Policy brief

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The study of Ukrainian farmers' opinions on the EU environmental policies

Water and Biodiversity

Policy brief based on

The study of Ukrainian farmers' opinions on the EU environmental policies: Water and Biodiversity

UKRAINIAN CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN POLICY

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Water and Biodiversity

Introduction

In the process of accession to the EU, Ukraine's agricultural sector will be gradually adapting and implementing the elements of the EU Common Agrarian Policy (EU CAP). It includes a number of elements, such as mechanisms for providing farmers with financial tools or ensuring information gathering, transparency and control.

The EU CAP includes a Conditionality system, which plays a key role in achieving climate and environmental goals, requiring farmers to comply with basic standards. Its goal is to increase the alignment of the CAP with environmental, climate and animal welfare objectives, contributing to sustainable agriculture. Conditionality includes Statutory Management Requirements (SMRs), which are mandatory for all farmers, and standards on Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC) that apply only to recipients of financial support.

Within this Policy Brief, we will focus on the requirements, compliance and attitude of farmers within the areas of "Water" and "Biodiversity".

Key requirements in the areas of “Water” and “Biodiversity”

Water Framework Directive

- **The objective is to prevent further deterioration of water resources, improve their status, and promote sustainable water use in different sectors.**

Requirements mainly relate to matters of special water use, in particular when water is withdrawn, used and discharged. At the national level, these matters are regulated by the Water Code of Ukraine, which specifies the conditions for special water use, obtaining appropriate permits and wastewater management. The Law of Ukraine “On the National Pollutant Release and Transfer Register” introduced an additional tool to prevent pollution from diffuse sources (e.g., manure storage facilities), i.e. a certificate of diffuse sources.

Nitrates Directive

- **The objective is to reduce and prevent water pollution caused or induced by nitrates from agricultural sources (e.g. manure).**

The requirements for farmers involve the proper storage of organic fertilizers, in particular manure, as well as the planning and efficient use of all nitrogen fertilizers on agricultural land. In addition, it regulates matters such as inappropriate/prohibited fertilization periods and land management on slopes or near water bodies. In Ukraine, these issues are partially addressed in the Water Code of Ukraine and the Rules for Ensuring Soil Fertility and the Use of Certain Agrochemicals (Order of the Ministry of Agrarian Policy No. 382 dated 24.11.2021).

Birds and Habitats Directives

- **The objective is to promote maintenance of biodiversity by way of preserving wild birds, rare species of flora and fauna, and their habitats.**

The requirements for farmers mainly focus on compliance with the rules and practices for managing territories to meet the needs of certain habitats (for example, by restricting the pruning of hedges during the breeding and nesting periods of birds or ensuring grass-cutting in the relevant periods). In addition, the Directives involve drawing up management plans for the sites where the relevant practices are prescribed, and conducting a proper assessment of the impact of any economic activity that may be detrimental to certain species of flora, fauna or their habitats. Ukraine’s national legislation has not transposed the requirements of the Directives yet.

Farmers' compliance with and attitude towards the requirements: Water and Biodiversity

In August to September 2025, Ukrainian farmers were surveyed on the opportunities associated with the introduction of European requirements. Within the survey, 364 fully completed questionnaires were collected. General characteristics of the respondents:

- **79% or 288 respondents are farmers,**
- **75% or 275 respondents are engaged in crop production,**
- **60% or 196 respondents have a land bank of less than 100 hectares.**

Water Framework Directive

Analysis of the responses on special water use permits revealed significant inconsistencies. Although 75% of the respondents (including representatives of some medium-sized livestock farms) claim that they use less than 5 cubic meters of water per day, 19 respondents who hold such a permit paradoxically answered that they did not exceed the limit of 5 cubic meters. This attests to a lack of consistency and awareness of the requirements of the legislation on special water use or means that farmers ignore these requirements.

Almost all of the surveyed farms (89%) insist that they do not generate or discharge wastewater. The 12 respondents who do generate it mostly represent combined and livestock farms. However, only 9 have some controls in place, while 3 have none. This means that the lack of proper wastewater monitoring and control in some farms may pose a problem.

