

ELN-FAB NEWSLETTER

No. 5, February 2012

ELN-FAB European Seminar in 2012

14 & 15 June 2012, Avignon, France

We invite you to attend the 4th European seminar of the ELN-FAB. After previous meetings in the Netherlands, Switzerland and Slovenia, we are happy to announce that our partner [GRAB \(Groupe de Recherche en Agriculture Biologique\)](#) has offered to host and support the organization of the next meeting, together with [INRA Avignon](#), in France.

In the framework of the ELN-FAB initiative, annual seminars are organized in order to bring together representatives of various stakeholder groups and national and international organizations from across Europe, so that they

can collect and exchange experiences about functional agrobiodiversity.

The annual ELN-FAB European Seminar will be held on **14 & 15 June 2012 in Avignon**. The seminar will include presentations, a field trip and facilitated workshop discussions. There will be a special focus on issues, problems and solutions related to the Mediterranean region and region-specific crops.

More information will follow soon and will be available at www.eln-fab.eu. We look forward to seeing you there!

Editorial team of the FAB handbook makes important progress

A handbook is under preparation by ELN-FAB to help the stakeholders to strengthen the role of FAB in their operations, and to promote and disseminate examples of best practice. The editorial team met on 7 February 2012; the meeting was hosted by Wageningen University, the Netherlands. The key issue discussed during the meeting was how to integrate FAB into

practices. The participants reached consensus on the content of the handbook and agreed on the next steps. The final draft of the handbook is planned to be ready by June 2012. The renewed financial support from the Flemish Land Agency for ELN-FAB in 2012 will provide an essential contribution to finalizing this important product.

ELN-FAB and soil functional biodiversity

The SUSTAIN project team held its kick-off meeting, hosted by the University of Rennes, France, on 10 and 11 January 2012. SUSTAIN (Soil Functional Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services, a Transdisciplinary Approach) is a

research project funded by the ERA-NET SNOWMAN under the EU 6th Framework Programme. ECNC, host of the secretariat of the European Learning Network on Functional Agro-Biodiversity (ELN-FAB), is a project partner and



Photo: Veronika Mikos



Photo: Hoël Hotte

will play a role in disseminating the project results.

The main objectives of SUSTAIN are to understand how reduced tillage systems, as compared with conventional tillage systems, impact soil functional biodiversity and soil functions such as soil structural maintenance, organic matter and nutrient cycling, water regulation, filtering and pest regulation. SUSTAIN will also quantify the consequences of reduced tillage systems on the soil ecosystem

services of food production and greenhouse gas mitigation, and investigate the socio-economic sustainability of reduced tillage systems.

The involvement of the ELN-FAB will ensure Europe-wide dissemination of the results to the various stakeholder groups. The SUSTAIN project runs for three years (2011-2014).

For more information see:

<http://www.snowmannetwork.com/main.asp?id=110>.

Making the link to soil biodiversity research

ECNC is involved as a stakeholder in the European research project EcoFINDERS, to make the connection between our role in the European Learning Network on Functional AgroBiodiversity (ELN-FAB) and soil biodiversity research. To this end ECNC's Ben Delbaere attended the project's stakeholder meeting, hosted by the University of Coimbra, Portugal, on 5 December 2011.

The EcoFINDERS project (short for Ecological Function and Biodiversity Indicators in European Soils) is a large research project, funded by the EC FP7 and bringing together 25 research institutions. The project, which started in January 2011, aims to support EU soil policymaking by providing the necessary tools to design and implement strategies for sustainable use of soils, including characterization of the biodiversity of European soils; determination of relationships between soil biodiversity, functioning and ecosystem services; quantification of the economic values of soil ecosystem services; evaluation of the impacts of human activities on soil biodiversity, functioning and services; and design of policy-relevant and cost-effective indicators.

Soils and soil biodiversity are key components in



the natural system and provide key ecosystem services. Many of these support agricultural processes and are essential for ensuring a more sustainable agriculture in Europe. This is where functional agroBiodiversity comes in. The EcoFINDERS knowledge and experts therefore provide a unique contribution to the ELN-FAB network, which itself offers a valuable platform for outreach and cooperation to the soil biodiversity research community.

<http://www.ecofinders.eu/>

The European Commission proposes a new partnership between Europe and its farmers

The European Commission has presented a draft reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) for the period after 2013. This draft aims to strengthen the competitiveness, sustainability and permanence of agriculture throughout the EU in order to secure for European citizens a healthy and high-quality source of food, preserve the environment and develop rural areas.

In order to reinforce the ecological durability of the agricultural sector and enhance the efforts of

farmers, the Commission is proposing to dedicate 30% of direct payments to practices which enable optimal use of natural resources. These practices, which are easy to implement and are ecologically efficient, are: crop diversification, maintenance of permanent pasture, and preservation of ecological reserves and landscapes.

For more information see:

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/cap-post-2013/legal-proposals/index_en.htm.

Set-aside land improves farmland biodiversity in Hungary



Photo: Veronika Mikos

Setting aside agricultural land remains an important method of promoting biodiversity in Central Europe, according to new Hungarian research. Results have indicated that, compared with winter cereal fields, set-aside land has greater plant and insect diversity. This supports the continuing use of set-aside policy in Central and Eastern Europe.

