

# What farmers are doing for the environment

The Austrian Agri-environmental  
Programme ÖPUL

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# Introduction

In this brochure seven farmers are explaining how they protect our environment with their agriculture and preserve it for future generations. The Austrian farmers have already been working for centuries with the natural bases of life water, soil, air and biodiversity. By means of their near-natural management they have succeeded in creating a cultivated landscape which is renowned for its diversity and its beauty far beyond the borders of our country.

This entails great challenges for the farmers. Small farm areas, often located on steep slopes, are hard to be managed, the renunciation of the use of yield-increasing inputs, such as for example artificial fertilisers saves the environment but means at the same time lower yields for the farms.

The Austrian Agri-environmental Programme ÖPUL supports the farmers, in order to ensure that they can produce healthy domestic foodstuffs and preserve at the same time our natural bases of life and tend our landscape.

By means of the Agri-environmental Programme additional services resulting from the additional work in favour of the environment and of the cultivated landscape as well as income losses are compensated for. Read on the next pages about all the things our farmers are doing in favour of our environment – and why they are doing all that.

**Niki Bertlakovich**  
Minister for Agriculture

**ÖPUL** = Austrian programme to promote agricultural production methods compatible with the requirements of the protection of the environment, extensive production, and the maintenance of the countryside

# Cultivated landscape



IRMGARD POBASCHNIG:

“I am proud of my  
fruit trees.”

“Many of our fruit trees on the meadows are almost hundred years old. In winter it happens sometimes that a tree is breaking down; then we are planting a young tree in order to ensure that our meadows with scattered fruit trees are preserved. The fruit trees are simply part of our landscape – if they disappeared from the meadows it wouldn't be our landscape any more.

Tending such big trees entails a lot of work. The cutting and picking high up in the tree crowns is much more complicated than in a low fruit plantation. The mowing of the meadows entails a lot of work, too, as we have to mow separately around each and every tree. Many holiday-makers are admiring us and ask us why we are taking all these efforts. I tell them that we are doing all that from the bottom of our hearts – but of course also for them. So that they can enjoy the beautiful landscape.”

**Irmgard Pobaschnig**  
Farm woman from Guttaring



## FACTS

With the measures of the Agri-environmental Programme ÖPUL “Preservation of scattered fruit trees stands”, “Mowing of steep surfaces”, or “Alpine pasturage and shepherding” the character of the cultivated landscape is maintained. The measures for the cultivated landscape were mostly developed because of the difficult cultivation. Without compensation for services rendered via ÖPUL agricultural utilisation and tending would not be possible any more.

- » 7 measures of ÖPUL aim at the preservation of the cultivated landscape.
- » 17,585 farmers are preserving via ÖPUL 10,832 hectares of meadows with scattered fruit trees
- » 67,485 mountain farms are cultivating more than half of the cultivated agricultural landscape.
- » 443,750 hectares of Alpine pastures and mountain meadows can be managed by means of financial support via the Agri-environmental Programme ÖPUL.

# Soil



GEORG DOPPLER:

“Earthworms  
are my  
most important  
assistants.”

“My soil does not only serve for the production of barley, oats and rapeseed – it is also a filter for high-quality groundwater, and an important water reservoir. In the case of severe rainfall it absorbs water like a sponge and protects thus the surrounding against floods.

In order to fulfil these functions the soil must be rich in humus, loose, and well aerated. This requires special tending, year in and year out. I take care that the soil is covered by plants all over the year. After the harvest I am sowing as soon as possible a ‘green cover’, such as a mixture of mustard, oil radish, and winter turnip rape. This green cover prevents in the case of severe rainfall that my soil is washed away.

I do not remove the dead material from my ‘green cover’, because it nourishes innumerable soil organisms, such as earthworms. The earthworms are my most important assistants. They are digging thousands of small tunnels in the soil, which can absorb then like a sponge air and water. Without air nothing would work in the soil – the soil animals would suffocate!”

### **Georg Doppler**

Farmer from Waizenkirchen



## **FACTS**

Within the framework of the Agri-environmental Programme ÖPUL a healthy soil, clean water, and an efficient flood protection are promoted. With the measures “Greening of arable surfaces”, “Erosion protection in vineyards” or “Organic farming” farmers reduce the level of application of fertilisers and plant protection products, as well as the nutrient discharge into surface waters, and protect the soil against wind and water erosion.

- » In Austria 479,597 hectares of agricultural areas are protected against erosion by targeted measures within the framework of the Agri-environmental Programme.
- » 61,075 farms are greening their fields, fruit, hops and wine areas.
- » In addition to the 388,043 hectares of organic areas the soil is saved from a too intensive form of management by means of special fertilizer reduction and renunciation measures on 675,580 hectares.

