

What Is HNV

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What is HNV Farming?

The concept of High Nature Value (HNV) farming developed in the early 1990s from a growing recognition that the conservation of biodiversity in Europe depends, among other, on the continuation of traditional low-intensity farming systems. Many of Europe's most endangered habitat types and species are dependent on farming practices that have evolved in specific regions according to their specific environmental conditions. HNV farming is present in all European countries, with a diversity of types and extent.

The cornerstone of HNV farming, and indeed of European farmland biodiversity, are semi-natural pastures, meadows and orchards, as well as peripheral semi-natural features such as large hedges and copses. This semi-natural farmland provides a mosaic of habitats and an essential green infrastructure for wildlife. It is central to achieving effective ecological networks. Apart from conserving wildlife, these types of farming provide a multitude of other services for society, including ecosystem services such as carbon storage, clean water, wildfire prevention, storage of genetic diversity and cultural values. This locally adapted farming types provide much of the rich social fabric and character of Europe's landscapes. Not surprisingly, many unique agricultural products, such as jamón ibérico, originate in HNV landscapes.

The link between HNV farming, biodiversity and traditional landscapes is very strong, as many of the landscapes and habitats of biodiversity significance in Europe were created by the centuries-old practices of extensive grazing and low-input small-scale cropping. Replaced by expanding intensive agriculture in large parts of the territory, nowadays HNV farms often operate in the most marginal agricultural land, under difficult social and economic realities such as in the mountainous regions.

Alerted by the trends threatening the viability of HNV farming, a wide spectrum of research, conservation, farming and policy organisations have paid increasing attention to these systems over the last 25 years. Some of the main outcomes of all this completed and ongoing work are linked below, together with some suggestions for further exploring the world of HNV farming.



Bucegi (Romania)



Cereal steppes of Rio Jarama & Henares (Spain)