

# VOICES FROM THE FIELD

No. 7 / 10



contracts**2.0**



Involve farmers in monitoring the effects of agri-environmental measures

## KEY MESSAGE

Monitoring the results of agri-environmental contracts is essential to evaluate their effectiveness, but is also important for motivational and learning purposes, especially when involving farmers. Future research and innovation actions should therefore focus on finding robust indicators and cost-effective monitoring tools that could be used by farmers or farm advisors.



Have you ever wondered what farmers would propose when asked to hold the pen for the next generation of agri-environmental contracts? In the Contracts2.0 project, this question was the starting point to establish 13 contract innovation labs (CILs) with practitioners (including mainly farmers, but also landowners, NGO staff, local government officers) in 9 European countries. Practitioners were asked to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of new and existing contracts, and to propose so-called “dream contracts”. This brief reflects the opinion of the practitioners of 13 CILs throughout Europe, without claiming to be representative for the whole European farming community. This series is meant for all who are involved and interested in the design of the next generation of agri-environmental contracts.

© Christoph Scholze/EC/AFLE

## ■ Why is it important?

To evaluate the effectiveness of agri-environmental measures and to enable improvements when needed, it is key to have a consistent monitoring system in place. Knowledge about the effects of agri-environmental contracts is important not only to keep motivating funders to finance them, but also for farmers to stay committed to their contract. Involving farmers in performance monitoring activities is perceived to stimulate farmers' engagement and learning. In addition, it creates opportunities to develop more results-based payment schemes.

## ■ Opportunities

In all [Contract Innovation Labs](#) (CILs), farmers indicated they wanted to know more about the effects of their efforts. Such feedback allows them to **better sense their achievements, encourages them to continue the contracts and also adapt measures** when needed.

However, in several member states, information on the actual effects of measures seems to be either lacking or farmers don't have access to it. Monitoring is mainly focused on the process (compliance of actions with predefined rules) rather than on outcomes. This approach to monitoring and control is viewed rather negatively by farmers as it reduces the monitoring to an administrative burden.

Most CILs indicated that ideally monitoring should pay attention to **both actions and results**, regardless of whether the payments are based on actions or results. Of course, for results-based contracts, having a well-established results monitoring system in place is crucial for setting payments. However, for all contract types this could also promote a better understanding of the links between a farmer's actions and results, which in turn can help to **improve the design, implementation and advice** on agri-environmental contracts.

The majority of CILs are convinced that **farmers or farmer groups should be involved** in the monitoring of agri-environmental contracts. Farmer collectives show a real interest in monitoring the results, making them an ideal partner for this activity. Involving farmers in monitoring results can be carried out in different ways, from informing and discussing the monitoring outcomes with them on their farm, to engaging them in self-assessment. Besides an **empowering effect**, it may stimulate them **to learn more** about the agri-environment and how to improve it. The UK results-based payments pilot has good experiences involving farmers for self-assessment, with a proven high degree of reliability.



## ■ Challenges

Some challenging aspects of monitoring the performance of agri-environmental contracts are:

- The **costs** of monitoring are perceived to be high, and funding for this element is often described as lacking. Involving farmers in monitoring and using new technologies could reduce these costs.
- Finding **robust and sensitive indicators** that are readily usable by farmers can be very challenging. Farmer collectives in Ireland have developed some good examples of indicators for various ecosystems (see below).

*(see below)*

## ■ Example from Ireland

Wild Atlantic Nature Results-based Payment Schemes: Habitat quality is assessed at the field level using a scorecard specifically designed to evaluate key aspects of each habitat. The scorecard allocates scores that reflect the quality of the habitat in terms of specific indicators including biodiversity (plant species), water management, vegetation structure, exposed soil and damaging activities. The better the quality of the habitat, the higher the score awarded in each section. Habitats receive a final score on a scale of 0 (low) to 10 (high) and the level of payments are linked to this score.





If you have further questions, you may contact  
Sven Defrijn: sven.defrijn@boerennatuur.be

All Practice Briefs can be found here: <https://www.project-contracts20.eu/in-brief/>



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement no. 818190.