# Water

A photograph of a wetland area. In the foreground, there is a dense field of green grasses and numerous small yellow wildflowers. A narrow stream flows through the middle ground, reflecting the sky. The background shows more greenery and a clear blue sky with a few wispy clouds.

**ERICH SCHRUIFF:**

“The motto  
is to save  
and to store  
water.”

“We are all dependent on water. Water is precious – from above and from below the earth’s surface. Cereals need especially in spring a lot of water, and this is exactly when it is hardly ever raining in the upper Burgenland region. Thus the motto is to save and to store water. Therefore we are ploughing only about once in four years. In the meantime we are only digging up the soil superficially and are then sowing the seeds directly into the sub-surface. We never remove the straw from the field, but bestow it on the soil, in order to ensure that there is nutrition for the living beings in the soil and that they can build up humus. The humus stores the water and saves the cereals from ‘dying of thirst’ in spring. We must also take care from at the bottom, because too much fertilizer or spray could get into the groundwater and thus pollute the groundwater. Many of our arable areas are bordering to the river Wulka, which flows into Lake Neusiedl. In order to ensure that no fertilizers and sprays get into the river, we have set up a buffer strip there. On this strip along the river, which is 20 metres wide we refrain from additional yield and do without fertilizing and spraying.”

**Erich Schruiff**  
Farmer from Oslip



## FACTS

The Agri-environmental measures “Greening of arable surfaces”, “Mulch and direct sowing”, “Preventive soil and water protection” and “Organic farming” are reducing in different ways the leaching of nutrients into groundwater and the nutrient output into surface waters.

- » On a total of 814, 427 hectares of arable and grassland areas the Austrian farmers are refraining from the use of yield-increasing inputs. Of which 388,043 hectares are under organic farming, thus cultivated completely without chemical plant protection products and mineral fertilisers.
- » In selected areas, which are of special importance for groundwater protection 4,450 farmers are participating in the measure “Preventive soil and water protection” and avoid thus groundwater contamination.

# Climate

A close-up photograph of a young plant with a reddish stem and green leaves growing out of dark, rich soil. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The word "Climate" is overlaid in a large, orange, sans-serif font at the top of the image.

FRANZ PRINZ:

“CO<sub>2</sub> becomes  
valuable humus.”

“Today everybody is talking about the lot of CO<sub>2</sub> in the air which is, in fact, mainly responsible for global warming. However, CO<sub>2</sub> is not in principle bad, plants absolutely need it for their growth and incorporate it in their leaves. But normally, when plants are rotting, the same quantity of CO<sub>2</sub> is again released into the air – thus a zero sums game.

Therefore I incorporate the plants of my intermediate vegetation into the soil before they are rotting. In the soil they are then processed by bacteria and fungi to valuable humus. Thus up to 300 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> per hectare can be bound on my fields. This corresponds approximately to the annual CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of 150 passenger cars.”

**Franz Prinz**

Farmer from Kottingnondorf



## FACTS

The climate-friendly measure “Organic farming” focuses on the renunciation of the use of chemical-synthetic fertilisers, humus development and, as far as possible, on recycling management. The measure “Low-loss application of liquid organic fertilisers and biogas manure” minimizes the emission in the air and saves thus the climate.

- » About 21,900 farmers practise organic farming and make thus by their humus-promoting type of management and their renunciation of the use of mineral fertilisers a positive contribution to climate protection.
- » 3,139 farms are minimizing their nutrient discharge into the air by applying liquid manure near the ground and/or directly into the subsoil.
- » In Austria’s arable areas a total of 400 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> are stored as humus, almost five times the quantity of the annual greenhouse gas emissions of Austria.

A man in a brown tank top and green pants is mowing a field of tall grass with a walk-behind mower. The background is a dense line of green trees under a blue sky with some clouds. The text "Animal species + plant species" is overlaid in large orange letters on the left side of the image.

# Animal species + plant species

ELFRIEDE NESSLER:

“Flowers grow  
because we  
mow them.”

“The abundance and diversity of the plants found on our meadows is incredible. The areas we tend are located in the nature conservation area ‘Bödner Magerwiesen’, some of them on a slope sharply falling away towards the south. Greater knapweed, meadow clary, ox-eye, field scabious, and many other special flowers grow here. There are plants whose great value I recognised only after I had become aware of their rareness. It happens quite frequently that when we mow the meadows hikers pass by and are appalled that we cut the beautiful flowers. I explain to them that the flowers grow precisely because we mow them. On areas which are not mown any longer shrubs and trees appear after few years and displace all the flowers.

As the slope is that steep, many areas can be managed only using special machines. What remains has to be done by hand. Everybody helps then: Also our brothers and sisters, our children and some friends come. Without their help we could not do that. However, generations before us invested great efforts in that and we want to preserve it.”

