

## **Hay meadows and the new Common Agricultural Policy**

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Agricultural areas with high natural value farming systems are of exceptional value in the agricultural policy of the European Union.

The roots of traditional farming methods go back several centuries in Székelyföld. The area of traditional meadows has drastically declined in recent years, because of intensive farming, abandonment or use as pastures.

Attention must be paid to the future role of traditional meadows right now, since they function as „gene banks” in preserving biodiversity, they are important factors in water protection, in nitrogen and carbon balance, and they are an important part of the life of rural farms. Practically every member of society in Romania enjoys the food (milk, cheese, butter, meat, herbs etc.) from traditional meadows without chemicals, thus we can rightly assert that farmers deserve extra compensation for this farming style, which needs not only human labour and time, but it is also important from the food safety and ecological point of view.

On 29 June 2011 the European Commission published the framework for financial proposals in the new Common Agricultural Policy programming period, which starts in 2014. Since then, each member country including Romania has been identifying the areas within agriculture that are really worth supporting.

In January the European Commission published an online questionnaire about the future of agricultural areas with high nature value in Europe, which received 45.000 replies. In the opinion of EU Agriculture Commissioner Dacian Ciolos, this also shows that people dealing with agriculture have high expectations from the subsidy period after 2014.

In the new programming period the Union aims for a more efficient and fair distribution of subsidy incomes, to make the subsidy system more simple and effective.

A new feature of the next subsidy period is that about 30% of the direct payments will be linked to activities for conservation of natural resources, in order to stimulate environmental awareness of farmers, and to increase ecological sustainability. This is the so-called “greening” of the agricultural policy. This includes for example diversification of crops, the sustainability of permanent grasslands and the protection of ecological areas.

Farming on traditional grassland results in healthy, non-chemical foods, and at the same time it gives many environmental services to society. For farmers who farm in such a traditional way, it is not easy to serve modern expectations, and to compete with the multinationals’ cheap, varied produce. It is hard for them to meet consumer requirements without losing the many benefits of this sector, which is why the EU remunerates the challenging but valuable high natural value farming.