

MANAGEMENT INSTRUMENTS FOR CULTURAL LANDSCAPE CONSERVATION IN THE NEW COMMON AGRICULTURAL POLICY

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Purpose: The study addresses a relatively new, yet highly significant area of agricultural management, which is the protection of cultural landscape. The analyses and evaluations presented in the paper refer to the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union, currently being implemented and programmed for the years 2023-2027. Poland carries out the national version of this policy by adapting management instruments and mechanisms to the country's specific realities, needs, as well as the structural and economic conditions.

Design/methodology/approach: The paper takes the form of a case study, critically concluded with guidelines aimed at improving the support system for shaping the agricultural landscape.

Findings: A critical analysis of the support system, which may serve as a set of recommendations for policymakers seeking to improve the nationally developed framework for supporting the protection of the agricultural landscape.

Practical implications: Support for the cultural landscape conservation within the European Union is shaped at the national level based on common guidelines applicable across the Community. This makes the system both original in its design and the evaluation of it inherently creative.

Originality/value: Improving the support system will facilitate its acceptance by beneficiaries- namely, farmers, without the need to allocate additional financial resources.

Keywords: cultural landscape, the GAEC, the CAP 2021-2027, the Green Deal.

Category of the paper: conceptual paper; case study.

1. Introduction

After many years of discussions held within EU member states and institutions, and with a significant delay relative to earlier projections, the year 2023 marked official implementation of a strategy aimed at supporting economic development, including agriculture and rural areas, known as the European Green Deal. This strategy encompasses nearly all

aspects of economic and social life within EU countries, with particular emphasis on the natural environment, transportation, energy production, and agriculture (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament..., 2019; Wspieramy..., 2025). The Green Deal strategy integrates climate and energy policy, sustainable industry, transport, smart mobility, and forestry, while also placing agriculture at its core. It promotes sustainable development across all areas of economic policy and extends to households as well (Poczta, Walczak, 2022). This includes, among others, sustainable development through the implementation of various types of eco-innovations within companies - their organizational structures and management practices, that reduce or prevent negative environmental impacts (Zuzek, 2011; Zuzek, 2025; Wielewska, 2016; Wielewska, 2018; Wielewska, 2019).

Among the nine specific objectives of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), three are explicitly related to the management of natural environment and landscape conservation in rural areas - responsibilities that are to be primarily fulfilled by the agriculture, and in particular by farmers (Pe'er et al., 2019). That is based on the consideration presented by Agnoletti et al. (2011), that the cultural landscape is a many centuries-old type of interaction between man and environment. These objectives address the need to halt and reverse biodiversity loss, strengthen ecosystem services, and protect habitats and landscapes - issues that have been already emphasized for the last several decades (Porter, Linde, 1995; Perrings et al., 2006). They also underscore the need for the sustainable production of safe and healthy food, the improvement of animal welfare, the development of the bioeconomy and circular economy, and the promotion of sustainable forestry practices (Musiał, Krawczyk, 2022). However, the central aim and strength of the European Green Deal lies in its shared vision of building a sustainable food system, encapsulated in the "Farm to Fork" strategy and the "Biodiversity Strategy." These frameworks define not only the new structure and goals of the CAP but also the management instruments that member states are expected to implement during the 2023-2027 period.

Nonetheless, the goals outlined in the strategy, once transferred to the national level, must be tailored to the specific environmental conditions and other relevant characteristics of each country, including both systemic challenges and agricultural strengths (Płatności..., 2023). Consequently, the responsibility for implementation and management of the strategy rests not with the institutions of the European Union but with the executive authorities of the individual member states. For the first time, the strategy's recommendations explicitly address the landscape by emphasizing the need to maintain and create high-diversity landscape features, in order to halt and reverse the biodiversity's decline in habitats associated with agriculture, but also to prevent erosion, protect agricultural habitats, and restore and maintain their proper condition (Musiał, Szumiec, 2021). The document also highlights the importance of developing precision agriculture, establishing buffer zones, adopting new approaches to wetland management, expanding organic farming, afforesting agricultural land, and promoting agroforestry systems.

