sold/exchanged to neighbours. 2% of the respondents stated that they exported their production - meat and meat products.

The type of financial support most often (72%) indicated by the respondents, in the period from 2018 to 2021, was the receipt of the single area payment. 38% indicated that they had received payments for biologically valuable grasslands, the same number (38%) - greening payments. The opinions of the respondents were divided as to whether the amount of financial support so far motivated the maintenance of biologically valuable grasslands: 31% believed that it motivated, the same number or 31% believed that it did not motivate, and 38% did not have an opinion on this issue. A large number of the respondents stated that it would be necessary to increase the existing support, setting the amount of support at 200-300 EUR/ha. In order to promote natural diversity and other values in perennial grasslands, the majority (77%) of the respondents would prefer combined support, when both the performance of the activity and the achieved result - the presence of species - were controlled. The following most important types of support were mentioned: financial support (80%), advisory support (57%) and technical support for ensuring appropriate grassland management (41%).

The most acceptable form of training would be face-to-face group training (76%), online lectures (61%) and individual training (60%). Perennial grassland managers would be interested in the perennial grassland restoration activities if associated costs were compensated, for example, bush removal (54%) and grass cutting and grass collection (50%).

The respondents would be interested in participating in the following grassland protection measures: assessing the diversity of flowers in their grasslands (70%), developing a management plan for their grasslands and fulfilling it within the framework of the commitments (60%). In order to engage in the aforementioned protection measures, the following prerequisites were important: confidence in one's



knowledge (83%), organized opportunities to improve one's knowledge (81%) and freely available advice throughout the support activity (81%).

When assessing their knowledge of the species found in perennial grasslands, the respondents were self-critical and rated it as satisfactory or weak. 47% of the respondents rated their knowledge of flowering plant species as satisfactory, 38% - of nesting bird species. The knowledge about species of diurnal butterflies (47%) and about other insect species (43%) was rated as weak in the self-assessment. 39% of those respondents who indicated that they managed a SPNA confirmed that they were aware of the existence of a nature protection plan, but almost as many - 34% - did not know whether such a plan had been developed. 29% of the respondents indicated that they used the information contained in the plan, 25% carried out the management measures provided for in the plan. The respondents would be happy to participate in working groups and seminars (34%), in the public discussion of the nature plan (23%). 65% of the respondents would use the information about natural values and management measures included in the nature protection plan in the form of an interactive map (for example, in the Natural Data Management System "Ozols"). In general, the knowledge and actions of beneficiaries from the agro-environment measure to maintain biodiversity on grassland differ from non-beneficiaries.

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