



Result-based Nature conservation Plan (RNP)

Result-based approach introduced and integrated into the Austrian Agri-Environmental Program (ÖPUL) to pursue nature conservation objectives (biodiversity).



Summary

In the period 2014-2022, under the Austrian Agri-Environmental-Program ÖPUL, a sub-measure “Result-based Nature Conservation Plan (RNP)” has been integrated into the measure “Nature conservation”. In contrast to conventional ÖPUL measures, the RNP defines environmental objectives to be reached as basis for 2nd Pillar payments, and not management measures. The approach allows farmers to make own decisions about management measures and implement them at their own discretion. The RNP represents a dual system of 1.) environmental area objectives, on the basis of which farmers primarily orientate their farming methods and 2.) control criteria, which are used primarily as a control instrument for the technical control service. Both types of environmental objectives are farm-individually developed by ecologists together with the farmers, and fixed in a farm-individual logbook, containing information on objectives, illustrations of species, maps of appearance, suggestions of management measures as well as a section for documentation of management measures and progress as regards the objectives. Besides the documentation by the farmer, control of RNP control criteria is carried out by specially trained staff of the national control body (AMA).

RESULT-BASED



The contract is distinctively result-oriented, the payment depends on the achievement of environmental objectives.

PUBLIC GOODS



(Farmland) biodiversity
Species and habitats

LOCATION

AUSTRIA



The farmers who are allowed to participate can come from all over Austria.



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Objectives of RNP

- Results-oriented implementation of the ÖPUL conservation measure;
- Definition of specific nature conservation area objectives (species and habitats) on the farm;
- Increase farmers' understanding of the needs and conservation of valuable species and habitat types;
- Enabling decision-making autonomy and room for manoeuvre in the implementation of management measures;
- Raising awareness of the objectives of the Habitats Directive, the Birds Directive and the Natura 2000 network, and knowledge expansion about the life requirements of the target species.

CONTRACT

The financing party is the government (with and without EU-funding, co-financed funds). The contract is concluded between the department of the province responsible for nature conservation (project confirmation).



Contract conclusion:
Written agreement



Payment mechanism:
Incentive payments



Start of the program:
2015 (after pilot phase)
End: still ongoing

Length of participation in scheme:
Length of contract:
Normally 5 years;
depends on ÖPUL program period (e.g. 2014-2020)

Problem description

“Classical” contractual nature conservation is predominantly designed to be action-oriented. Concrete management measures are defined on valuable areas by authorities in coordination with the farmers. The farmers are often not well informed about the protection objectives on the area and the expected results. This means that farmers do not necessarily understand why certain measures are taken and no process of learning can settle. In 2014 the first concept of the result-based nature conservation plan was developed and piloted. Here, the focus lies on the nature conservation objectives on the contractual areas. These objectives are developed together with the farmers. Management measures to reach objectives are not prescribed and can be determined by the farmers themselves. Besides reaching the environmental objectives, in this way the RNP intends to increase farmers' flexibility, supports awareness building and the building of social capital.

Data and Facts - Contract

Participation: At the time of this report 143 farmers participate in the RNP program.

Involved parties:

Farmers. The RNP concept was piloted on 16 farms; after integration into ÖPUL an upper limit of 150 farms was set. In the next program period the upper limit might be up to 700 farms.

Consulting agency

Implementation of the RNP was supported by an environmental consultancy agency identifying and engaging potential farms for the first implementation of the RNP (together with the Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism and the federal nature conservation departments), providing advice of ecological experts (flora and fauna), visiting farms and specifying nature conservation objectives on the fields, supervising the implementation of RNP during the program period

Federal nature conservation departments and Ministry

The Ministry of Agriculture, Regions and Tourism and the federal departments introduced the RNP into the nature conservation plan

National control authority (AgrarMarktAustria; AMA).

AMA is Austrians ÖPUL controlling unit, checking compliance with control criteria

Requirements for farmers: In the RNP a dual system of control criteria and area objectives was developed to guarantee a better risk distribution.

- **Control criteria:** The control criteria have to be reached to be eligible for payment. They also act as an early alarming system for undesirable developments in the fields. The control criteria are indicators, which show early nature conservation related mistakes. The connection to management measures is high. Control criteria and their indicators are sanctioned in the event of non-compliance.

- **Area objectives:** Besides the control criteria, on basis of the ecological initial situation individual objectives are defined for each field. The objectives are understandable and influenceable by the management measures of the farmers. Nevertheless, it cannot be excluded that in some years or under certain conditions the influence of the farmers regarding the achievement of the objectives can be low. Therefore, the fail of the area objectives does not lead to a sanction for the farmers.
- **Additional requirements:** For all nature conservation areas there are general conditions, irrespective of the area-specific stipulations in the project appraisal, even if they are no longer explicitly mentioned in the project appraisal for the respective area. These are, for example, no new drainage, no mechanical pitting and no terrain corrections, deposits and fillings and no spreading of sewage sludge and sewage sludge compost etc.

