

# Assessing Private Landowners' Opinions: Conservation Programs and Policies to expand the use of private land conservation methods and approaches in Europe



## METHODOLOGY



With the support of the Life Programme of the European Union 14 discussion groups were organised among private landowners and land managers in 14 European Member States. Discussions were organized February and March 2019, by the European Landowners' Organization (ELO), in collaboration with The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

Based on the outcomes of the 14 focus group discussion, the Life Programme of the European Union supported an online survey among landowners and managers **all over Europe** from 27 May 2019 until 29 June 2019.

The goal of the research was to identify ways for landowners to increase conservation practices on their lands, to investigate perceived challenges, to evaluate trust in key actors and existing policies, and to determine which incentives they need to engage in a conservation program.



The countries in which discussions were organized:  
**Belgium, France, Poland, Romania, Estonia, Scotland, The Netherlands, Denmark, Spain, Finland, Sweden, Germany, Bulgaria, and Czech Republic**







## SUMMARY OF KEY INSIGHTS

### Perceived Challenges

- Landowners and managers indicated that land that is a working farm or working forest provides environmental and biodiversity value, and that this land should be valued for the conservation, economic and societal benefits it provides. The public is not always recognizing the value that landowners and managers are providing.
- Barriers to passing land on to future generations included overregulation, a struggling agricultural economy and high inheritance taxes.
- High taxes were a fairly top-tier concern for many landowners and managers, though they were more likely to point at income taxes as a bigger concern than property taxes or inheritance taxes.

### Factors of importance

- Respect the variety of landowners, the autonomy and unique knowledge
- Ensure benefits and revenues are not expropriated by restrictions without fair compensation
- Protect and support owners if unwanted interventions are imposed
- Define the conservation goal, instead of imposing the methodology
- Positive public communication



### Trust in key actors

- Landowners and managers tend to place the most trust in associations of private landowners when it comes to issues related to land use, management or conservation programs
- Natura 2000 was recognized by about two-thirds of landowners and managers, but most rate it somewhat poorly overall.



## Voluntary conservation tools and incentives

- Information sharing and in-field support
- **Annual Payments**
- One-time payment for implementing practice
- One-time payment based on how much land is conserved
- Public recognition (awards and networks)
- Labeling and certification for market access
- **Tax benefits for conservation expenses**
- **Tax benefits natural value**
- Tax benefits for value of use rights
- **Payments for carbon credits**
- **Certification of products**
- **Sharing of information**
- Direct Payments by Government
- Direct Payments by NGO
- Conservation easements Land
- Management agreements
- Safe Harbor agreements
- Natural Area Designation
- Land Exchange
- Right of first purchase
- Credit systems

## Incentives to Engage in Conservation Programs

- The top-rated incentives involve some form of compensation: annual payment, tax benefits for natural value, tax benefit for conservation expenses and payments for carbon credits.
- For financial compensation programs, annual payments dependent on conservation and management rates were more highly appealing than one-time payments
- A certification of products is the top-rated incentive that is not purely financial in nature.

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