The study is of a review-based nature and addresses a relatively new, yet highly significant area of agricultural management: the protection of the cultural landscape. Cultural landscapes may be protected either passively, through minimal human integration, or actively. In the latter case, it involves deliberate and often substantial human intervention in the natural environment, provided that such actions are legally regulated and aligned with social expectations and requirements (Brelík, 2015; Daniłowska, 2014). In the context of agriculture and agricultural production, landscape protection can be supported through a system of economic and non-economic instruments, including specifically targeted incentives that encourage environmentally responsible management of commercial farming operations (Małżewska, 2016; Musiał, 2024). The analyses and evaluations presented in the study pertain to the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union, currently being implemented and programmed for the years 2023-2027. Poland executes its national version of this policy by adapting management instruments and mechanisms to its own structural and economic conditions, as well as to national needs and realities.

2. The essence of landscape conservation management within the framework of the Green Deal

Among the various currents of economic thought that have gained prominence in recent years, each seeking to address key contemporary challenges, one particularly noteworthy approach is the so-called new pragmatism. It offers a response to today's civilizational dilemmas by advocating for the development of a sound economy, while rejecting the dogma of profit maximization and unlimited production growth. A central principle of this paradigm is the shaping of economic policy - also at the global level - in a way that serves long-term public interests (Kołodko, 2013). As such, a defining paradigm of modern economics should be moderation across multiple dimensions and the maintenance of long-term balance (Kołodko, 2025). Achieving the economic goals proposed by new pragmatism requires the convergence of numerous conditions and causal factors, particularly those related to economics, the management of socially sustainable development, as well as spatial and ecological sustainability. This pertains to the dynamic relationship between human economic activity and the natural world, including nature that has been deliberately organized for the purposes of agricultural production (Galbraith, 1967). Today, such goals are operationalized through regulatory frameworks established at both the European Union and national levels. Although the EU lacks an autonomous public policy explicitly dedicated to landscape protection, it nevertheless initiates diverse actions within its environmental policy, spatial planning policy, and - crucially - its agricultural policy, as embodied in the Common Agricultural Policy (Nowak-Far, 2017). Institutionalized landscape conservation, whether driven by objective

circumstances or subjective priorities, inevitably leads to the internalization of environmental costs (Wilkin, 2010). It now constitutes an important component of the EU's agri-environmental policy, which is designed to support a range of agricultural practices aimed at reducing incentives for production intensification while encouraging environmental stewardship, including landscape conservation (Kruszyński, 2023). It also aligns with the somewhat overlooked concept of the European Model of Agriculture, in which sustainability and environmental values (landscape among them), are now more prominently emphasized. These objectives are currently being pursued within the framework of the European Green Deal.

The implementation of the Green Deal has become the central task in the practical execution of the new Common Agricultural Policy for 2023-2027. This responsibility, similarly to previous years, has been entrusted to the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture, particularly its regional and county-level organizational structures (Musiał, 2024). The program constitutes a specific offer addressed to farmers and, although mandatory for EU member states, it remains voluntary for individual agricultural producers. This means that the program should be designed in such a way that its individual support schemes, i.e. actions and measures, form an attractive propositions for farmers, encouraging them to participate and, in doing so, gain additional economic benefits. However, not all actions required of farmers to qualify for support are financially compensated. Some are categorized as practices that serve as entry conditions for accessing the support system and are referred to as "conditionality". These requirements must be met by farmers as a prerequisite for participation in the broader system of farm support, which includes a variety of both existing and newly introduced direct payment schemes. Conditionality determines whether farmers receive full and diverse forms of entitled support (i.e., budgetary transfers) through the following support instruments:

- direct payments,
- eco-schemes,
- agri-environment-climate payments,
- payments for afforestation, tree planting, and the creation of agroforestry systems,
- payments for areas facing natural or other specific constraints (ANCs) (Płatności..., 2023). Conditionality constitutes both a continuation and an expansion of previous requirements, introducing new instruments that farmers must comply with in order to access selected direct payments included in Pillar I and Pillar II of the CAP. The comprehensive document titled the Strategic Plan for the Common Agricultural Policy 2023-2027 (SPCAP) outlines a wide and complex array of institutional instruments designed to influence agriculture, including the economic and structural dimensions of rural areas. In the context of landscape protection, particular attention should be given to the standards set out in the SPCAP known as Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions (GAEC). These standards correspond to EU-level benchmarks aimed at ensuring sustainability in agriculture (Diaconu, 2024).