Nitrates Directive

The questions focused on fertilizer management, manure storage facilities, slope management, and proximity to water bodies. Based on the survey results, the following conclusions have been made:

- Some farmers often apply certain fertilizers during periods when their use may be inappropriate. The most problematic ones are: *urea (carbamide)* – 40% *of the respondents*; *ammonium sulphate* – 38%; *and sodium/calcium/ ammonium nitrate* – 36%. At the same time, no significant problems are anticipated with ammonium chloride, liquid ammonia and ammonia water. Regarding the established limit for the application of nitrogen from organic fertilizers (170 kg/ha), only 7% (13 respondents) indicate that they exceed it. There is a risk that many farmers do not have complete information on the nitrogen content of organic fertilizers, as it was difficult for many to answer the question. As for fertilization plans, 75% of the farmers draw them up annually (on their own or involving a consultant). However, 24% (78 respondents, mostly owners of small land plot of less than 100 hectares), do not prepare the plan, although they say they would like to have one.

Most farms (79%) do not have permanent manure storage facilities. Only 19% of the respondents use a permanent storage facility/site. Of those who do have such facilities, only 55% say that their floor is impenetrable (the other 45% do not have an impenetrable floor or are not certain). At the same time, the vast majority (81%) of the farmers who have permanent vessels indicate that their capacity is sufficient to store manure for at least 4 months.

The majority of respondents (77%) claim that their land plots are not situated within 25 meters from water bodies. However, 25 meters is a minimum distance and is relevant only for small rivers, for medium rivers the requirement is 50 meters, and for large ones – 100 meters. 85% of farmers are aware of the restrictions on the use of fertilizers near water bodies.

The number of respondents who have, do not have or have not checked whether they have a land plot with a slope exceeding 3 degrees is almost equal. However, 58% of farmers are not aware of restrictions on ploughing slopes exceeding 3 degrees.

Birds and Habitats Directives

93% of respondents do not know what the Emerald Network (NATURA2000) sites are and, accordingly, what restrictions may apply to them. On a positive note, farmers have shown interest in understanding the connection between Emerald Network sites and agriculture.

Most of the farmers (68%) say that their land plots do not border on pastures, hayfields or territories of the nature reserve fund (NRF). The majority of respondents (65%) are not aware of the restrictions that may be imposed if their land plot is located or borders on an NRF territory.

To understand the situation, it is extremely important to take into account the challenges that farmers see and their willingness to change their practices to conserve biodiversity. These include: financial fears (52%), loss of yield and profit (52%), and limited financial resources (52%).

56% of the respondents are generally willing to maintain biodiversity in their territories or are willing to do so under certain conditions, namely:

- financial support (for equipment, compensation for losses);
- perception of business as a partner, rather than an offender;
- if there is no loss of income;
- provision of another land plot as a replacement.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The environment and climate related components of the EU Common Agricultural Policy are cross-cutting elements that should be implemented both at the national level and directly at the level of agricultural holdings.

Depending on which EU directives are included in the conditionality system within the framework of the Common Agrarian Policy, the level of adaptation and implementation of their requirements in Ukraine is different. However, in general, this level remains low.

The national regulatory framework still lacks many requirements. This applies in particular to the provisions of the Nitrates, Birds and Habitats Directives. The requirements of the Water Framework Directive are mainly laid down within the framework of the current legislation, but the issue of compliance and implementation by farmers still remains problematic.

According to the survey results, it can be concluded that there are no critical concerns, where a significant share of farmers would be strongly opposed to the implementation of relevant environmental practices. The potential difficulties may include: compliance with the limitation periods for the land application of certain fertilizers, arrangement of appropriate infrastructure for manure storage, as well as other aspects specified in the recommendations concerning each Directive.

At the same time, farmers' general understanding of climate and environmental requirements (including current regulations e.g. on water use or manure management) is insufficient. To rectify the situation and ensure compliance with the regulations, it is necessary to focus on raising awareness, providing constant consulting support and establishing effective monitoring and control over the activities of farms.

