

The agri-environmental footprint project

International researches at the Department of Environmental Economics, Szent Istvan University*

**The aim of the series is to give information for the wider professional public about the multitude of ongoing international research activities at our Department.*

European Union Member States are obliged to monitor and evaluate the environmental, agricultural and socio-economic impacts of their agri-environmental programmes. The evaluation process aims to determine the extent to which policy objectives are being fulfilled, and to identify any changes necessary to bridge the gap between policy aims and outcomes. However, there is little consensus on how to monitor and validate the benefits of agri-environmental schemes (AESs) successfully. Critically, there are no agreed methodologies for tracking the environmental consequences of changing agricultural practices, or the benefits of particular agri-environmental policy measures.

The three-year Agri-Environmental Footprint project funded by EU Framework 6 (STREP SSPE-CT-2005-006491) was launched in April 2005 to meet this challenge. The main objective of the project is to develop a common methodology for environmental assessment of European agri-environment schemes.

The research consortium consists of 8 partners from 7 countries as follows:

- UK: University of Reading, (co-ordinator), (S. Mortimer, J. Park, K. Haysom, A. Mauchline),
- Ireland: National University of Ireland Dublin (G. Purvis, G. Louwagie, G. Northey),
- Ireland: Teagasc (Irish Agriculture & Food Development Authority) (J. Finn),
- Germany: Institute für ländliche Strukturforschung, Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität Frankfurt (K. Knickel, N. Kasperczyk),
- Hungary: Szent Istvan University (J. Angyan, K. Balázs, L. Podmaniczky),
- Greece: Agricultural University of Athens (L. Louloudis, G. Vlahos, S. Christopoulos),
- Finland: MTT Agrifood Research (J. Peltola, J. Aakkula, L. Kröger, A. Yli-Viikari),
- Denmark: Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University (J. Primdahl, H. Vejre, L. Kristensen, J. P. Vesterager).

The Agri-Environmental Footprint Index (AFI) is based on multi-criteria analysis methods and has been constructed as a customisable approach to any agri-environmental context within the EU25. It is a farm-level index that aggregates the measurement of agri-environmental indicators.

It is envisaged that a client (for instance a policy maker) will commission evaluators to apply the AFI methodology to a particular type of agriculture, or to a given agri-environmental scheme or mechanism to measure its effectiveness. The evaluators will follow a prescribed AFI methodology involving consultation with both stakeholders and a technical panel; the overall outcome being a quantitative index measuring environmental impact at the level of individual farms. A higher AFI score indicates greater or improving environmental quality and thus reduced negative impact. Farm level impact scores can be aggregated at a regional level to track temporal change and/or to provide comparisons of the success (or otherwise) of the chosen scheme or mechanism.

For further information please visit the project website: www.footprint.rdg.ac.uk.

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