Table 1.

Agricultural practices designated for on-farm management, that pertain to the preservation of the cultural landscape and environmental protection, and which constitute a prerequisite for farmers to receive direct payments

Type of practice	Objective of protective measures	GAEC Standard ¹⁾
Maintenance of permanent grasslands	Maintaining the existing share of permanent grasslands at the national level and preventing their conversion into arable land or forest.	GAEC 1
Protection of wetlands and peatlands	Protection of organic soils as carbon reservoirs. Conservation of biodiversity as a co-benefit.	GAEC 2
Prohibition of burning plant residues on agricultural land	Protection of flora and fauna and prevention of wildfires.	GAEC 3
Establishment of buffer zones along watercourses	Protection of surface waters from contamination by fertilizers and plant protection products.	GAEC 4
Restrictions on conventional ploughing, especially on slopes	Prevention of soil erosion through reduced tillage and a ban on bare fallow. Maximum slope gradient set at 14%.	GAEC 5
Implementation and diversification of crop rotation on arable land	Enhancement of biodiversity and soil production potential (does not apply to farms smaller than 10 hectares).	GAEC 7
Maintenance of a minimum share of arable land allocated to non-productive areas	Very strong and diverse landscape protection (as specified in Table 2).	GAEC 8
Prohibition of converting and ploughing permanent grasslands	Maintenance or restoration of permanent grasslands in Natura 2000 areas.	GAEC 9

¹⁾GAEC – Good Agricultural and Environmental Conditions.

Source: *Platności bezpośrednie w tym ekoschematy oraz interwencje środowiskowe PS WPR 2023-2027* (2023). Warszawa: MRiRW.

The various actions or practices listed in Table 1, which a farmer is required to implement in order to receive different types of direct payments (i.e., those linked to cultivated land), are highly diverse. Their impact on the natural environment and the cultural landscape, in which farmers and, more broadly, rural residents live and work, also varies considerably. Through these often additional and intentional undertakings, farmers provide a range of public goods that benefit not only the inhabitants of their immediate subregion, but also the wider national community. These contributions hold significance not only at the national level, but also at the European and global levels (Brelík, 2015).

A farmer intending to receive the direct subsidies, must comply with the requirements of GAEC 1. This entails managing crop structures in a way that ensures the preservation of ecologically valuable permanent grasslands. These areas may not be converted into arable land, and if such transformation has occurred in the past, they must be restored within the cultivated land structure. Meanwhile, GAEC 2 evokes significant debate among both the environmentalists and farmers - particularly those engaged in ruminant livestock production. This standard concerns the protection of carbon-rich soils, which are to be preserved as long-term carbon sinks. The release of carbon from such soils, primarily through oxidation, results in the depletion of soil carbon stocks and contributes to the atmospheric accumulation of CO₂, a key driver of climate warming. In Poland, carbon-rich soils are primarily associated with wetlands and peatlands. Historically, these areas were considered agriculturally marginal and

were often excluded from farming. Over time however, largely under pressure from environmental advocates and the pro-ecological EU lobby, their status has been redefined. They are now recognized as ecologically and scenically significant. Consequently, beginning in 2025, farmers are required to maintain the status quo, meaning they must refrain from ploughing wetlands and peatlands and are encouraged to allow for periodic spring and summer inundation (Diaconu, 2024). GAEC 3 also carries important and multifaceted implications for environmental and landscape protection. It addresses the still-practiced, though legally prohibited, burning of stubble, especially after grain harvests. The destructive force of fire causes long-term ecological damage, eliminating numerous valuable plant species, as well as invertebrates and small vertebrates. Such practices also frequently lead to the spread of fire to adjacent plots, woodlands, forests, and even human settlements. The burning of stubble, as well as grass on degraded permanent grasslands, ditches, and riverbanks, has resulted in numerous fatalities, affecting both those managing the land and bystanders. Particularly devastating to the cultural landscape are large-scale forest fires, as the restoration of such areas to their original state may take decades.

