



Vereniging Nederlands Cultuurlandschap
Rijksstraatweg 174
6573 DG Beek-Ubbergen, The Netherlands
info@nederlandscultuurlandschap.nl
0031 246 842 294

European Commission
Rue de la Loi / Wetstraat 200
1049 Brussels
Belgium

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Dear Executive vice-president Frans Timmermans, Commissioner Janusz Wojciechowski and Commissioner Virginijus Sinkevičius,

This letter is being sent to you on behalf of several European organisations, that focus on hedges and hedgelaying. During a recent symposium, on which six European countries were present, we shared our concerns about the new CAP and decided to write you this letter. The following video is an integral part of our message, and we kindly request you to watch this 2-minute video (after reading our letter): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xw7ac9wlqgs>

Despite the greening measures that have occupied an important place in the European Common Agricultural Policy for many years, nature on European farmland is not doing well. Alarming reports about insects, farmland birds, reptiles, amphibians, mammals, and the flora of fields and meadows have appeared in all the Member States. In addition to loss of biodiversity, the biomass of each species is also declining rapidly.

The history of our European agriculture goes back thousands of years. The traditional method of agricultural imitated forest edges and riverbanks; the transitional areas where biodiversity is also naturally greatest. This led to an immense labyrinth of millions of miles of hedges, wooded banks, terraces and ditches criss-crossing Europe. The considerable impact this had on boosting biodiversity in Europe may have been unintended, but is nevertheless extremely valuable. Linear landscape elements are typically characterised by a wealth of transitional areas between types of vegetation, making them indispensable for biodiversity. In Europe's increasingly intensive agricultural regions, the role of linear elements on the edges of fields as a refuge for wild flora and fauna is gaining importance. They also form a very fine network of ecological corridors in which animals and plants can spread. In short,

landscape elements are the bearers of biodiversity in the European agricultural cultural landscape.

These elements include the dry stone walls and terraces that are found from Ireland and Wales to Greece and Malta, the ditches in Holland and Flanders, *le bocage* in France, the terraces in Spain, Italy and Slovenia, and the elevated hedgerows and *Knicks* of Denmark and Germany: in any case, this diverse habitat for unique flora and fauna belong to the common heritage of Europe. The elements both decorate the European landscape, and keep alive the memory of a pan-European agricultural culture spanning thousands of years. They are the bearers of the European agricultural cultural landscape.

Landscape elements are also crucial for natural pest management, thereby helping reduce the use of pesticides. Hedges, wooded banks and brushwood alongside fields provide pest controllers with shelter and a place to hibernate, following which they can enter the crops to do their useful work. Hedges and wooded banks are also important in terms of capturing particulates, absorbing ammonia, and binding CO₂.

It is a great source of concern that these bearers of biodiversity and our agricultural culture are rapidly disappearing or falling into disrepair. Following the disappearance of virgin natural areas of forests and swamps in Europe, the disintegration and disappearance of this network of landscape elements is the greatest injustice done to our nature today.

Everyone is in agreement on this; local authorities, national authorities, and the European Commission. Even so, the tide isn't being turned. The Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive, the Directive for Good Agricultural Practice and the European Landscape Convention are all absolutely inadequate in terms of the conservation of nature. In fact, in around 80% of the surface area of Europe, our flora and fauna are simply doing very poorly, both in variation of species and in numbers of each species. Landscape elements are deteriorating rapidly in length, causing the much-needed ecological networks to crumble.

Even if, as everybody hopes, farmers or regions make an attractive proposal to create and repair landscape elements, they're left empty handed because there aren't enough funds available for construction and long-term maintenance. Obviously, nobody can tolerate the current situation; neither the farmers concerned, nor the nature conservationists, nor the landscape-loving citizens of Europe. This is seriously undermining support.

Europe is currently working on a new European Common Agricultural Policy, where greening measures are a central issue. Considering how much is known about the value of landscape elements in supporting biodiversity, and the shocking state of nature in rural Europe, it's unconceivable that the CAP wouldn't be taken by the scruff of the neck to turn the tide!



The CAP is the perfect tool for saving and conserving the remaining valuable heritage landscapes as a source of inspiration for new landscapes. In modern agricultural areas, the CAP can focus on saving the remnants of elements by including them in a new, denser network of new landscape elements. In view of their importance in preserving biodiversity function, and in contrast to the intention behind the old elements, these new elements can be specifically designed to promote as much biodiversity as possible. They can provide Europe with a new, attractive face, by covering the old cultural history with a new history; one that shows concern for the disappearing diversity of species, and the successful actions that this has put into motion.

There has clearly been universal agreement about the value of a varied landscape up to now. However, we're deeply concerned that the new CAP won't pay enough attention to this issue, and fail to turn the tide. We hope you can address these concerns in a personal meeting. If desired, we can explain our letter in more detail. We would very much like to hear when this would suit you, preferably in good time in view of the development process of the new CAP.

Yours sincerely,

Jaap Dirkmaat, director of the Association
for Dutch Cultural Landscapes

The Netherlands



Nigel Adams, signed as a Trustee on behalf
of the National Hedgelaying Society

United Kingdom





VERENIGING NEDERLANDS
CULTUURLANDSCHAP



Ulrich Pieper, Heimatverein Nieheim e.V.,
Arbeitskreis: Flechthecken
Germany

Heimatverein Nieheim e.V.

Arbeitskreis: Flechthecken

Wasserstr. 6
D 33039 Nieheim
Tel.: 0049 5274 953 630
www.sackmuseum.de
Mail: info@sackmuseum.de
Mitglied im Westfälischen Heimatbund



Flechthecken immaterielles Kulturgut der UNESCO

Yves Gabory, Directeur de Mission Bocage
France



Clive Lyttle, Hedgelaying Association
Ireland



Dirk Cuvelier, Coördinator Regionaal
Landschap Westhoek
Belgium



Louis Dolmans, Heg en Landschap
The Netherlands

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