

Collaboration for sustainability between institutional landowners and tenant farmers



In the region around the city of Greifswald institutional land owners and tenant farmers cooperate to establish a sustainable agriculture protecting environment and nature. Land tenure contracts with sustainability clauses are the means chosen. A transparent tendering procedure is now taking into account sustainability criteria.

Summary

Key players are the institutional land owners of the region around the city of Greifswald and their tenant farmers. The land use should be shaped in a way to meet ecological, economic and social demands in the long term. The Michael Succow foundation has suggested joining forces by setting up the initiative called 'agricultural initiative for Greifswald (Greifswalder Agrarinitiative / GAI)' and has coordinated it until June 2019. After project ending the collaboration platform was transferred into an association with the same name to ensure continuation of the cooperative approach. The current practice under which leased land has been awarded changed substantially. A transparent tendering procedure taking into account sustainability criteria has replaced rental price as key decision criterion. The agricultural holdings get advice on how to integrate environmental and nature protection measures into their farming practice. A cooperation agreement is signed between the agricultural holdings and the institutional land owners for new or renewed lease.



Objectives

- Strengthening the sense of responsibility for natural resources of tenants and land owners
- Improving the sustainability of agricultural production
- Biodiversity maintenance and promotion
- Greater consideration of climate protection requirements and the protection of water bodies



Problem description

The agriculture in the region around Greifswald is dominated by large-scale fields and an intensive agricultural production with a high share of rented land. The intensive land use has negative impacts on the agricultural soils and the neighbouring ecosystems. The initiative has been initiated by the Michael Succow foundation.

Data and Facts - Contract

Participation: Three institutional landowners, the city of Greifswald, the University of Greifswald and the Peter-Warschow Sammelstiftung (a foundation) own together 11.000 ha that they rent to farms of the region (mainly conventional arable farms). 37 of these farmers are members of the GAI association in 2022, together they manage 25.000 ha.

Further participation: Until June 2019 project lead by the Michael Succow foundation, since then by GAI association; assistance and project support by scientists from the university of Greifswald as well as independent external experts.

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LAND TENURE



contracts with sustainability clauses concluded between institutional land owners (city, university) – private tenants and farm managers

PUBLIC GOODS



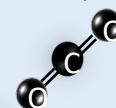
Biodiversity



Soil quality



Water quality



climate regulation

Further PGs

Improvement of the social and economic sustainability of land use

LOCATION

Germany



The project area located in the northeast of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania encompasses the land around the city of Greifswald up to a distance of 20 km.

CONTRACT

A cooperation agreement is signed between the tenant (agricultural holding) and the institutional land owner in addition to the lease contract.



Payment:

Land tenure contracts with adjusted lease payments, supplemented by funds collected by association (1 €/ ha and year, paid by land owners and tenants) and possibly external funds

Duration of contract:

during the whole term of lease, as a general rule 6-12 years

Start:

2013 (ongoing (should continue long-term))

Funding:

1st phase: German Federal Environmental Foundation (DBU) Dec. 2015 - June 2019
2nd phase: members of GAI association

Farming requirements:

The cooperative approach follows four principles:

1. Cooperative: the involved parties work together closely and on a basis of trust
2. Knowledge-based: based on available scientific and practical knowledge
3. Value-based: the participants act voluntarily based on their values and convictions, taking into account the economic and ecological concerns in a balanced manner
4. Landscape oriented: measures to promote biodiversity take into account the natural as well as the site specific conditions



The conclusion of the cooperation agreement is a prerequisite for new or renewal of land leases. The objectives are formulated as intended improvement, with some specific targets e.g. reduced use of pesticides and minimum-standards concerning the share of high-nature-value vegetation spots. The implementation of the measures is to be tailored to the individual agriculture holding in view of long-term value creation and employment in the region. The farmers benefit from transparent lease criteria, connected to ecological (and social) aspects.

Controls / monitoring: Advisors perform an analysis of environmental deficits taking into account landscape-ecological aspects as well as the farm specific situation and give recommendations for the implementation of environmental and nature protection measures. There is no systematic control; however, the newly established association helps ensuring that farming is in line with cooperation agreement.

Conditions of participation: Land for lease is to be awarded to agricultural holdings willing to cooperate and which commit to farm the land according to the guidelines and the cooperation agreements. Nevertheless, over time cooperation between regional actors became more important than formal agreements in tenure contracts. The measures that have been identified for the agricultural holding to protect and promote biodiversity are formulated as recommendations for action. The implementation of these measures like the establishment of landscape elements, alongside with measures for water and soil protection, remains as far as possible voluntary and farms that are GAI members get support (e.g. through advice about funding possibilities and on technical aspects).

Risks / uncertainties for participants: There is a certain financial risk for the tenants, or at least a funding restriction as agri-environmental and nature protection schemes as well as compensatory measures in line with the German impact mitigation regulation are used for the implementation of practicable measures.

Contract features combination: Conventional and ecological farming are treated equally.

Framework conditions

Landscape and climate: The city of Greifswald is located in the northeast of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. The city is situated nearby the Baltic Sea, in the north of Greifswald are the islands Rügen and Usedom. The area is characterised by a flat countryside, rarely going 20 m above sea level.

Farm system: The proportion of rental land is about 80% in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. Besides the land owned by institutions there are many private land owners who rent out their land to farmers. 79% of the farmland in the region around Greifswald is arable land. Agricultural holdings with more than 300 ha dominate and half of the farms cultivate more than 500 ha.

The "agricultural initiative for Greifswald" aims at an overall sustainable land use, even though the plots owned by the participating institutions and rented to the farmers do only cover a more or less small part of their land.

Successful cooperation?

- Voluntary collaboration of the regional actors with the common goal 'voluntary mandatory'
- Dialogue forums for an exchange on an equal footing on technical issues
- Successful cooperation requires trust, continuity and seriousness

SUCCESSFUL CONTRACT SOLUTION



The sustainable land use could be successfully established as common guiding principle for the awarding of lease land in the region around the city of Greifswald. Through an intensive dialogue process it was possible to agree on a goal-oriented proceeding. All three institutional land owners (city, university, and foundation) have committed to conclude voluntary cooperative agreements with their tenants for an enhanced consideration of environmental and biodiversity aspects. It was possible to keep the process running after the initial project duration ended thanks to the setting up of an association.

Reasons for success

- The landscape-oriented approach puts the land ownership and the land management into a spatial context going beyond the borders of the agricultural holding and the property, enabling more demanding measures.
- The close involvement of the democratically-elected bodies of the institutional land owners in the cooperation process and the design of the sustainability criteria for renting land
- The process has been scientifically supported, without prejudging its outcome.



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Temporary water body created by the ice age in wheat field

SWOT analysis

Strengths

1. Voluntarily assumed responsibility for the future development ('prospective')
2. Additional environmental performance on leased farmland

Weaknesses

1. Long lead time for decision-making processes in the institutions
2. Leasing payments an important source of income

Opportunities

1. Association for a long-term collaboration
2. Strengthening of the regional nature protection
3. In the longer run maintenance or even increase of the value of the land

Threats

1. Unequal power relation (institutional landowners, tenants)
2. Need for additional funding sources for the nature protection and environmental measures

Developments since 2020

- Successful establishment of the GAI association
- Biodiversity measures are based on a farm-specific concept developed with support of nature experts
- Farmers sign a self-declaration independently from the lease contract itself and engage to undertake efforts towards sustainable farming beyond the rented land parcels