**Elfriede Nessler**

Farm woman from Innerbraz



## FACTS

With the help of ÖPUL also the ecologically most valuable areas of our country are tended year after year. Farmers and nature conservation authorities fix and coordinate the ecological objectives and define the management measures for these areas.

- » 23,417 farms take part in the ÖPUL nature conservation measure and manage their land in line with site-adjusted nature conservation requirements.
- » On 81,691 hectares of agricultural land rare and endangered birds, insects, small mammals as well as numerous plant species are protected.
- » Under the “eco-points programme” 6,632 Lower Austrian farms preserve hedges, individual trees and characteristic structures of the landscape.
- » 329,417 hectares of utilised agricultural surfaces are located in NATURA 2000 areas. A big part of these areas are managed with the help of ÖPUL measures.

A herd of brown and white goats is resting on a lush green alpine meadow. The goats are scattered across the grassy slope, some lying down and others sitting up. In the background, a white river flows through a rocky landscape under a clear sky. The text "Rare livestock breeds" is overlaid in large yellow letters on the left side of the image.

# Rare livestock breeds

RUPERT HASENAUER:

“Perfectly adapted to the Alps.”

“Old-established livestock breeds differ from modern high-producing breeds mainly by their resistance and their longevity.

Moreover, they are more resistant to diseases and are sure-footed on our steep land. They are simply perfectly adapted to our alpine area. Our Tauernsheck goat, for example, is very special in this respect: With its three-coloured skin it is easily visible to everybody even on large pastures. In addition, this goat has a particularly strong maternal instinct, which is important as it has to bring up its kids alone on the alpine pasture. Unfortunately, these valuable breeds have become rare. We preserve them – for us, but of course also for future generations.”

**Rupert Hasenauer**

Farmer from Saalbach-Hinterglemm



## FACTS

Under the ÖPUL measure “Rare livestock breeds” and specific gene preservation programmes the population sizes of 31 recognised rare livestock breeds have been extended.

- » With the help of ÖPUL, 4,414 farms preserve rare domestic breeds in Austria. Under the environmental programme compensation is granted for the reduced economic yield.
- » ÖPUL subsidises the preservation of 9 cattle breeds, 2 pig breeds, 8 sheep breeds, 7 goat breeds, and 5 horse breeds.
- » By means of ÖPUL the populations of the Tauernsheck goat have been increased. In 2002 support was provided for 137 Tauernsheck goats; in 2009 they numbered 454 already.
- » Of the about two million heads of cattle kept in Austria today, the endangered breeds have a share of approximately 4%.

# Europe

A photograph of a flock of Great Bustards in flight over a field. The birds are captured in various stages of flight, with their wings spread wide. The background shows a blurred landscape with a line of trees in the distance. The word "Europe" is overlaid in a large, blue, sans-serif font at the top of the image.

**JOSEF MANN:**

“Great Bustards  
know no  
frontiers.”

“Every year dozens of Great Bustards breed on our fields. The Great Bustard is Europe’s heaviest flying bird. There are only two regions left in Austria where it breeds regularly.

We coordinate our work with the rhythm of life of the Great Bustard. During the breeding season it is important not to disturb the clutches – therefore we cannot farm our land during these periods. We have also designed the cropping system in a way that there is always sufficient cultivated land to ensure the food supply for the Great Bustard. Almost all farmers in the region take part in this programme. The population has improved since then.

However, all this makes sense only if our colleagues in Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia have protection programmes for their fields as well because, of course, birds do not know the national borders we are still used to. We are therefore trying to coordinate our protection programmes. This is more troublesome, but in return it makes us also aware of the fact that Europe does not end beyond the boundaries of our own fields.”

**Josef Mann**

Farmer from Goggendorf



## FACTS

The objectives of several protection programmes for animal species crossing national borders have been coordinated among EU Member States. The nature conservation measures developed in particular for the Great Bustard have already proved successful in Austria, Slovakia, Czechia, and Hungary.

- » Approximately 1,500 Great Bustards – i.e. 3% of the global stock – live in Austria, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia.
- » In Austria, about 5,000 hectares of arable land have been integrated into ÖPUL for the protection of the Great Bustard and are cultivated as protection areas for the Great Bustard.
- » With the help of the Hungarian agri-environmental programme thousands of hectares of arable land have been taken out of production also in Hungary to provide feeding grounds and breeding areas for the Great Bustard.
- » Europe-wide there are over 90 agri-environmental programmes.

# FACTS AND FIGURES

“ÖPUL 2007–2013” is the Austrian programme to promote agricultural production methods compatible with the requirements of the protection of the environment, extensive production, and the maintenance of the countryside. In financial terms, it is the most important measure of Austria’s rural development policy under the EU’s Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Careful management of agricultural land to protect the environment is of particular significance all over Europe. Each Member State is therefore obligated to offer its farmers an agri-environmental programme. The programmes are based on EU Regulation No 1698/05.

