North Rhine-Westphalia (DE)

The Region

In North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), as a densely populated federal state, around half of the land area is used for agriculture. The agricultural structure is according to the topographical conditions diverse: In the high-yielding regions with their fertile soils, intensive agriculture is practiced, with grain (50%), maize (27%), rapeseed and sugar beet being the most dominant crops. Along the Dutch border there are large fattening farms for pigs and poultry, while the low mountain ranges are characterized by extensive cattle breeding farms. The farm size varies strongly, with the average farm holding about 43 ha.

Objective

General

The aim of the CIL NRW is to develop economically viable contractual concepts, which increase the willingness of farmers to implement voluntary environmental services. In the process the various perspectives and expertise of the involved stakeholders need to be taking into account and at the same time the quality and effectiveness of the implemented measures need to be ensured.

Targeted Public Goods

The CIL NRW strives to preserve the diverse agricultural landscapes of the region. In addition, the habitats of (endangered) species that are adapted to open agricultural landscapes are to be protected. The focus lies on birds, insects and small mammals as well as the native flora.

Contact CIL NRW

- Stiftung Westfälische Kulturlandschaft
  Tanja Brüggemann ✉ brueggemann@kulturlandschaft.nrw
- Stiftung Rheinische Kulturlandschaft
  Amelie Hassels ✉ a.hassels@rheinische-kulturlandschaft.de
- Deutscher Bauernverband e.V.
  Christine Hamon ✉ c.hamon@bauernverband.net

Methods & Results

The CIL NRW regularly invites farmers, advisors, and members of the environmental and agricultural administration as well as scientists from the nearby universities to joint workshops.

In these workshops (some of which were carried out digitally), the participants first worked out the success factors and the barriers of currently existing agri-environmental programs. Elements that were rated positively by the participants are, for example, the broad spectrum of the agri-environmental measures on offer, the voluntary nature of participation, the already existing advisory structure or the possibility of generating an income by implementing the measures in marginal areas.

Aspects that are viewed more critically are, for example, the high bureaucratic effort that arises when participating in Agri-environmental (AECM) programs, the lack of flexibility or the risk of disproportionate sanctions in the event of (possibly unintentional) deviations from the agreed content of the contract.

The CIL NRW has set itself the goal of examining the “collective approach” (based on the Dutch collective model) as a potentially promising contractual solution: This approach addresses many of the barriers mentioned above and has the potential to strengthen the implementation of voluntary environmental services in agriculture by making participation in the programs more attractive and at the same time increasing the effectiveness of the measures implemented.

Based on the previous results in the CIL NRW, on the one hand, contract modules were developed which have the potential to overcome the above-mentioned barriers regarding the (general) participation in existing AECM programs. In addition, in the proposed concept were modules included that explicitly relate to the implementation of environmental measures within a collective. Also the potential application of a results-based component was taken into account in order to additionally strengthen the flexibility when implementing agri-environmental measures.

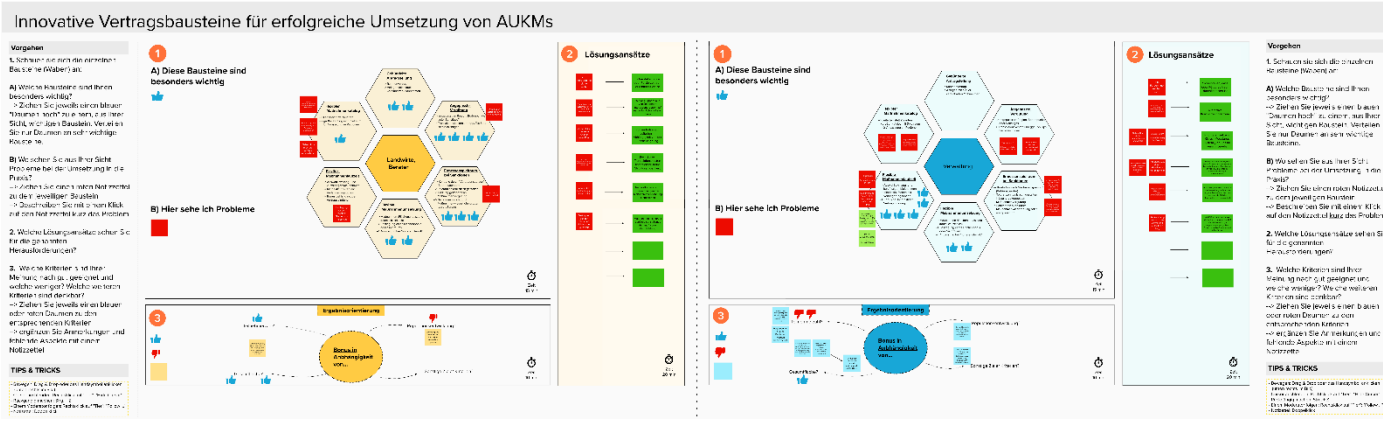

Fig. 1: Working out “must-have”- modules of the „ideal” contract during a (digital) CIL workshop (using the whiteboard-app Mural)

North Rhine-Westphalia (DE)

Potential Contract Solution ("Dream Contract")

"The Biodiversity Collective"

Objective

The contract concept to be developed aims to increase the willingness to participate in agri-environmental programs and thus to increase the total area under agri-environmental and climate measures (AECM) in the region. The participants of the CIL NRW expressed their wish to examine the potential of a version of the "collective approach" known as the "Dutch model", adapted to German conditions. The "collective" acts as an intermediary between farmers and administration. In this role, the collective is also able to mitigate the risk of sanctions by planning so-called "buffer areas" and thus reducing an often-mentioned reservation of many farmers regarding the enrolment in AECM programs. Another important feature of the cooperative concept is greater flexibility in implementing the measures through close coordination with the management consultants or field officers. The coordination of suitable measures on a regional level is intended to improve the connectivity of habitats and thus contribute to increasing biodiversity-levels in the region.