For more information: [download the article](#)

Source: Science for Environment Policy, European Commission DG Environment News Alert Service

Gaia Biodiversity Yardstick

A lot of attention is being paid in the Netherlands to various aspects of agrobiodiversity, such as grassland birds and functional field margins. CLM, consultancy for sustainable agriculture and countryside, has developed the Gaia Biodiversity Yardstick, an internet tool covering all aspects of on-farm biodiversity: from diversity of crop species and varieties and soil life, to grassland management and nesting boxes in the farmyard. The Gaia Biodiversity Yardstick is a science-based internet tool that quantifies farmers' efforts to maintain and enhance biodiversity. It is an interesting tool for farmers, governments (greening the CAP) and food companies (sustainability programmes).

Gaia translates inputs on six biodiversity themes into a numerical score:

- types of crops and farm animals used (1)
- cultivation practices aimed at increasing biodiversity benefits (2) (crop protection, nutrients, soil management, etc.)
- productive areas under targeted nature management (3) (extensive cropping, postponed mowing, etc.)
- area and management of non-productive landscape elements (4) (watercourses, hedgerows, etc.)
- contribution to management of natural reserves (5) and
- farmyard (6).

The biodiversity scores are expressed in charts and tables. The input is translated into a numerical score for each theme and for the all six themes together (see diagram opposite). Then, expected effects on several types of plants

and animals are expressed in additional scores, e.g. for soil life, field birds or hedgerow flowers.

The Gaia tool is being set up as a mother system, from which more specific instruments targeted at particular countries, regions or crop systems can be further developed. Hence the tool's name Gaia (mother earth). The prototype is being developed for the Netherlands; with minor additions it will be applicable to other countries in temperate Europe. The tool could also be enhanced for other production systems, including more extensive systems.

The English version of the tool is now online: <http://gaia-biodiversity-yardstick.eu/>. For other CLM tools for sustainability, see www.clm.nl.

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Biodiversity themes: farm specific results

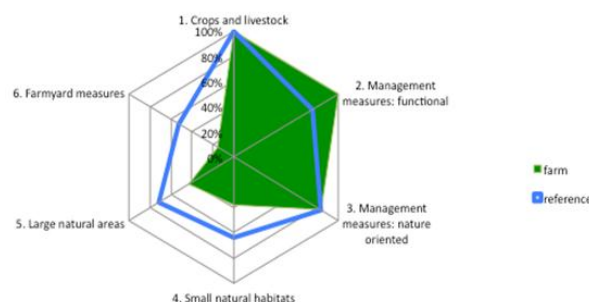
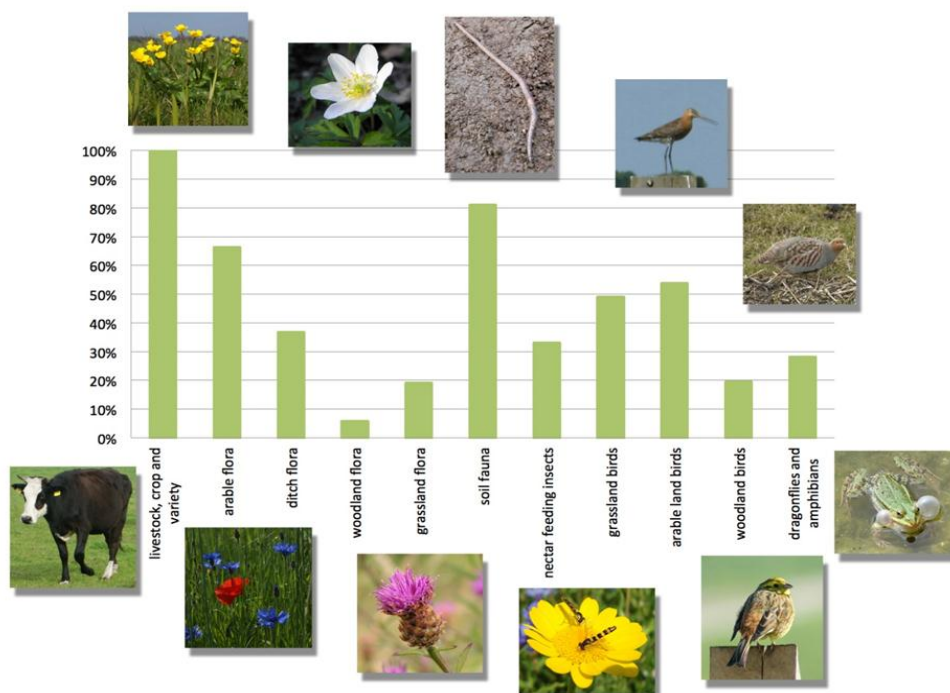


Figure: Farmers' efforts for Gaia's six biodiversity themes. The benchmark (blue line) is flexible. It can be based on a potential maximum or average for the region, or an average of all farms supplying a particular food company.