Climate and environmental matters are often of low priority to key state bodies, including the Ministry of Economy, Environment and Agriculture and relevant committees of the Verkhovna Rada. The relevant authorities have not yet offered any effective tools to achieve ambitious climate and environmental goals. As a result, farmers do not have an incentive to pay due attention to these matters and implement more environmentally friendly practices. At the same time, a more sustainable bottom-up approach to changes, where the demand for the implementation of relevant environmental and climate practices is initiated by farms themselves, is unlikely because of war risks and limited resources. It is only because of the aggravation of the effects of the climate crisis in recent years that farmers demonstrate an urge for the implementation of adaptation measures. It is important that climate and environmental issues do not disappear from the agenda of the responsible executive bodies. It is mandatory to raise both awareness and capacity to make and implement relevant policies, especially on Ukraine's way towards EU accession.

Recommendations for the negotiating position

For the negotiating position, it is important to understand that the matters of climate and environmental conditions within the framework of the Common Agrarian Policy are addressed in two different chapters: Chapter 11 "Agriculture and Rural Development" and Chapter 27 "Environment and Climate Change".

Chapter 11 "Agriculture and Rural Development", focuses on institutional support for the implementation of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This requires developing a system of conditionality, in particular implementing the necessary statutory management requirements (SMRs) and standards on good agricultural and environmental condition of land (GAECs).

For the negotiating position and a plan for progressive implementation of the EU acquis, it is important to include and gradually develop a conditionality system within the operation of the Paying Agency. In particular, to perform this task, it is necessary to:

- adapt national legislation to EU requirements for SMRs and GAECs in terms of the conditionality system;
- develop and implement monitoring and control systems including on-site inspection procedures and use of Integrated Administration and Control System (IACS) to remotely monitor SMRs and GAECs requirements;
- provide initial and advanced training to the Paying Agency's staff on conditionality procedures;
- conduct outreach and training for key stakeholders (advisory services, regional agribusiness government bodies and farmers) on new conditionality requirements and rules for compliance with them.

The environmental requirements of SMRs are in line with specific EU Directives, the implementation of which is regulated under Chapter 27 "Environment and Climate Change". Each of them is at different stages of implementation, but it is important to further methodically integrate them into the state agricultural policy.

Water Framework Directive

Status of implementation

enshrined in the regulatory framework but requires increased capacity and actions to stimulate implementation and control.

Challenges	Recommendations
◦ Inconsistency of information that may be obtained/ provided by farmers regarding permits for special water use or choosing to ignore the requirements ◦ Problem with water monitoring and control of wastewater management by farms	◦ Provision of information and consulting support to farmers concerning matters of special water use and wastewater management ◦ Improvement of the water price policy to provide sufficient incentives for users to use water resources efficiently and contribute to the achievement of the objectives of the Directive ◦ Implementation and improvement of the monitoring of pollution from diffuse sources ◦ Encouraging to install water meters on the farm to track water use and understand the needs

Resources needed by farmers	Time that farmers need to adapt to the requirements
◦ Additional financial investments (48%) ◦ Training (21%) ◦ New technologies (19%) and workers/specialists (19%)	◦ More than 60% of respondents believe that they will be able to adapt to the requirements approximately within 3 years

Nitrates Directive

Status of implementation

partially enshrined at the level of regulatory legal acts; requires the adoption of a relevant law and by-laws, as well as implementation at the level of central authorities and farms.