For landscape protection, the legal incorporation and on-farm implementation of GAEC 4 is of particular value. This standard centers on limiting and, in some cases, completely prohibiting the use of fertilizers and plant protection products within buffer zones of 5, 10, or 20 meters, depending on the width of the watercourse. Additionally, the application of any fertilizers is strictly prohibited within 3 meters of the banks of lakes, other water reservoirs, and natural watercourses such as streams. The objective is twofold: to protect ecologically and scenically valuable riparian vegetation, which is often lush and diverse, from alteration of its botanical composition, and to safeguard aquatic ecosystems from nitrate pollution and the accelerating process of eutrophication.

At first glance, GAEC 5 - concerning what is referred to in programmatic documents as "tillage management", may appear to have limited relevance for landscape protection. However, its core principle is the promotion of plant production practices that eliminate the maintenance of bare fallow (i.e., arable land without vegetative cover). This standard also requires farmers operating in areas with significant terrain variation (e.g., mountainous regions) to plough across slopes rather than along them, in order to prevent soil erosion, especially water erosion. Moreover, GAEC 5 mandates the discontinuation of plough-based cultivation on plots situated on slopes with a gradient exceeding 14%. The implementation of this standard is expected to contribute to landscape transformation in mountainous areas, where cultivation along slopes is still commonly practiced. In cases where arable plots on steep slopes are too narrow to accommodate compliant ploughing techniques, this regulation may lead to, or encourage a shift away from conventional tillage toward the establishment of permanent grasslands. On such terrain, permanent grasslands are clearly better suited from both ecological and agro-economic perspectives (Pipíšková et al., 2023).

GAEC 7 also has direct implications for landscape management, as it requires farmers applying for direct payments and certain other subsidies to implement crop rotation and diversification on arable land. Over the past 30 to 40 years, when Poland's agrarian structure was even more fragmented, agricultural land typically featured several, sometimes even a dozen or more, crop species, varying by subregion. These included cereals, potatoes, sugar beets, various legumes, fodder crops, and industrial plants. Today, however, crop rotations are often simplified due to technological constraints, particularly the high cost and specialization of machinery used for soil cultivation and harvesting. As a result, arable land is now heavily dominated by winter and spring cereals, maize, and regionally also rapeseed. These so-called combine-harvestable crops account for over 90% of cultivated land in some areas, shaping a highly uniform agricultural landscape. This narrowing of crop selection, along with production specialization and concentration, has caused significant changes to the agricultural landscape, especially in areas where arable land predominates. To counteract this trend, GAEC 7, which applies to farms exceeding 10 hectares, requires the cultivation of at least three different crops, with no single crop (e.g., maize) exceeding 65% of the total arable area. Additionally, the standard mandates crop rotation, prohibiting the cultivation of the same crop on the same field for more than three consecutive years. The use of winter cover crops and post-harvest catch crops is also encouraged. These practices are intended to halt the degradation of crop diversity and preserve the cultural landscape, while simultaneously maintaining the productive potential of the soil.

GAEC 8 is one of the most complex and task-intensive standards, addressing both the allocation of arable land to non-productive areas or features, and the preservation of valuable landscape elements. It also includes a prohibition on trimming trees and hedgerows during the bird nesting season (Table 2). Under this standard, the farmer is, in effect, regarded as a steward of the semi-wild or agriculturally modified natural environment that surrounds them. To comply, a farmer must refrain from damaging landscape features, such as heritage trees protected by conservation law, which is relatively self-evident. Additionally, the farmer is obliged to preserve ditches wider than 2 meters and small water bodies, including seasonal ponds, with a surface area smaller than 100 m² (0.01 ha). Non-productive land also includes hedgerows or tree-lined strips, various types of linear woodland formations, and large individual field trees with crown diameters exceeding 5 meters.

