

How feasible is it for farmers to implement various innovative permanent grassland management options in different parts of Europe?

Objective: This policy brief presents the findings of an assessment aiming to evaluate the feasibility of eleven different permanent grassland (PG) management options and innovations. The study focused on ease of implementation, likely uptake, and potential to deliver ecosystem services under diverse climatic, agronomic, and socio-economic conditions. Perspectives from scientific experts and farmers across five biogeographic regions in Europe were gathered using a modified Delphi technique.

Methodology: Utilising interviews and online questionnaires, data were collected from sixty-two scientific experts and fifty farmers. Expert opinions were sought to evaluate each management option based on the underlying rationale, mechanism of action, outcomes, potential for ecosystem service delivery, applicability, and support requirements in terms of land manager implementation. Farmer interviews focused on familiarity, experience, ease of adoption, likelihood of adoption, and preference ranking of the management options.

Key Results:

- Opinions varied across biogeographic zones.
- Rotational grazing emerged as the most feasible option in the Mediterranean region, with positive impacts on ecosystem service delivery.
- Sward renewal and virtual fencing were perceived as the least feasible options, with sward renewal perceived to have the greatest negative impact on ecosystem service delivery, particularly in the Alpine region.
- Adoption of current/new technologies by farmers is hindered by a lack of evidence, and awareness.
- Both scientific experts and farmers highlighted the need to compensate farmers who reduce productivity to enhance ecosystem services.

Policy Recommendations:

- Provide independent and periodic reviews of technology efficacy to build farmer confidence in adopting new technologies (for example, through extension specialists).
- Support research into field trials of all technologies to establish on-farm benefits.
- Fund training programs for farmers to enhance their proficiency in using technologies.
- Ensure adequate ICT connectivity in rural areas for the seamless use of applications and other technological tools.
- Make upfront capital grants available for the purchase of virtual fencing, GPS collars, improved farm infrastructure, and potentially satellite/drone technology, where appropriate.

This assessment provides valuable insights into the prioritisation of permanent grassland management options, offering a starting point for supporting farmers in adopting technologies that contribute to multiple ecosystem service deliveries. The policy recommendations underscore the importance of empowering farmers through knowledge, awareness, training, and financial support to enhance sustainable grassland management practices across Europe.

Key Reference: Tindale, S., Raley, M., Vicario Modroño, V., Hunter, E., Bufe, C., Dekker, C., ... Frewer, L. (2018). Scientist and farmer perceptions of the feasibility of current and emerging permanent grassland management techniques in Europe. WP2 Deliverable 2.4, SUPER-G (Sustainable Permanent Grassland Systems and Policies), EC Project Number 774124-2.