Challenges	Recommendations
○ Lack of a relevant law, which hinders further implementation of the Directive ○ Inappropriate (undesirable) periods for fertilization without scientific grounds and economic calculations may prevent the introduction of these periods at some types of farms ○ Issues related to fertilization plans and the correct calculation of the nitrogen contained in manure remain critical ○ Most farms do not have a permanent, well-equipped facility to store manure and resort to temporary sites. There are difficulties with maintaining a sufficient capacity of manure storage facilities and ensuring the impermeability of their floor ○ Lack of awareness of the restrictions or risks associated with agricultural activities in the areas close to water bodies or on slopes	○ Adoption of the relevant law and its gradual implementation ○ Development and adoption of an Action Programme to reduce nitrate pollution ○ Preparation of a scientific rationale for inappropriate (undesirable) periods for fertilizer application in particular based on the calculation of economic efficiency and regional specifics – and their discussion with farmers ○ Supporting initiatives aimed at assisting farmers in drawing up fertilization plans based on the needs of crops focusing on the planned yield, taking into account already available nutrients from all other sources (soil, crop residues, green manure, etc.) ○ Increasing farmers' awareness of the negative impact and financial losses caused by improper manure storage ○ Development of digitalized tools for planning fertilizer application, calculation of manure storage facilities that could be used by small agricultural producers ○ Consulting and financial support to farmers for the arrangement of manure storage facilities with impermeable floor and with the right capacity based on the amount of their livestock ○ Continued financial support involving the state compensation for the reconstruction of livestock farms, in particular with a focus on the storage and handling of manure ○ Training of farmers and agricultural consulting services that will be able to provide the necessary support, especially for small farms, in the planning of fertilizer application, arrangement of manure storage facilities, and management of land near water bodies and on slopes

Resources needed by farmers:

Fertilizer management	Arrangement of manure storage facilities
○ Financial support (72%) ○ Training (42%) ○ New technologies (37%) ○ Consulting support (37%)	○ Additional financial investments (61%) ○ New technologies (29%) ○ Workers/specialists (24%)

Time that farmers need to adapt to the requirements:

- **Fertilizer management and arrangement of manure storage facilities:**

  Many farmers believe that they will be able to adapt within 1 to 3 years, but it is important to take into account that it might be possible on condition that the above-mentioned resources are available.

Birds and Habitats Directives

Status of implementation

not enshrined in the regulatory framework; requiring the adoption of a relevant law and by-laws, as well as increased capacity of the responsible bodies in order to draw up plans, implement measures and monitor their implementation.

Challenges	Recommendations
○ Lack of a relevant law and by-laws, as well as infrastructure to implement the requirements of the Directives and, in general, matters of biodiversity conservation when coupled with agricultural activities ○ Lack of understanding of the need to conserve biodiversity at all levels ○ Lack of awareness among farmers of the Emerald Network sites and of how to properly conduct their activities within these sites ○ Farmers' ignorance of the legal regimes of various territories and sites that belong to the nature reserve fund, as well as of the importance of their conservation ○ Farmers' financial concerns about potential yield and profit losses, as well as limited financial resources ○ Lack of knowledge and examples of effective combinations of agricultural practices and biodiversity conservation ○ Lack of a market for eco-friendly products	○ Adoption of a relevant law that will give an impulse to the adjustment of the management system of the Emerald Network sites and introduce a mechanism for assessing the impact on such sites ○ Raising awareness of all stakeholders – the Government, regional and local communities, as well as farmers – about the territories of the nature reserve fund and the Emerald Network, about the importance of their preservation and the approaches to managing these territories ○ Determining the share of agricultural land overlapping with the Emerald Network sites (later with NATURA2000 sites) ○ Training for farmers and agricultural consulting services with a focus on the rationale for the need to preserve biodiversity and specific practices for its conservation on the specific farm ○ Supporting demo farms that could serve as examples for scaling and calculating the economic feasibility of biodiversity conservation ○ Financial support for farmers to implement biodiversity conservation practices in valuable protected areas (compensation for losses, purchase of equipment, etc.) ○ Support for grazing livestock farming, which will help to restore and preserve a sustainable livestock farming model, as well as valuable natural areas, such as pastures/hayfields

Resources needed by farmers	Time that farmers need to adapt to the requirements
○ Additional financial investments (74%) ○ Training (45%) ○ Ongoing consulting support (45%)	○ Most respondents believe that it will take up to 3 years to adapt. At the same time, the share of those who checked "up to 1 year" and "up to 5 years" is the same (20% each)

Notes

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