



HOW TO IMPROVE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT SCHEME UPTAKE AND PROVISION

National report Germany

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An important goal of the PARTRIDGE project was to improve existing agri-environment schemes (AES) and increase farmers' uptake of AES. To better understand why farmers do or do not participate in AES, a large online survey was conducted across the North Sea region. The target group was arable farmers in areas where AES is available to them through governmental support. The report, which includes the results from all PARTRIDGE partner countries, is available at <https://northsearegion.eu/partridge/output-library/>. Here we present the results of the German survey. The questions were tailored to the conditions for AES in Lower Saxony. A total of 99 Lower Saxon arable farmers participated, 26% of whom were also hunters. Eighty of the farmers already had AES.

MOTIVATION

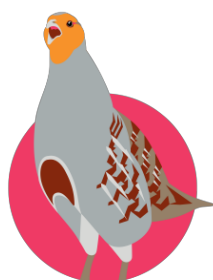
The main motivations for implementing AES¹ were to help the environment (56%), to help fauna and flora (56%) and to improve the farm's image (48%). Additionally, farmers reported using AES as a solution for their less productive arable land (36%), because it makes them feel good about their farm (35%), and because the measures fit easily into their farm management (31%).

ADVICE

Almost all farmers (89%) wanted advice on various aspects of AES¹. Farmers with AES tended to seek advice more often and had a clearer idea of what they needed advice on. The most popular advice topics were practical management (79% with AES) and option choice (69%), followed by financial implications (56%), legal aspects (56%) and environmental benefits (54%). Half of all farmers indicated that they would like advice when they requested it. Over 50% of all farmers felt it was important to have an advisor available throughout the course of the AES contract. The most popular sources of advice were governmental advisors (42% with AES, 29% without) and their own research (25% vs. 23%). Nevertheless, most farmers said they would (also) seek out other advisors (68% with AES, 53% without AES).

Most farmers said the government should pay for advice (81% with AES, 82% without). Only a small proportion said NGOs (25% with AES, 18% without) or farmers themselves (16% vs. 6%) should be paying¹. When asked directly, 30% of farmers with AES would be willing to pay for advice themselves, but only 6% of those without AES.

More than half of all non-AES farmers would be more likely to join if there was better written information and measurable evidence that AES delivered more wildlife, and 47% would be more likely to join if they had better face-to-face advice¹.



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¹ Respondents could choose more than one answer to this question.

OPTION CHOICE: FLEXIBILITY AND DESIGN

Most farmers wanted more flexibility (92% with AES, 89% without AES) and fewer restrictions (80% vs. 63%) in managing AES, especially in controlling pernicious weeds and changing locations¹. Farmers also wanted more flexibility in changing the locations of AES to manage problems such as weeds (65% with AES, 42% without). The Farmers without AES also wanted more flexibility in herbicide use, fertilizer use and manure spreading¹. Overall, 61% of farmers with AES said they wanted more flexibility in mowing dates. Similarly, most farmers wanted more flexibility in sowing dates (83% with AES, 63% without). Farmers without AES placed more emphasis on the cost of seed mixes affecting the payment level (34% with AES, 42% without).

Seventy-nine percent of non-AES farmers would be more likely to join an AES if there were AES options that better fit the conditions of their farm, and 74% if the management of options were more flexible¹.

CONTRACT FLEXIBILITY

More than two-thirds of all farmers wanted more flexible contract lengths (standard length in Lower Saxony is 5 years). Shorter contracts of less than 5 years were most popular (40% with AES, 32% without), followed by annual contracts for farmers without AES (26%) and medium length contracts (5-10 years) for farmers with AES (16%). Seventy-four percent of non-AES farmers would be more likely to join if contract options were more flexible.

LEGISLATION AND ADMINISTRATIVE BURDEN

Only 29% of farmers with AES were satisfied with the current inspection system, even though 50% agreed that some form of inspection was necessary. The main points regarding inspections¹ were that it should be possible to correct the errors within a certain period to avoid penalties (94%), that inspectors should give quick feedback (75%), that the inspector's report should be available within the financial year (73%) and that inspectors should have leeway to react to individual situations (80%).

More than three-quarters of non-AES farmers would be more likely to join if they could be sure there would be no long-term legal restrictions under the AES contract and no unwanted nature designations, if penalties were lower, and if there were less administration. Sixty-eight percent said they were more likely to join if there were fewer inspections¹.

REMUNERATION

Fifty-three percent of farmers without AES and 38% with AES considered the level of AES payments for wild bird seed mix / flower block (700 € / 875 €/ha) insufficient. On average, for those farmers who thought the payments were too low, they proposed 1071 € (with AES) – 1262 € (without AES) per hectare.

Most farmers felt that the money for AES should come from the EU and national/regional governments (76% with AES, 53% without) and from consumers (59% vs. 37%¹). For all farmers, the most important aspects that should be included in the calculation of AES payment¹ were the income forgone (79% with AES, 68% without), the effort required to establish and maintain AES (73% vs. 63%) and the habitat quality provided (65% vs. 47%).



¹ Respondents could choose more than one answer to this question.