MOBILE ADVISORY TEAMS FOR HNV FARMERS

LOCATION:
Ponor SPA and Bessaparski hills SPA, Bulgaria

HNV SYSTEM:
Extensive grazing, extensive and organic orchards and gardens

SCALE OF OPERATION:
2 mobile teams working in 2 regions in Bulgaria, 200 farmers consulted

KEYS TO SUCCESS:
Real commitment and skills of local team to promote High Nature Value (HNV) farming practices

TIMESPAN:
2007 - 2011

STORY IN A NUTSHELL

The mobile advisory teams (MAT) were created in the framework of project „Conservation of globally important biodiversity in high nature-value semi-natural grasslands through support for the traditional local economy", funded by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and implemented by Bulgarian Society for Protection of Birds (BSPB) during 2007-2011 period.

The aims of the mobile advisory teams were to consult farmers on new knowledge and skills for HNV farming practices; funding opportunities; preparation of business plans; compliance with the EU standards in the dairy sector (good hygiene practices; production practices, storage and use of manure; good agricultural practices, etc.); marketing activities (direct sales; advice on design and standardization of the jars' shape and labelling; linking farmers and consumers, organization of joint visits at fairs and exhibitions, etc.).

WHAT DOES THE INNOVATION ACHIEVE FOR HNV FARMING?

In the 2007-2011 period, the mobile advisory teams:

- Assisted the development and implementation of pilot AE and Natura 2000 grants schemes for HNV conservation, tailored to the specific regional conditions. The pilot grant scheme supported 83 projects for a total amount of 213017 €.
- Organised trainings and gathered proposals for simplification of the rules and procedures for the implementation of Natura 2000 measure and Agri-environmental payments measure of the Bulgarian Rural Development Programme 2007-2013.
- Promoted the national Agri-environmental scheme for restoration and maintenance of HNV farmland.
- More than 200 farmers were consulted how to maintain the high nature value of their grasslands and why this is necessary. According to the independent final evaluation the project directly contributed to the conservation of 36 000 ha of HNV farmland.

CRITICAL FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

The innovation of setting up mobile advisory teams (MAT) is a response to farmers' needs for adequate and on-time advice, information and consultation (on biodiversity conservation and links between farming activities and nature conservation) in the HNV areas.
The advices were provided on the farms and were tailored to the specific needs of each farm.
The advices were free of charge for the farmers in the project pilot regions.
The skills, personal belief and motivation of the team helped them to gain the trust of the HNV farmers and local authorities.

LESSONS LEARNT

- The mobile advisory teams became a trusted partner both for farmers and for the regional offices of Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Forestry and State Fund Agriculture – Paying Agency.
- Face-to-face contact and farm-specific advice are required to effectively engage farmers and local authorities in conservation of HNV farming systems.
- Advisory services and consultation for HNV farms are better done by a small teams of experts that have background and experience both in agriculture and biodiversity conservation.

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