The detailed regulations on ÖPUL have been laid down in the special directive of the federal government, available at [www.le07-13.lebensministerium.at](http://www.le07-13.lebensministerium.at).

## ÖPUL 2007–2013 comprises 29 measures:

### Extensive and environmentally friendly management of the whole farm or of the entire type of crop and animal protection

- » Organic farming
- » Environmentally sound management of arable and grassland surfaces (UBAG)
- » Renunciation of the use of yield-increasing inputs on arable land
- » Renunciation of the use of yield-increasing inputs on arable land dedicated to green forage and on grassland
- » Abstention from the use of fungicides on grain-growing land
- » Environmentally sound management of medicinal plants and herbs, alternatives and seed reproduction
- » Integrated production of potatoes, beets, vegetables, strawberries
- » Erosion protection fruit and hops
- » Integrated fruit and hops production
- » Erosion protection in vineyards
- » Integrated production in vineyards
- » Protected cultivation
- » Animal protection measure

### Cultivated landscape and nature conservation

- » Abandonment of silage
- » Preservation of scattered fruit tree stands
- » Mowing of steep surfaces
- » Management of mountain meadows
- » Alpine pasturage and shepherding
- » Eco-points (Lower Austria)
- » Rare livestock breeds
- » Rare agricultural crops
- » Preservation and development of surfaces valuable in terms of nature water protection (nature conservation measures)

### Soil, climate and water protection

- » Greening of arable surfaces
- » Mulch and direct sowing
- » Regional project for groundwater protection and grassland preservation (Salzburg)
- » Preventive soil and water protection
- » Management of arable surfaces particularly at risk of erosion
- » Undercropping in maize
- » Low-loss application of liquid organic fertilizers and biogas manure

The programme “ÖPUL” is eligible for farmers managing agricultural land in Austria.

The acceptance rate of ÖPUL is very high:

- » About 89% (2.2 million hectares) of all utilised agricultural areas in Austria are ÖPUL areas.
- » About 73% (117,771) of all farms take part in ÖPUL.

## Participation in selected ÖPUL measures in 2009

ÖPUL measure	Number of farms	Subsidised area in hectares	Amounts of aid paid in million €
Environmentally sound management (UBAG)	69,480	1,317,445	114.71
Greening of arable surfaces	50,852	431,232	65.81
Organic farming	19,998	388,043	92.39
Mowing of steep surfaces	42,254	152,470	27.03
Renunciation of inputs on grassland surfaces	39,595	419,233	20.36
Animal protection measure	37,790	602,306 <sup>1</sup>	35.01
Nature conservation measure	23,417	81,691	41.83
Alpine pasturage and shepherding	7,809	441,929 <sup>2</sup>	23.88
Erosion protection in vineyards	7,961	37,148	5.32

<sup>1</sup> Number of animals      <sup>2</sup> Alpine forage area

Participation in the measures is voluntary. Corresponding to their higher effort and the loss of yield or lower yields they suffer, farmers receive compensation for exactly defined services. The different services are paid for in the form of premiums.

The area payment amounts to 220 €/ha on average.

ÖPUL is funded by the European Union, the federal government and the federal provinces in a 50:30:20 ratio. ÖPUL constitutes an important part of the entire rural development.

## CAP funds in Austria in 2009 in million € (rounded)

		in Mio. €
<b>1<sup>st</sup> pillar of the CAP</b>	Costs of market organisation	783.9
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> pillar of the CAP</b>	Rural development	1,147.6
<b>Axis 1: Competitiveness</b>		216.9
<b>Axis 2: Environment and countryside</b>	Total	842.9
	Of which ÖPUL: 548.4 million	
<b>Axis 3: Quality of life and diversification</b>		73.9
<b>Axis 4: LEADER</b>		9.3
Technical assistance		4.6

Agrarmarkt Austria (AMA) checks all holdings by means of administrative controls. In addition, compliance with the requirements on the relevant surfaces is checked in on-the-spot controls.

In case of infringement differently high sanctions are imposed which may include the reclamation of the total amount of payments granted.

To allow further development of ÖPUL and to ensure that the desired impacts on the environment are really achieved, the measures offered are checked for their technical accuracy and evaluated at regular intervals. This is done by means of various evaluation projects which, in a targeted manner, deal with the impacts of ÖPUL on the individual assets (soil, water, climate, biodiversity).

# Links

Rural Development Programme and Special Directive on ÖPUL:

[www.le07-13.lebensministerium.at](http://www.le07-13.lebensministerium.at)

Data and evaluation projects: [www.gruenerbericht.at](http://www.gruenerbericht.at)

Application and implementation: [www.ama.gv.at](http://www.ama.gv.at)

Network for rural development: [www.netzwerk-land.at](http://www.netzwerk-land.at)

European Commission: [www.europa.int](http://www.europa.int)