Contract Type

- PES / Agri-environment- and climate measures

Contract Features

- Collective Implementation
- Action-based Payments
- (Potential Results-based Top-up)

Targeted Public Goods

Biodiversity

Landscape & Scenery

Cultural Heritage

Measures

The measures are selected according to the requirements in specific regions or locations, taking into account ecological and ideally also economic (productivity) aspects, and are developed jointly by representatives of agriculture and nature conservation. This should lead to an increased ecological benefit, easier integration into the agricultural production cycles, a better understanding of different points of view as well as a legitimation of measures by all actors involved. The positive impact of the measures on the indigenous flora and fauna (esp. Farmland birds and insects/pollinators) is however the overriding goal. Examples for specific measures are flower strips, skylark plots, wide row spacing in cereals.

Actors & Structure

At the centre of the collective contract model is a group of farmers who implement the measures in accordance with the agreed management plan. A core team manages the administrative tasks arising from the group's effort and supports farmers with application, implementation, and payment issues. The farmers are involved in important decisions within the collective (e.g. definition of rules and statutes). A vital task of the collective will also be to raise awareness among farmers and society regarding biodiversity and the potential of nature conservation measures within agricultural production.

Contract Duration

The optimal contract duration varies depending on the type of farm (grassland / permanent crops vs. arable land). While contract terms of 5 years (or even longer) appear sensible for permanent crops or grassland, many farmers would like shorter contract terms on arable land. Therefore, depending on the area of application, a flexible contract duration seems to make sense, whereby the following two options are conceivable:

1. A framework agreement that stipulates the main contractual terms and conditions, as well as a contract for measures in which the agreed measures can be flexibly extended, adapted or supplemented each year OR
2. A five-year contract for all measures with the possibility of termination

Payments

The economic viability of the participation of the respective farm (e.g. through attractive financing of measures) is a basic requirement for the success of the collective and the long-term commitment of the farmers. The remuneration for the implementation of the measures comes from public funds (EU co-financed) and the farmers are preferably paid via the collective as the coordinating body. The remuneration is based on the measures implemented in accordance with the contract and may be supplemented by a results-based bonus component.

If the increased recreational value of the agricultural landscape or other ecosystem services are communicated accordingly, this could bring about additional advantages for possible direct marketing or tourism in the region.

Controls & Checks

In this model the EU Payment agency does not check the individual farmer, but the agreed overall goal of the collective. To this end the collective documents the results of its work, reviewing the implementation of the agreed measures on within the area by field officers keeping close contact with the involved farmers. This way already early signs of failed efforts can be detected, and countermeasures can be taken.

In general, the efforts of documenting the correct implementation of the measures should be kept as small as possible in order to not strain the farmers time and patience and keeping the financial burden accompanied with checks and controlling as low as possible for all actors involved. Here the use of new technologies (use of GIS, remote sensing, apps, photos / videos, etc.) should be furthered.

Where suitable, an additional increase in flexibility could be achieved by introducing a result-based component as an add-on. In this case, suitable indicators must be developed in agreement with the actors, which can be checked without too much of an (administrative and financial) effort. It is also conceivable that farmers support the monitoring/controlling of the implementation of the agreed measures or fulfilling result-based criteria by self-documenting via photo, video or app.

Expected Benefits

Social/Ecological Advantages

- Increase in the number and connectivity of ecologically valuable landscape elements and habitats and thus have a positive influence on the number and diversity of the species that occur (in particular open land species and insects). This ecological effect can be further increased if the measures are embedded in a management plan that takes into account the specific features of the region and the spatial location of the agricultural areas.
- Tourism and the residents of the region can also benefit from the greater recreational value of the cultural landscape.

Advantages for Farmers

- The implementation of biodiversity-promoting measures can positively influence agricultural production by supporting pollinators and other beneficial organisms (integrated pest control).
- Appropriate remuneration for the measures implemented (possibly with the option of top-ups, if the result-based criteria are met)
- More flexibility in the implementation of measures (e.g. sowing / mowing dates) via close contact to field officers
- Feeling of security and „togetherness“ (social coherence); being part of a group instead of "lone warriors"
- Possibility to share costs for the use of machines or other means of production or to support each other with certain management measures
- Regular trainings / workshops
- A trustworthy and personal contact who is available for questions and problems
- Regular exchange with fellow farmers from the region
- “Buffer” effect through the collective (monitoring the overall goal agreed with the EU, not the individual farmer)
- appropriate sanction mechanisms within the cooperative (participatory development of collectives’ own rules and statutes)