Updates on the ELN-FAB website

The ELN-FAB website (www.eln-fab.eu) provides the main communication platform for the Network and contains a European project database on the subject of functional agrobiodiversity. The website is available in English, German, French and Spanish, and uses targeted messages to focus on the Network's stakeholder groups.

New projects have been uploaded to the database

Over the last decade, knowledge on how to preserve and use ecosystem services in agricultural practices has increased. Pilot projects have yielded their first results. But is this information available to the right people and stakeholder groups, also to enable multiplication of good examples? Learn more about practical experiences on the website.

Let your voice be heard

If your organization has relevant projects which you would like to promote via this Network and the database, the ELN-FAB Secretariat would be happy receive them. In the register of agrobiodiversity projects we can put a short description (max. 2 pages) of your project, including information on overview, aims, partners, outputs, attached files (e.g. project leaflets) and contact person.

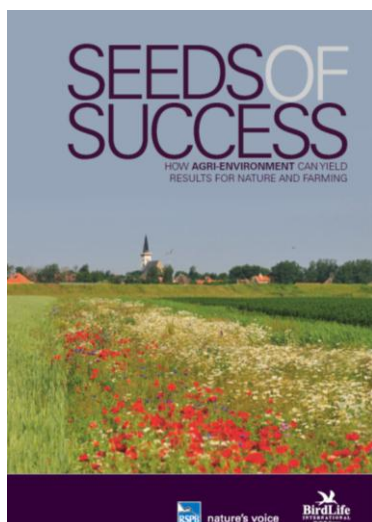
New projects have recently been uploaded to the database, which currently contains about 40 projects.



Additionally, if you have any relevant scientific publications, news items connected to the practical implementation of functional agrobiodiversity or the science-policy interface, you are invited to submit them to the ELN-FAB Secretariat. The information can be disseminated and published in our quarterly newsletters and on the Network's website.

Publications

Seeds of Success: How agri-environment can yield results for nature and farming



RSPB and BirdLife International have collected examples from across Europe to show how agri-environment schemes are successfully delivering biodiversity and environmental objectives. The purpose of this paper is to celebrate environmental successes under the Common Agricultural Policy and demonstrate how competitive food production can be supported alongside environmental targets.

For more information see:

http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/Agri-env_tcm9-283020.pdf.

Soil protection critical for Europe's economy and ecosystems



Soil is one of the planet's invaluable resources but continues to be degraded in Europe. Together, the mineral particles, water, air, organic matter and living organisms that constitute soil perform key functions which underpin our society.

The European Environment Agency (EEA) has joined forces with the European Commission's Joint Research Centre on 'The state of soil in Europe', a comprehensive scientific report highlighting the need to protect and maintain soil in a coordinated way across the European Union. The report warns that failure to tackle increased soil degradation could eventually compromise food production. Moreover, degraded soil is less able to prevent droughts and flooding and stop biodiversity loss.

Upcoming events

5th Forum for the Future of Agriculture (27 March 2012, Brussels, Belgium)



The annual Forum for the Future of Agriculture (FFA 2012) returns to Brussels on Tuesday 27 March 2012. Following

last year's successful event, which saw over 1200 participants join distinguished speakers

and interesting debates and discussions, the 5th edition turns the spotlight on Meeting the Food & Environmental Challenge: Resource efficiency, innovation and governance.

For more information visit:

<http://www.forumforagriculture.com>.

6th European Organic Congress "Smart change - towards a sustainable CAP" (17-18 April 2012, Copenhagen, Denmark)

The 6th European Organic Congress in Denmark is taking place at a crucial point in time for the debate on the future Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). The Congress "Smart change - towards a sustainable CAP" addresses the policy change needed to reach a greener, smarter, fairer future CAP, improve the availability of sustainably produced food for consumers and to ensure the credibility of certification for sustainable farm systems. It provides the organic community with an opportunity for exchange and discussion and will bring together high-level speakers from the European Commission, the European Parliament,

the European organic movement and other civil society organizations, along with participants from across Europe.

Following high-level panel discussions, the topics will be further elaborated in three interactive workshops covering organic regulation, CAP and promotional measures and the green public procurement of organic products.

For more information visit <http://www.organic-congress-ifoameu.org>.

AGRO ENVIRON 2012 (1-4 May 2012, Wageningen, the Netherlands)

The 8th International Symposium Agro Environ will be held in Wageningen, the Netherlands, on 1-4 May 2012. The symposium is being organized by the Land Degradation and Development Group, Wageningen University. During the meeting renowned scientists from all over the world will present their latest ideas and findings on environmental sustainability of agricultural management systems. For a description of themes and more information, please visit www.agroenviron.com.



The ELN-FAB project is currently financially supported by the Ministry of Infrastructure and Environment (previously Ministry of VROM), the Netherlands; Flemish Land Agency (VLM), Belgium; Ministry of Agriculture, Estonia; and the European Environment Agency (EEA). The European Landowners Organization (ELO) provides in-kind support. Fundraising continues in order to expand the Network in the long term.

This newsletter aims to inform the partners, intermediaries and interested stakeholders of the ELN-FAB initiative. For more information visit: www.eln-fab.eu, or contact the ELN-FAB Secretariat:

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