

Delimiting areas with natural handicaps in the European Union: Common criteria and policy implications

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ABSTRACT

New criteria based on climate, soil and terrain parameters have been developed for the future delimitation of the Intermediate Less Favoured Areas (LFAs) support, a measure of the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. The criteria are extensively based on soil parameters like soil drainage, texture and stoniness, rooting depth and chemical properties currently available within the European Soil Information System (EUSIS) of the European Soil Data Centre (ESDAC). Additional parameters related to climate (temperature, heat stress) and terrain (slope) can be easily combined within a fully interoperable geographic information system (GIS) to provide derived criteria, like soil moisture balance, as well as the ultimate delimitation of the areas with natural constraints to be eventually adopted as Intermediate Less Favoured Areas by EU Member States. The application of integrated information systems providing the necessary data at the various scales in a common assessment framework will be demonstrated in some test cases, highlighting the potential benefits of fully interoperable geographic information systems complying with the Infrastructure for Spatial Information in the European Community (INSPIRE) directive.

Keywords: Less Favoured Areas, Natural Resource Management, Agricultural Policies, Spatial Data Infrastructure