Table 2.

*Obligatory commitments of farmers under GAEC 8, related to landscape conservation**

Type of practice	Protective tasks to be performed by farmers
Preservation of landscape elements	– Prohibition of destroying: – trees designated as natural monuments, – ditches wider than 2 meters, – water bodies with a surface area up to 100 m²
Prohibition of trimming hedgerows and trees during the bird nesting and breeding period	This restriction does not apply to: – willows, – fruit trees, – short-rotation coppices

Cont. table 2.

Exclusion of arable land from productive use (applies to farms over 10 ha)	At least 4% of arable land must be designated for: – landscape elements through the preservation of permanent grasslands (TUZ), – establishment and/or preservation of hedgerows and wooded areas, – preservation of solitary trees on arable land, – establishment and/or preservation of mid-field groves, trees, and stones, – preservation of existing field ditches, – establishment and/or preservation of ponds, – preservation of mid-field balks and buffer strips, – preservation of (extensified) field margins adjacent to forest edges, – fallowing or sowing of melliferous (pollinator-friendly) plants, – use of cover crops and undersown crops in main crop systems
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*GAEC 8 includes the requirement to allocate a minimum share of arable land to non-productive areas or features, to preserve landscape elements, and to prohibit trimming of trees and hedgerows during the bird nesting season.

Source: *Platności bezpośrednie w tym ekoschematy oraz interwencje środowiskowe PS WPR 2023-2027* (2023). Warszawa: MRiRW.

Medium and large farms (those exceeding 10 hectares) are required to meet additional obligations involving the exclusion of a relatively small portion (namely, 4% of arable land) for non-productive purposes. While this percentage may appear modest, in the case of larger agricultural holdings, it translates into the withdrawal of several, or even dozens, of hectares from the plant production. For farmers who have invested in acquiring additional land, this represents a non-productive allocation of capital, effectively turning investment into non-yielding land assets. In 2024, however, this mandatory provision was withdrawn after the Polish production-oriented economic lobby effectively “won” a policy dispute with the environmental lobby. The requirement had often been justifiably challenged by large-scale farmers, particularly those managing consolidated expanses of farmland characterized by open agricultural spaces with no field margins, hedgerows, ditches, or mid-field shelterbelts. Under the revised rules, farmers can now compensate for the absence of natural non-productive areas by cultivating catch crops, undersown crops, or legumes, provided these cover at least 3% of the arable land. They may also plant pollinator-friendly species on part of their land, thereby offsetting the lack of fallow (non-productive) areas, supported by an officially recognized list of melliferous plant species.

The GAEC standards encompass a wide range of responsibilities to be fulfilled by farmers, involving diverse production-related undertakings that simultaneously function as instruments of landscape management. These include:

- maintaining the current status of permanent grasslands, soil cover, and non-productive agricultural features,
- protecting certain areas by withdrawing wetlands and peatlands from agricultural use (compensatory payments for compliance with this requirement are planned from 2025 onward),
- refraining from burning post-harvest residues and other dry vegetation,
- establishing buffer zones along watercourses, which also applies to the banks of lakes and other water bodies,

- reorganizing production systems, including the abandonment of plough-based systems on slopes and eliminating bare fallow practices,
- implementing crop rotation and diversification on arable land.

Farmers are also required to maintain or restore permanent grasslands in Natura 2000 areas. Every farmer who applies for direct payments is obligated to align their production practices with conditionality requirements. If these obligations are violated in a severe, prolonged, or intentional (or negligent) manner, reductions in direct payments may be imposed (CAP Strategic Plan 2023-2027).