Controls/monitoring: The control of RNP farms is carried out by the national control body (AMA). It is done under the same conditions as for other measures of the Austrian Agri-Environmental Program (ÖPUL), but the inspectors have previously received additional training for the RNP. The control criteria are checked by the technical inspection service and, if necessary, sanctions are taken. There is a documentation obligation in this contractual measure. Farmers commit themselves to document management measures and observations regarding the objectives, this is done in the so-called RNP-logbook. Also documentation is checked during the inspection. Furthermore, the non obligatory area objectives are evaluated by ecologists. This is done on selected farms and there are no sanctions for non-compliance. The check of area objective is used as an additional support for the farmers.



Conditions of participation: The maximum number of participants in the program period 2015-2022 is 150 farms, in the next program period the maximum number might be up to 700 farms. Only farmers which already participate in the measures "Environmentally friendly and biodiversity-enhancing management" or "Organic farming" or "Organic farming - partial farm" of the Austrian Agri-environmental scheme ÖPUL are allowed to participate in the RNP. The first farmers to participate were contacted and selected by the environmental agency together with the nature conservation departments of the Federal Provinces and the Federal Ministry. Farmers interested in deepening their knowledge on nature conservation were selected for participation.

Links to other contractual relationships: In addition to the RNP areas, it is not possible to apply for areas under the "Nature Conservation" (WF) or "Nature Conservation Valuable Maintenance Areas" (WPF) measures of the Austrian Agri-environmental scheme. (see conditions of participation).

Risks/uncertainties of participation: There is a risk that the control criteria will not be met, but the risk is reduced by the non-sanctioned area objectives.

Funding / Payments:

Eligible areas are grassland (excluding alpine pastures) and arable land. The amount of payment is individually determined for each area on the basis of the objectives and the cost for theoretically most potential management measures. Payments are recorded in the project confirmation. The upper payment limits are 700€/ha for arable land and 900€/ha for grassland. Fallow land on arable land is eligible for a maximum of 25 % of the total area of the farm. In combination with the measures "Environmentally friendly and biodiversity-enhancing farming" or "organic farming" only landscape elements are compensated in addition to the ENP premium.



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Context features

Landscape and climate: The project focuses on utilised agricultural nature conservation areas in Austria - mainly in Natura 2000 areas, biosphere reserves and other valuable landscapes or species listed in Annex IV of the Flora Fauna and Habitats (FFH) Directive. These valuable areas are distributed throughout whole Austria and therefore no specific area is in the contract solution involved.

Farm structure: Participation is possible throughout the whole country. Currently, 143 Austrian farms participate. The nine Federal States are represented to varying degrees: about 1/3 of the farms are located in Styria, about 20% each in Tyrol and Lower Austria. While the farms are not evenly distributed throughout Austria, but regional clusters exist. This is mainly due to the fact that farmers have been informed about RNP via word of mouth recommendations of individuals. Both part-time and full-time farms take part, and a wide variety of farm types and sizes are represented. Nevertheless, participation of grassland farms exceeds the number of arable farms in the RNP. About 85 % of RNP farms have previously participated in the "ÖPUL nature conservation measure (WF)" and have switched to the RNP. 44% of the participating farmers in the RNP have a very good and 53% have good ecological knowledge. The ecological knowledge was an important factor in the selection of the farms so that they were not overstrained with the RNP measure at the beginning.

SUCCESS OR FAILURE?

