



ENRD webinar

1st Thematic Group meeting on Carbon Farming

Highlights report

This was the first meeting of the Thematic Group on Carbon Farming whose aim is to consider how carbon farming practices can be upscaled in the EU. To reach the EU's climate goal of achieving net zero emissions by 2050, emission reductions alone will not be enough. Substantial efforts are also required to increase carbon removals and maintain existing carbon stores.

The CAP has an important role to play in supporting carbon farming practices alongside other EU and national funding sources. Sharing examples of existing good practices, initiatives and experiences is key to building capacity and awareness of how to upscale carbon farming in the EU.

Event Information

Date: 24 March 2022

Location: Virtual meeting

Organisers: ENRD Contact Point

Participants: 47 TG members from 15 EU Member States, including representatives of Managing Authorities, National Rural Networks, environmental NGOs, agricultural and forestry organisations, farm advisers, researchers and the European Commission.

Outcomes: Sharing experiences on how to upscale carbon farming.

Web page: [1st Meeting on Carbon Farming](#)

Carbon Farming – the opportunities



Valeria Forlin (DG Clima) highlighted the importance of establishing sustainable carbon cycles to achieve climate neutrality by 2050 at the latest, as highlighted in the Commission's Communication, adopted in December 2021. The need to develop sustainable solutions to increase carbon removals on both agricultural and forest land is an important part of this. Carbon farming is a win-win solution where land management practices to sequester carbon and reduce the release of carbon to the atmosphere can also lead to income generation combined with benefits for biodiversity, soils and water management as well as increasing the resilience of land to climate change impacts. In the Communication, the Commission outlined a goal that all land managers should be able to monitor their climate performance by 2028 and proposed an action plan which includes the creation of an Expert Group and support under LIFE and Horizon Europe (in particular, within the Soil Mission). The Commission is now working on a proposal on the certification of carbon removals which will be adopted by the end of the year.



Many different types of practices can help sequester and store carbon, all of which have significant co-benefits for farmers and society more generally. However, they have very different mitigation potentials, as explained by **Ana Frelih-Larsen (Ecologic Institute)**. Practices associated with managing peatland have the highest potential (mainly through avoided emissions). The mitigation potentials of agro-forestry and the range of practices to maintain and enhance soil organic carbon on arable soils is quite wide. This uncertainty is due to the nature of the practices, the different biophysical conditions, farm types, and existing land use and practices, showing the importance of local context. The estimates also often reflect technical potential and do not adequately reflect barriers to uptake. These issues raise a range of questions and challenges, including: on what kind of systems and practices should the focus be and where in order to generate the greatest impact; how best to manage issues of non-permanence of carbon removals and risks of reversal; as well as making sure that the total climate impact of any practice is addressed.



Dr Ernst Kürsten (3N Competence Centre) provided practical examples of how agro-forestry could be integrated into both arable and livestock systems, based on experiences in Germany. Agro-forestry can take many different forms, from traditional hedgerows, modern systems and high value tree agro-forestry, to the more traditional silvo-pastoral systems in the Mediterranean. **Marjon Krol (ZLTO)** showed how, in the Netherlands, the Interreg Carbon Farming project looked at ways of incentivising carbon practices on arable mineral soils.

Seventeen farmers were involved covering 650 hectares. They chose a range of carbon sequestration techniques, each creating an individual plan to suit their specific farm situation. It is estimated that these farms are sequestering 2,900 tonnes of CO₂ over five years.



Discussion with the TG members highlighted the fact that many carbon farming practices have co-benefits for biodiversity and other ecosystem services (e.g. peatland restoration). However, different practices have different mitigation potentials, not all practices are suitable everywhere and some require greater changes to the way land is managed which affects their uptake. Thought should be given to how to improve monitoring, reporting and verification processes to ensure greater accuracy on the carbon impact of different practices, differentiated by farming system and location. This would help provide greater clarity on what practices would be most beneficial and where which in turn would help encourage greater action on the ground.

Breakout Group Discussions - How to enable the upscaling of carbon farming



To set the scene for the group discussions, **Nicola di Virgilio (DG AGRI)** explained that climate mitigation and adaptation was one of the specific objectives of the new CAP and that there are a range of interventions available to Member States that can support carbon farming practices, including support for forest activities. Alongside the CAP, other funding is also available through the LIFE Programme, Cohesion Policy and State Aid.

TG members then split into three break-out groups, shared their own experiences of carbon farming initiatives and discussed the opportunities and challenges to upscaling and priorities for CAP implementation.

Many good examples of carbon farming practices already being implemented across the EU were described by TG members. Although carbon farming may be a new concept, the practices it involves are not new. The key challenge now is how to change farmer behaviour to encourage uptake, particularly of those practices that require greater changes to land use - which in turn affect the orientation of the business. Flexibility is key and the practices proposed should be compatible with different farming strategies and circumstances, so farmers can customise what they do to fit their own situations. However, some carbon farming practices (e.g. peatland rewetting or agro-forestry) require permanent changes to land use which involves significant investment and can bring with it financial risks. In these situations, it is even more important that the business case is sound and that changes are planned in advance. Since many farmers are not used to the longer timescales required to create and maintain carbon sinks, this also may require a change in mindset. Land tenure is also a consideration here, as tenants with short-term agreements may not be in a position to carry out long-term changes.

Many participants stressed that a systemic change to the way land is managed is required, with carbon farming becoming mainstream as part of a holistic approach to the production of food and timber in ways that deliver multiple benefits, including reductions in GHG emissions (including from the livestock sector) as well as improvements to biodiversity, soils, water quality and availability.

Participants across all the break-out groups highlighted a that there is a very large knowledge gap on carbon farming – amongst land managers and also within some advisory services and Managing Authorities – particularly in relation to technical knowledge and understanding. Ways of bridging this gap that were identified included: providing practical demonstrations of what is possible; supporting innovation brokers locally; and increasing awareness about the economic and environmental

benefits of carbon farming for improving the resilience of soils to climatic events, improving soil fertility and reducing flooding. Given the systemic changes required, the importance of providing ongoing business support to farmers to accompany the changes in orientation of the farm business was highlighted.

Another challenge is the need to find the right balance between: (i) meeting the real need to offer land managers practical support for Carbon Farming as soon as possible and; (ii) the time required to build further knowledge in order to be able to provide support in an appropriate, fair and measurable way.

There was a broad consensus that funding is necessary to encourage the change in practices proposed. However, it is important to reward farmers who are already carrying out carbon farming practices, not just those that take up new practices. But the CAP alone may not be enough. Opportunities from private funding should also be explored, looking at ways of combining both private and public funding, including how public funding would operate alongside carbon credits, and ways to spread the costs along the value chain.

Next Steps

The TG will invest in collecting and sharing practical and concrete experiences and encouraging peer-to-peer learning. TG members discussed and voted on what they considered to be the most important priority topics to investigate. As a result of this, deeper discussions within the group will include: a) how to raise awareness and build capacity amongst land managers, advisers, stakeholders and Managing Authorities on carbon farming; and b) what financial inducements are necessary to encourage land managers to take up carbon farming practices and what mix of funding sources can be used to generate sufficient incentives.