3. Instruments supporting the agricultural landscape management

A wide array of environmental management instruments, including those targeting the agricultural landscape, can be implemented by farmers on a remunerated basis. The primary category here consists of area-based direct payments, among which are the direct support measures introduced in 2023 known as eco-schemes. Each type of financial support available to farmers is precisely detailed in the relevant procedures, and farmers, particularly those considered "active" in a professional sense, can readily access detailed guidance and assistance in applying for any form of support. These services and informational materials are provided by the regional Agricultural Advisory Centres and their county-level offices, as well as by private consultants, the Agency for Restructuring and Modernisation of Agriculture, and Agricultural Chambers (Musiał, 2024). The most general eligibility criteria for receiving direct payments include meeting the definition of an "active farmer" and cultivating at least 1 hectare of agricultural land in plots of no less than 0.1 hectare. These payments are essential for environmental management at the EU, national, regional, and farm levels. In the current context of global market dynamics and macro- and microeconomic pressures, the absence of such payments would likely result in the widespread abandonment of agricultural land, leading to significant changes in the landscape. This is particularly true for very small farms, so those ranging from approximately 1 to 5 hectares, which typically cannot cover production costs solely through commercial output. Consequently, EU transfers, including direct payments, often serve as a critical factor enabling continued agricultural activity. At the same time, such payments may hinder agrarian restructuring processes, though that represents a separate economic and social issue (Musiał, Musiał, 2021).

The second category of payments that significantly contribute to landscape protection are the so-called eco-schemes. These are voluntary, annually implemented practices or initiatives that farmers may choose to adopt. They promote a variety of production-related decisions aimed at improving soil fertility, optimizing fertilizer use, protecting the natural environment, and enhancing crop quality. Eco-schemes also support farm management strategies that,

through their implementation, provide farmers with appropriate financial compensation. They address multiple environmental objectives, including landscape protection, particularly through the promotion of biodiversity in agricultural production (Płatności..., 2023). Some eco-schemes directly relate to landscape issues and have already been included under conditionality as part of the mandatory GAEC standards. Among them, the eco-scheme for extensive use of permanent grasslands (TUZ) has a particularly strong influence on shaping the cultural landscape, as do measures promoting crop diversification and the establishment of areas with melliferous plants, which are pollinator-friendly (Table 3).

Table 3.

Environmental and landscape management instruments implemented by farmers for payment and supported by direct payments (under Pillar I of the CAP)

Name of support instrument	Key eligibility conditions for payment	Annual payment rate per 1 ha/1 unit
Direct Payments: a) basic income support, b) payments for young farmers, c) redistributive payments	Agricultural activity on at least 1 ha of agricultural land	a) 483,20 PLN/ha b) 168,79 PLN/ha c) 256,55 PLN/ha
Eco-scheme payments: a) extensive use of permanent grasslands (TUZ), b) crop structure diversification, c) areas with melliferous (pollinator-friendly) plants, d) water retention on TUZ	Compliance with specific detailed requirements beyond GAEC conditionality	a) 432,05 PLN/ha b) 223,18 PLN/ha c) 891,32 PLN/ha d) to be determined

Source: Płatności bezpośrednio w tym ekoschematy oraz interwencje środowiskowe PS WPR 2023-2027 (2023). Warszawa: MRiRW.

Starting in 2025, a new eco-scheme, controversial among farmers is being implemented to support water retention on permanent grasslands (TUZ). Its objective is to maintain temporary and short-term inundation or waterlogging during the growing season in order to preserve biodiversity, particularly in valuable habitats occupied by endangered bird species. This measure aligns with other compensated instruments aimed at protecting valuable habitats within and beyond Natura 2000 areas (Table 4). The program also includes instruments that promote biodiversity in livestock production, such as supporting the conservation of endangered genetic resources of native livestock breeds (cattle, horses, sheep, and pigs). A similar form of protection applies to traditional orchards, where trees of original, genetically valuable but often commercially less competitive varieties are cultivated. One of the most extensive and wide-reaching measures is the intervention known as "Organic Farming", which covers all regions of the country. Farmers receiving direct payments and willing to transition to this production system may benefit from a variety of support instruments (referred to as interventions) and payment packages. These cover arable crops, vegetables, herbs, berries, and fodder crops cultivated on arable land. From the perspective of landscape protection management, the value of this measure lies in its contribution to increased biodiversity and the enhanced aesthetic and structural diversity of the agricultural landscape, which evolves visibly with the changing seasons. This is largely due to the variety of crops involved and the complex crop rotations required. Market losses associated with this form of production are compensated

through financial support, which also includes economic incentives to encourage farmers to adopt organic practices.