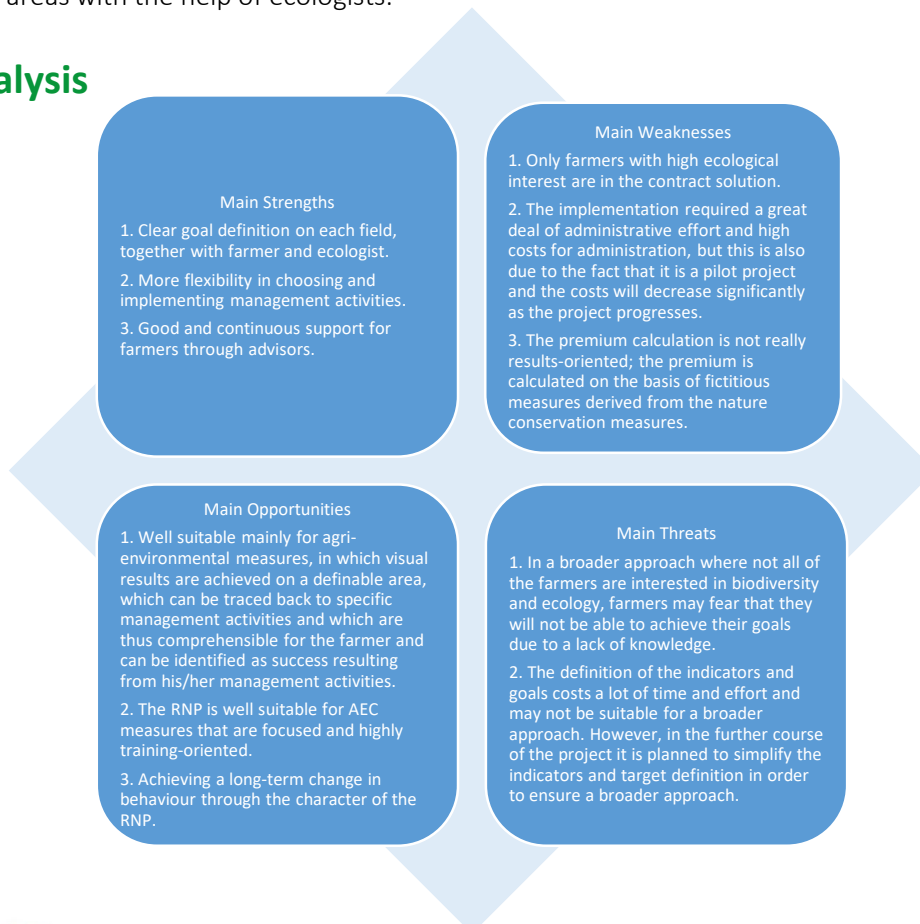


The RNP-program presents a successful result-oriented contract solution. The contract solution is judged successful, as the RNP allows pursuing nature conservation objectives for habitats and for endangered species at the same time. The educational aspect for the farms is very high and this leads to a long-term behavioral change. On the other hand, the number of farmers participating is quite low in the pilot project phase, but it will shall be expanded to around 700 farmers in the next period.

Reasons for success:

- Farmers see and record the results of their management in the fields and can decide which management activities they choose; the flexibility rises and farmers better understand the connection between their acting and the influence on nature.
- Advisory and educational activities are an important part of this contract solution.
- A clear improvement of nature (biodiversity) through the targeted definition of objectives on the individual areas with the help of ecologists.

SWOT analysis



Main external factors influencing success

Political/governance, economic/market, social, technological, legal and environmental factors can all have a strong impact on the success of contract solutions. In this case study an in-depth analysis found that the following, selected factors were of specific importance.



Include the control authority right from the beginning:

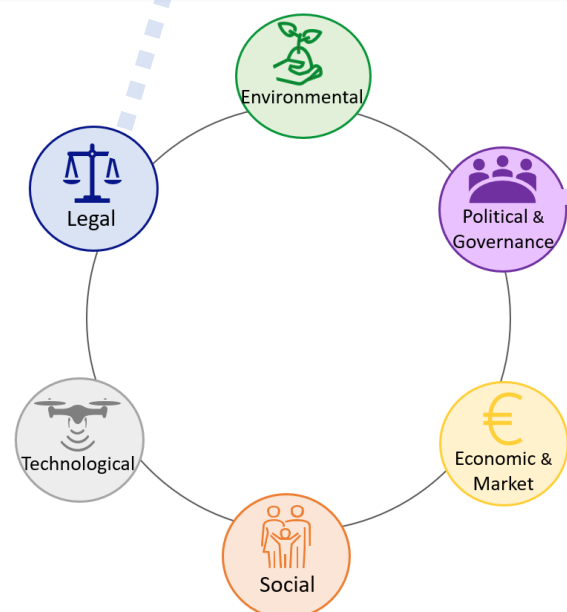
An institution being involved right from the beginning in the introduction of the *RNP* was the **national control authority** (AgrarMarktAustria; AMA), which particularly provided inputs for

- o the design of measurable and, consequently,
- o controllable indicators.

AMA was fundamentally involved in designing the mixed approach of area and control indicators, which finally enables the integration into the RDP.



In case of a transfer of such schemes to other countries, this integration is the basic recommendation of the experts.



Jumping on an already moving train of environmental protection

The RNP is implemented on high nature value agricultural areas, which mostly have already been managed under former public incentive schemes, in this case the area-based scheme of contractual nature protection.



Here, the solution represents a clear improvement for the farmers managing the mainly very low-intensive grassland sites, as the result-based approach provides the same payment range, similar goals, but **full flexibility in management decisions**.

Future of the RNP: In the upcoming CAP-period the RNP will be included as a separate intervention in the Austrian Agri-environmental Programm (ÖPUL) under the new name “Ergebnisorientierte Bewirtschaftung” (EBW) which means “Results-oriented Management”. It is scaled up to from approx. 150 to up to 700 farmers taking part. There is still a dual systems of indicators that are being controlled by the control authority (“control criteria” in RNP, now called “indicators”) and additional indicators not being controlled (“area objectives” in RNP, now called “additional indicators”). The list of area objectives and indicators was shortened and harmonized. Also an incentive mechanism for farmers to improve the conservation status of their nature conservation areas was included - premiums for areas which are in conservation status A is higher than premiums for areas in conservation status B or C.

Like in the RNP also in the new intervention EBW documentation is mandatory for participating farmers. To give farmers support in documentation work an app for mobile devices was developed. More information about the intervention EBW can be found on www.ebw-oepul.at.