

Conference on the Science and Education of Land Use: A Transatlantic, Multidisciplinary and Comparative Approach (91)

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The effectiveness of agri-environmental programs is a continuing policy issue in all modern nations. However, it is especially difficult to accumulate inter-country comparisons and capitalize on experiences with policy implementation. The purpose of this paper is to summarize the literature and the debate over the agri-environmental program effectiveness in the European Union (EU) and the US. Then, closer attention will be given to examples in the Northeastern US and Germany. A particular concern, especially in the context of evolving World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations, are arrangements for blending regulatory and compensatory incentives for providing environmental goods and services on farms and in rural communities.

In the EU, and especially in Germany, a prevailing view is that current agri-environmental efforts are unsatisfactory in terms of effects on environment as well as in terms of cost-effectiveness. Considering future prospects for the EU subsidy system, solutions are needed to better target agri-environmental payments and to motivate farmers to promote sustainability. New approaches should include concepts that combine environmental planning, targeting agri-environmental programs, alternate models of remuneration, and advisory schemes that better integrate environmental services into the technical assistance provided farm operators.

In the U.S., efforts to achieve a balance between agriculture and environmental quality date to the 1920s; since World War II, policy efforts have evolved into two distinct policy tracks: 1) soil erosion/water quality management and 2) farmland protection. Although the distinction between management of land and management of water is artificial (one always affects the other), separating agri-environmental discussions into these two dimensions has had an impact: each policy track has developed its own constituency and programs. Each program set has a fairly exclusive list of policy tools. Often missing in this fragmented policy environment, is a broad view of the rural, working or “multifunctional” landscape that considers the implications of farm and food production on landscape diversity, biological resources, wildlife habitat, and open space land interests. Too often, the conversation about Northeast agriculture and the environment moves in parallel universes, each suited to the particular purposes of academic disciplines or program managers. A further distraction in policy discussions in the

Northeastern US is that many state and local governments are aggressively promoting and funding agri-environmental programs. This layered approach—featuring federal, state, and local initiatives—is often masked in international discussions which usually dwell on federal agri-environmental policies alone.

The motivation for this proposal is that comparisons of the American and German experience with agri-environmental programs are both timely and beneficial to the evolving policy debate in both countries. Landowners, local public officials, and environmental interests must somehow be involved in a deeper and overarching discussion on how to sustain the working rural landscape. We will synthesize and interpret the extensive international literature on the role of agriculture in working landscapes, identify potential or emergent interests in landscape management, and present a comprehensive picture of current public investments in landscape conservation in the Northeastern US and in Germany. We will develop recommendations for advancing the strategic interests of both countries in the arena of working landscape management, with particular emphasis on providing financial incentives for the provision of environmental goods and services.