AGROFORESTRY AND THE ENVIRONMENT IN THE FUTURE EUROPEAN CAP

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Abstract

Agroforestry has to play a key role in the next Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) with regard to the environment. Cross-compliance, Pillar I and Pillar II intend to protect the woody component in agricultural lands. However, the implementation is rather complex and usually inefficient as highlights the court of auditors. This paper summarizes the main points that will make agroforestry implementation more feasible for European farmers after 2020 CAP.

Keywords: cross-compliance; greening; Pillar I; Pillar II

Introduction

The Common Agrarian Policy (CAP) is one of the star and most important policies that Member States of the European Union develop together. It is implemented in periods of seven years, being the current one from 2014 to 2020 (Mosquera-Losada et al. 2016). The post 2020 CAP is intended to be more sustainable in Europe than the previous one, which means that production increase should be encompassed with environment and social improvements and respect, as highlights the European Commission communication on the Common Agricultural Policy post-2020 entitled "The future of food and farming". This communication establishes the main objectives of the CAP (Figure 1) to which agroforestry can definitively contribute. Environment is usually promoted and protected in specific parts of the CAP such as cross-compliance, greening in the Pillar I and in Pillar II. This paper examines how agroforestry is considered by the CAP trying to provide suggestions for the post 2020 CAP.
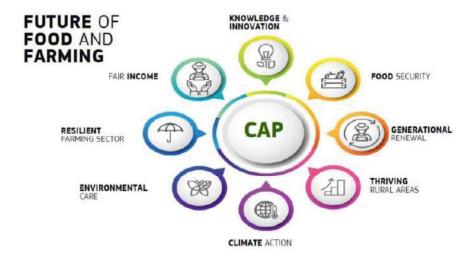
Figure 1: Main of objectives of the future of food and farming (EU 2017).

Agroforestry and cross-compliance

Between 2014 and 2020, the CAP is being administered in two big sections: Pillar I, which is completely funded by the European Commission and Pillar II, the Rural Development Programs, which is co-funded between European Commission and the Member States and is more related to environment. Farmers intending to receive direct payments should fulfil cross-compliance rules.

Farmers receiving direct payments through Pillar I and Pillar II have to comply with 13 Statutory Management Requirements (SMR) and standards for maintaining the land in Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) known as cross-compliance or conditionality. The SMRs are associated to issues such as water, biodiversity, food and feed laws, plant health, food safety, and animal welfare. The GAEC rules in 2014-2020 (Annex 2, Regulation 1306/2013) are focused on water, soil and carbon stocks, and landscape features. GAEC condition number 7 deals with "*the retention of landscape features, including where appropriate, hedges, ponds, ditches, trees in line, in group or isolated, field margins and terraces, and including a ban on cutting hedges and trees during the bird breeding and rearing season and, as an option, measures for avoiding invasive plant species*" (Annex 11 in regulation 1306/2013), which is highly relevant for agroforestry. Therefore, within cross-compliance, there is clear recognition that integrating woody vegetation can make agriculture more sustainable. However, the promotion and protection of this woody component in agricultural lands appear in a horizontal way through the cross-compliance, greening and different rural development measures (up to 27 measures protect or promote agroforestry practices across different countries), usually linked to landscape features. However, agroforestry is not recognized as such, in spite of the emphasis on woody vegetation preservation in the CAP. Landscape features preservation (linked to GAEC condition 7 described above) aims to protect, amongst other features, scarce woody vegetation in some European agricultural landscapes. However, the administrative burden for administrators in identifying and monitoring these features has made landscape features control difficult. The EU Court of Auditors (2009) has highlighted the lack of effectiveness of cross-compliance in regard to the protection of landscape features (associated with isolated trees, and trees and woody vegetation with different organizational frames in the landscape). Moreover, the current activities only focus on the preservation of landscape features but not on their promotion.

There are three main categories of agricultural land use when determining direct payments: arable, permanent pasture or permanent grassland (including herbaceous species other than grass, also browsable shrubs and trees), and permanent crops (i.e. nurseries, multi-annual crops and short rotation coppice) on which agroforestry practices linked to this specific type of land use can be used (Mosquera-Losada et al. 2018).

Agroforestry and Pillar I

When tree species are not designated as permanent crops by Annex 1 of Regulation 1308/2013 farmers loose the direct payments unless they are identified as landscape features with a maximum of 100 trees per hectare if arable land or permanent grassland is the main land cover (Regulation 640/2014). Moreover, member states can also select the pro-rata system on which the woody component of permanent grassland is discounted in spite of the ecosystem services they deliver (Mosquera-Losada et al. 2016). However, grazed and intercropped permanent crops areas that deliver Annex 1 (Regulation 1308/2013) products are eligible for Pillar I payments. Moreover, the integration of permanent crops on arable and permanent grassland (at any density) are also eligible for Pillar I payments (Mosquera-Losada et al. 2017).

In addition to the burden linked to identifying landscape features that has been recognized as a major problem by the EU Court of Auditors (2009), farmers have two main concerns regarding the eligibility of agroforestry:

a) the limitation to 100 trees per hectare in the current CAP, without identifying these trees as mature trees, prevents farmers from establishing, promoting and using agroforestry practices. Moreover, those trees with less than 4 m of width are not protected and discounted from farmers' direct payments.

b) the introduction of agroforestry with less than 100 trees per hectare is not clearly linked to the final tree density. This could be considered against basic silvicultural principles that link plantations with initial higher densities (low canopy cover) to select better trees when they become mature (interpretation of the 100 mature tree/ha rule in Article 9 of Regulation 640/2014). The argument to limit the tree density is to guarantee agricultural production, but, significant agricultural production can be obtained under different trees combinations with different densities when trees are young (low tree canopy cover) or old. There should be mechanisms for farmers to establish, maintain, and improve agroforestry practices on their land whilst retaining full direct payments of Pillar I. One way to achieve this is for farmers to identify "agroforestry practices" and secure Pillar I payments through the development of an agroforestry management plan.

Therefore CAP should propose agroforestry practices on arable and permanent grassland should be fully eligible if developed with i) a "management plan" including a minimum tree density (to be selected by member states), an initial tree density, and the pursuit of a final maximum tree density that should be less than 100 mature trees per hectare (if no Established Local Practices are declared) or ii) through Measure 222 (CAP 2007-2013) and 8.2 (CAP 2014-2020). In order to simplify eligibility rules for direct payments for agroforestry practices, we propose that an 'agroforestry option' should be implemented in all three categories of land use (i.e. arable land, permanent grassland and permanent crops) that, on one hand will make farmers aware of this sustainable land use, and on the other hand will make policy makers aware of the lands that are using these techniques. This would be self-declared by the farmer and supported/evidenced by the submission of a management plan. Agroforestry practices established with permanent crops should be promoted as it does not cause CAP eligibility problems.

Agroforestry and Pillar II

Pillar II promotes the establishment of agroforestry through 27 measures. There is one measure, measure 8.2 that aims at establishing agroforestry practices and 27 measures that both promotes agricultural products delivery in areas with a woody component or the establishment of a woody component (trees and/or shrubs) in agricultural lands that mostly not recognizes agroforestry as such. Main associated problems with this type of measures are that they did not allow to improve already existing agroforestry practices. OMNIBUS regulation have helped to overcome some of the problems of 8.2 measures as they have included the improvement of already existing agroforestry practices and systems like the dehesa and the montado besides the establishment of agroforestry practices.

Acknowledgements

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