



# The future of European semi-natural grasslands

Workshop report

20-21 October, Konstanz, Germany

53 participants from 14 different European countries were assembled for two days on the beautiful Isle of Mainau to discuss the future of semi-natural grasslands.

The overall aim of the workshop was to identify gaps of knowledge and to suggest new research projects necessary for the conservation of European semi-natural grasslands. What are the main obstacles for conservation? What needs to be done concerning research and sharing of knowledge within and between countries?

## **Background**

In the last decades, most European countries have seen a dramatic decrease in the number of farms with grazing animals, leading to decreasing areas of well-managed semi-natural grasslands. This is the effect of an economic system that favours standardized “bulk” production of food and fibre, and disfavors small scale farmers in Europe’s economic periphery since it does not give full value to the variety of public goods produced on marginal grasslands. The new and acceding EU countries still have vast areas of well-managed grasslands, but the management is threatened by the economic changes induced by increased globalisation and a high demand for cereals and bio energy. Semi-natural grasslands form base for the farmers’ production of food. There can also be a production of specialised products such as organic meat, branded cheese, and herbal medicine. These grasslands have a unique flora and fauna, and grassland habitats are among the most species-rich in the world. Semi-natural grasslands are highly appreciated for their esthetical values, for recreation, and as a component in a desired landscape view, thereby forming a prerequisite for the economically important tourism in rural areas. Furthermore, grasslands are important for the local cultural identity in many areas, and to cultural history, being used in festivities and traditions, and forming a link to pre-industrial life and economy. Last but not least, they are an important positive factor concerning climate change, they provide ecosystem services supporting the entire agricultural landscape (such as pollination, pest control, and nutrient catchment), thereby making them a requirement for an ecologically sustainable agricultural production at large. Accordingly, the increasing loss of semi-natural grasslands is a serious threat to the rural economy, to biodiversity conservation, to natural and cultural heritage, and to a sustainable rural development.

## Initiative

The workshop was initiated by the Swedish Biodiversity Centre (CBM) in cooperation with European Forum on Nature Conservation and Pastoralism (EFNCP) and the University of Rottenburg. CBM has previously managed the research programme HagmarksMISTRA (*Management of semi-natural grasslands – economy and biodiversity*) an interdisciplinary research programme between 2001 and 2008. The main goal for the programme has been to find the best solutions for different types of meadows and semi-natural grasslands to preserve and enhance biodiversity together with other values, while showing respect and consideration for the local land-use history and acknowledging farmers experiences and perceptions, reaching stability by means of an ecologically sound management of the grasslands and sustainability by means of profitable production- and business models. The research from HagmarksMISTRA has successfully influenced the Swedish agricultural policy concerning semi-natural grasslands. With these experiences CBM want to initiate a research cooperation concerning high nature semi-natural grasslands on a European level.

## Outcome

Initiated European research network. Initially consisting of:

- 1) e-mail group
- 2) compilation of projects related to semi-natural grassland (to be compiled)
- 3) summary of discussions on identified gaps of knowledge (below)
- 4) future common projects???

## Group discussions

In this report the topics discussed are listed below. The participants have received the scanned summaries.

No	Topic	Participants
1	How can we increase the monetary (economic) value to the farmer of the products and services from semi-natural grasslands	Paul Terwan Alan Hopkins Hein Korevaar Clunie Keenleyside Andre Chassot Rita merete Buttenschon Lisbeth Nielsen Thomas Walter
2	Do we need cartographic inventories of semi-natural grazing land or forage (snf)? How can we decide what is valuable and what is not	?
3	Do we have a consistent definition of semi-natural	Davy McCracken

	grasslands across Europe and knowledge of where they are? Do we need this? If we do, how do we achieve this?	Rainer Luick Bettina Tonn Jörgen Wissman Felix Richter Manuel shneider Daniel weiss
4	What are the most effective methods of persuading politicians and policy makers to take the decisions that will help farmers / other people to manage semi-natural grasslands for biodiversity	Sue Collins Eric Lepmets Flavio DaRonch Lisbeth Nielsen Davy McCracken
5	Agro-environmental schemes in Europe	Barbara Stäheli Manuel Schneider Marie Stenseke Eric Lepmets Ana Iuga Felix Richter J-O Helldin
6	Experiences in re-establishing species-rich meadows by sowing	Alan Hopkins Florin Pacurar Albert Reif Barbara Staeheli Posch Daniel Suter Bettina Tonn Flavio DaRonch Jörgen Wissman
7	Quantitative targets	Oliver Balmer Thomas Walter Thomas Kaiser Gisbert Kuhn Claire Collyer
8	Local participation	Ana Iuga Barbara Staeheli Posch Marie Stenseke
9	New (HNV) definitions for pillar 1 money and problems arising with xxxx pillar 2 money	Blandine Romain Eric Bignal Claire Collyer Hein Korevaar Paul Terwan

