

# EuroDairy pilot farms and biodiversity



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As part of the EuroDairy network, six pilot farms in Great Britain, alongside 36 others across Europe, are being audited on their biodiversity. The aim is to look at how profitable dairy farming can be combined with care for the environment, and what practical measures farmers can take to help further improve the environment around them.

Sophie Bertrand, livestock and environment consultant based in Germany, is carrying out the audits. Here she explains a bit more about biodiversity, and what she is looking for during her farm visits.

## In simple terms, what is biodiversity?

1. Biodiversity is all the different plants, animal, insects and soil microorganisms that live on the dairy farm. This is what we call the 'ordinary biodiversity', because there is nothing special about those plants and animals, but they are necessary for a well-functioning farming system, and the ecosystem in general.
2. On top of that, there is the 'extraordinary biodiversity', which refers to rare species of particular conservation interest. In some areas, specific measures are implemented to protect them

A method developed in France – 'BIOTEX', is being used to assess biodiversity during the audits.

## What can dairy farmers gain from improving biodiversity?

It is all about achieving a more balanced farming system that can better regulate itself, making it more resilient in the long run. For example, the birds and bats will eat the insects that damage the crops, earthworm will improve soil fertility, bees will facilitate pollination, hedges and grass strips will limit erosion and trees provide shelter and shadows for the cows. For farmers it represents an economy of pesticides, fertilizer, reducing farms cash outputs. Farmers may be able to capitalise on additional agri-environment payments, or derive a marketing benefit by promoting biodiversity aspects of their farm.

## How can dairy farmers promote biodiversity on their farm?

There are many different ways to promote biodiversity, but they need to be customized to each individual farm. In general there are three main approaches:

1. Landscape mosaic. Having a range of different crops on the farm encourages a variety of different species by providing very different habitats and shelter
2. Semi-natural habitats (trees, hedges, ponds etc.). The more of these there are on the farm, the better the biodiversity, as it provides greater shelter/habitat potential
3. Permanent grassland management. Grassland represent a wonderful habitat for biodiversity, but only if it is not too intensively managed i.e. grazed to low residuals, or subject to high Nitrogen fertiliser application



Finally, specific measures can be implemented within protected areas. We will have more information at the end of the project, when we will have an overview of the practices implemented by dairy farmers, under a range of circumstance, across the 14 countries participating in EuroDairy.

### Why is biodiversity important to my dairy farm business?

Good biodiversity is not only a source of pride, but can make a farm more resilient in the long-term. Society expects farmers to produce food, but also to take care of natural resources, including biodiversity. In the future, this may become increasingly embedded in the way dairy farmers are supported by Governments or by the consumer.

More about biodiversity available here:

[The main principles surrounding management for biodiversity](#)

[Assessing biodiversity on dairy farms: The Biotex tool](#)

## Research Themes

EuroDairy drives the engine of innovations on 4 main themes at dairy farms: animal care, biodiversity, resource efficiency and socio-economic resilience. Find more info on these dairy topics here!

[Biodiversity](#)

[Resource Efficiency](#)

[Socio-Economics](#)

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