Table 4.

Agri-environmental measures and actions aimed at environmental and landscape protection

Name of support instrument	Key conditions for payment eligibility	Annual payment rate per 1 ha/1 unit ¹
Protection of valuable habitats and endangered species in Natura 2000 and beyond	Protection of valuable natural habitats and bird nesting sites; protection activities carried out by farmers for payment	Highly variable payments from 912 to 1612 PLN/ha
Preservation of orchards with traditional fruit varieties	Maintenance and preservation of fruit trees with low market value	2117 PLN/ha
Conservation of endangered genetic resources of livestock	Support for maintaining conservation breeds of cattle, horses, sheep, pigs, and goats	Highly variable rates from 500 to 5925 PLN per animal
Increasing biodiversity on arable land	Enhancing biodiversity and landscape protection through establishment of flower strips and biodiversity gardens	Rates from 2342 PLN/ha to 3501 PLN/ha
Support for organic production	Plant production on agricultural land, including orchards and vegetables, supported through 9 packages; sustainable plant and animal production also supported	Rates vary from 573 PLN/ha to 3105 PLN/ha
Support for areas with natural and other constraints (ANC)	Farms located in: a) mountain areas (IZ)	450 PLN/ha 750 PLN/ha ¹⁾
	a) natural constraints zones I and II	179 PLN/ha 264 PLN/ha
	b) specific (especially valuable natural and sub-mountain) areas	179 PLN/ha 264 PLN/ha 550 PLN/ha ¹⁾
Afforestation of arable land	Separate lump-sum payments for: a) afforestation b) maintenance c) compensation for lost income	a) 16059-17436 PLN/ha b) 1377-1584 PLN/ha c) 972-1264 PLN/ha
Creation of mid-field afforestations	Establishing afforestations as landscape and biodiversity elements; supported activities include: - planting trees and shrubs - maintenance premium	10892-13664 PLN/ha 2494 PLN/ha
Establishment of agroforestry systems	Integration of trees and shrubs with agricultural production on the same land; support for establishment (including on slopes >12°) and maintenance	3092 PLN/ha a) 3199 PLN/ha b) 900±1500 PLN/ha

1) Payments for farms maintaining grazing animals.

2) Payments applicable for the year 2024.

Source: *Platności bezpośrednie w tym ekoschematy oraz interwencje środowiskowe PS WPR 2023-2027* (2023). Warszawa: MRiRW.

Another highly significant initiative implemented under the Common Agricultural Policy involves support for agriculture and farms located in so-called problem areas. The definition and delimitation of these areas fall within the domain of economic and spatial development policy, as well as institutional economics (Zieliński, 2023). For production and economic purposes, and in accordance with EU regulations, these areas are divided nationally into three categories. The first group includes mountainous areas located at elevations above 500 meters above sea level, characterized by less favorable climatic conditions and steep terrain. Such areas

are generally best suited for use as permanent grasslands, yet this form of land use should be unconditionally linked to the raising of both small and large ruminants. In this way, their productive function is uniquely and intrinsically connected to landscape-related functions. Similarly, in sub-mountainous zones with challenging farming conditions—typically situated above 350 meters—agricultural landscapes require special protection. These regions, found predominantly in the Beskids and Sudetes (as well as parts of the Kraków-Częstochowa Upland), depend heavily on the continuation of agricultural production, especially livestock farming, to maintain their mosaic-like, diverse, and ecologically valuable landscape structure.

A slightly different rationale underpins support for areas with natural constraints, such as poor soil quality, stoniness, or unfavorable hydrological conditions. Maintaining or prolonging agricultural use in these regions is incentivized through annual compensatory payments, which also serve as a form of social support for farmers. This problem-based support system helps preserve agricultural activity and production, open grazing of herbivorous animals (for which additional compensation is provided), and the protection of often unique ecosystems.