10	How do we actively <u>engage</u> land managers in the conservation of semi-natural grasslands across Europe	Åke Berg James Moran Oliver Balmer Brendan Dunford Barbara Staeheli Posch Anton Gazenbeck Flavio DaRonch Marie Stenseke
11	Possibilities for landscape planning – species with different requirements. + Grazing management – selection of appropriate conserving objectives	James Moran Gwyn Jones Anja Borsje Liv S. Nilsen Åke Berg Mirka Cierna- Plassmann Guy Beaufoy Sue Collins
12	What are the desired conservation of extensive and intensive grasslands on an individual farm or within a region	Rainer Luick Blandine Romain Eric Bignal Davy McCracken Andre Chassot Hein Korevaar Marie Boekhoff
13	Farmers perspective and contexts. Similarities and differences over Europe	Brendan Dunford Marie Stenseke Marike Boekhoff
14	Energy production from semi-natural grassland. Biomass ad a management alternative	Felix Richter Monila Heiermann, Rita Merete Buttenschon Anton Gazenbeck Lisbeth Nielsen Paul Terwan J-O Helldin Branko Kramberger Tsipe Aavik Daniel Weiss
15	Using knowledge of traditional management to improve current management	Eva Gustavsson Ana Iuga Clunie Keenleyside Diethild Wanke

		Anna Dahlström Evelyn Rusdea Florin Pacurar Albert Reif
16	Defining species requirements to derive management guidelines	Benjamin Hill Jurg Hoffmann Eike Lepmets Manuel Schneider
17	How do we evaluate wider environmental benefits (& disbenefits) of semi-natural grasslands and their farming systems	Alan Hiopkins Andre Chassot Felix Richter Manuel Schneider Bettina Tonn Åke Berg Guy Beaufoy
18	Research on wether meat/milk from HNV grassland has different quality (texture, fats etc. ) than “classic” meat/milk	Rita Buttenschen, Diethild Wanke, Thomas Kaiser, Daniel Weiss, Rainer Luick, Brendan Dunford, Liv S. Nilsen Thomas Walter Gisbert Kuhn Anton Gazenbeck
19	Many semi-subsistence farmers “fall through the net” of agricultural support payment. Does this matter – for semi-natural grasslands? For the farmers?	Clunie Keenleyside Jörgen Wissman Branko Kramberger Eva Gustavsson Marika Boekhoff Anna Dahlström Gwyn Jones Florin Pacurar Evelyn Rusdea James Moran Alberg Reif
20	Need for a new terminology – semi-natural grasslands? Grassland, scrubland, grazed woodland. What about semi-natural vegetation that is grazed and HVN but not strictly grassland	Blandine Romain Guy Beaufoy Tsipe aavik Eike Lepmets Diethild Wanke Benjamin Hill

		Gwyn Jones
21	Common projects combining the biodiversity issue and the cultural heritage one	Eva Gustavsson Anna Dahlström Florin Pacurar J.O. Helldin Sue Collins Albergt Reif Evelyn Rusdea
22	How do we prevent reduction of values in the European "hot-spots"? Spec. East Europe	Anna Dahlström Jörgen Wissman Daniel Suter Lisbeth Nielsen Marike Boekhoff Davy McCracken Sue Collins Flavio DaRonch Hein korevaar Albert Reif Anton Gazenbeck Florin Pacurar Evelyn Rusdea
23	In targeting policy, how do we indentify "semi-natural" or is the real distinction between "valuable" + "less valuable"? can we do without many species / atlases / inventions?	Gwyn Jones Andre Chassot Thomas Walter Guy Beaufoy Clunie Keenleyside Liv S. Nilsen Eva Gustavsson Gisbert Kuhn Åke Berg Rita Merete Buttenchen

### **Participants' final reflections and "take home messages"**

One clear need is a common definition of grasslands in Europe. We need to have a common understanding on what semi-natural grasslands are. What is a grassland, how is it managed, what does the vegetation consist of?

There is a clear link between cultural heritage and biodiversity. Semi-natural grasslands must be understood in a historical context, so that we can learn for future management. Countries in east Europe are extremely valuable for several reasons;

both for being biological “hot spots” and for the opportunity to learn about traditional management practices that will enable better management practices.

It is very important to be able to influence the policies concerning grasslands. We need a mass influence in Brussels. No the least for the benefit of less favoured areas. The group discussions at the workshop reached a barrier, consisting of policy limitations.

In order to save values in semi-natural grasslands we need to have the farmers and community perspective, and also include history and traditions. In the discussions it became clear that we often have the same problems in many different countries, and the farmers are central. How can we create valued products from semi-natural grasslands? Grass biomass energy production may be a potential product. There is a need for many different solutions because of the different conditions and possibilities farmers face, including the economic and social situation. Farm management must also be linked with biodiversity. Research need to be in a wider context, including the implementation practical aspects.

There is a diversity of approaches out in Europe. Maybe the solution is to go back to locally adapted systems? Given the large diversity, is there a general solution? How can we gain more impact from local initiatives? What is the right level to address, administrative and/or local?

We apparently have many problems in common. We also have a common vision, next we must go for finding the solutions. We do not start from scratch. Maybe there is no big lack of knowledge, but more a matter of communication. Communication is important both between and within disciplines. Exchange itself is valuable and exchange of experiences may be underestimated. There are good examples for communication from many areas. But we need to know more about what are functioning methods to communicate? Is there an internet forum for semi-natural grasslands? There are still big scientific gaps concerning practice and policy.

The workshop was well arranged and one important gain was the discussions and meeting all people. But what concrete will come out of it? Did we really identify the knowledge gaps? May be we should have focused more on questions.