

Rural Development and High Nature Value Farmlands in Romania: a project funded by the Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme

What are High Nature Value Farmlands and what is their role in rural development?

High Nature Value Farmlands (HNVF) are situated in rural areas where **traditional farming is the main economic activity and a key factor in nature conservation**. They are characterised by **the presence of natural and semi-natural vegetation** (grasslands), generally very species-rich, and in some cases they are **integrated into a large scale continuous mosaic landscape** which includes natural structural elements (such as field margins, hedgerows, stonewalls, patches of woodland or scrub, small rivers) and patches of arable land and orchards.

HNV farmlands in Romania are an estimated **30%** of the total utilisable agricultural area: 5 million ha, associated with smaller holding sizes in hilly areas within the Carpathian arc.

Traditional farming practices are responsible for maintaining many of Romania's (and Europe's) HNV farmlands, which **deliver a host of public benefits** (goods and services), including **valuable cultural landscapes**, high quality water and food, quality of life, recreation opportunities, carbon sequestration, flood control. These benefit wider society, beyond the communities that live within HNV areas.

HNV farmlands are also worthy of support for their **economic and agricultural productivity** which secure the livelihoods of many farming communities in Romania. Support given to HNV farmlands contributes to the prosperity of local communities, by providing opportunities for market diversification such as the development of rural tourism and businesses based on high quality and healthy products.

What threats to High Nature Value Farmlands is this project addressing?

In spite of their wider value, most of these semi-natural grasslands and mosaic, extensively farmed lands are under increasing pressure due to **abandonment, intensification and changes in land use**. They are threatened because the **small-scale farming systems no longer offer financial security**. This represents **a major socio-economic as well as environmental challenge**.

Specific issues which are being targeted through this project:

- **Policy limitations:** the current **eligible area for HNV grassland payments is only 2.5 million ha**, owing to inefficient targeting of funds and the restrictive definition of farmlands. There are currently **230,000 HNV farmers receiving some support**, but this is only **25 - 30% of the total number of HNV farming families**.
- **Barriers to market for HNV products:** small-scale farmers face administrative and commercial barriers to market. **Hygiene and safety standards** that production units need to meet are often set **too high** for micro-scale producers and they also have **low capacity to find and access markets** and to present their products attractively to consumers.

Finding ways to maintain traditional farming systems is critical not only for securing the survival of vibrant rural communities and high quality food, but also for conserving nature and the services it provides. **It is crucial to help farmers obtain access to the two sources of income: market sales** (of HNV goods and services) **and state funding** (which should be regarded not as support funding, but as payment for valuable public goods).

Project objectives

The project **overall goal** is **improved economic viability of local livelihoods from HNV farmlands in Romania and conservation of agri-environmental benefits.**

Specific objectives:

- 1. Policy:** Rural development policies better address threats and integrate trends and needs of HNVF communities
- 2. Training and capacity building:** HNV farmers and organisations in the study areas have higher capacity to:
 - Access markets and to make use of funding opportunities
 - Pass on skills and innovative approaches to develop HNV farming into a sustainable income-generating activity
- 3. Marketing:** HNV farmers/producers in the study areas have better access to markets for their products

The project aims to use innovative means to bring genuine long-term prosperity to these areas, stimulating commercial viability as well as public funding support (“*public money for public goods and services*”). There are growing opportunities to revive rural economies, to secure livelihoods and maintain HNVF areas. Growing interest amongst urban populations in food quality and provenance, as evidenced by the growing popularity of farmer markets, food festivals and movements, is opening new markets for such products.

Study areas

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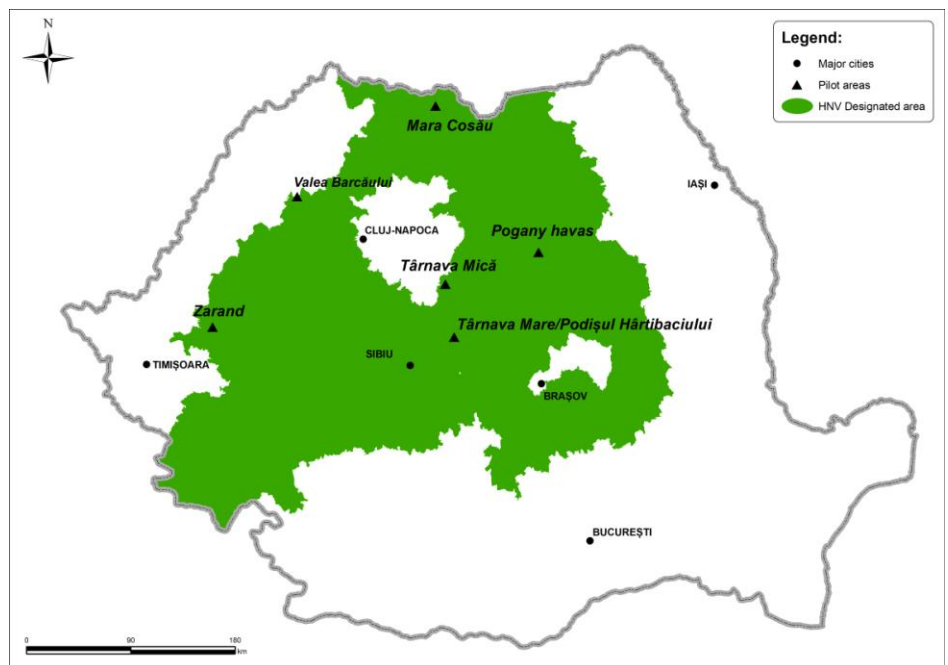
Duration

3 years: 2013 - 2016

Donor

The Swiss-Romanian Cooperation Programme

Partners



AGRIDEA (Switzerland), Fundația ADEPT Transilvania, ProPark Foundation for Protected Areas, WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme Romania

Local partners: Zarand Association, Milvus Group, Pogány-havas Association, Agapis Foundation for Education and Local Development, Apavie Association