Further instruments focus on environmental management within the domain of forestry. Although Poland already has a relatively high forest cover, which is 9,511 thousand hectares, or 30.3% of the national territory (Statistical Office of the Republic of Poland, 2023), afforestation efforts now carry less weight on the national level but remain relevant at regional and local scales. These initiatives now emphasize the afforestation of marginal arable land, typically with low soil quality, and involve a three-tiered compensation system: a one-time payment for afforestation costs, annual maintenance payments, and a flat-rate afforestation premium to compensate for the loss of income from agricultural use (paid for 12 years). Particularly valuable are mid-field afforestations, which hold both ecological and landscape significance. Newly created mid-field woodlots, ranging from 0.1 to 0.5 hectares, are intended to serve as food bases for birds and pollinating insects. However, the requirement for fencing these areas to protect against animal damage remains a subject of debate, unless such fencing is temporary.

A recent innovation in the context of agricultural-forestry coexistence is the establishment of agroforestry systems. These integrate trees and shrubs into agricultural production, offering a wide range of ecological, landscape, and environmental-climate benefits. Nonetheless, despite generous financial support for their establishment and maintenance (for up to five years), doubts remain about whether such systems will gain broader acceptance among farmers. These concerns arise from the challenges of placing arable crops adjacent to forested areas, including issues related to shading, disrupted water balance, and nutrient management. Such difficulties are especially pronounced in regions with low rainfall and on light soils with lower fertility ratings.

The requirements for agricultural production management known as SMR (Statutory Management Requirements) can also play a significant role in shaping and protecting the rural landscape. A particularly important element is the set of recommendations related to ensuring

enhanced animal welfare standards for farmers who raise livestock. This can be achieved, among other measures, by guaranteeing free-range grazing for dairy cows, suckler cows, and fattening cattle for at least 120 days per year during the pasture season, without tethering, and for a minimum of six hours daily. This financially supported method of livestock management, once the dominant system but now in decline due to economic pressures, is crucial for maintaining the productive use of grasslands and for safeguarding the landscape. The preservation of small and medium-sized farms also plays a key role in this regard. These farms, typically ranging from 1 to 30-50 hectares, are responsible for the mosaic structure of fields, as well as the diversity and variability of crops. Their environmental and landscape value increases substantially when they also engage in livestock production. However, in recent years, this type of production has become increasingly concentrated, specialized, and commercialized. Small herds are disappearing, and a gradual deanimalisation of agricultural production space is occurring (Musiał, Sowula-Skrzyńska, 2024). To address this, the CAP Strategic Plan introduces measures to support income related to livestock farming. Support is directed particularly at smaller farms and herds, with additional payments available for up to 20 cows, all sheep, and goat herds of at least 10 animals (or 5 in smaller cases). These payments aim to sustain livestock keeping, promote the production of local and regional products, and strengthen both the productive and landscape functions of rural areas. This support is particularly relevant in regions with high landscape and tourism value, especially in mountainous areas.

4. Summary

Agriculture within the European Union, including in Poland, has entered a phase of implementing new or previously underemphasized functions related to environmental protection and the preservation of the cultural landscape. These functions represent a response to increasing threats to landscape integrity. Such threats stem from within the agricultural sector itself, as well as from the development of infrastructure, urban expansion, and mineral extraction. Over the course of its evolution, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has developed increasingly rigorous requirements and mechanisms aimed at safeguarding the environment and the cultural landscape of rural and agricultural areas. The currently implemented European Green Deal sets out a shared vision of environmental protection, but entrusts its practical implementation to individual member states. Poland's Strategic Plan for the CAP, introduced in 2023, contains a range of institutional regulations concerning cultural landscape conservation. These regulations are preventive in nature, seeking to preserve environmental quality, and also aim to support agricultural production in ways that are environmentally friendly and culturally sensitive. A key component of this system is the

so-called conditionality, which continues the pro-environmental efforts pursued under the CAP until 2022. Within this framework, farmers undertake certain actions either voluntarily and without compensation, or with financial support to offset additional costs and foregone benefits. Conditionality, as a distinct category of institutional obligations, determines farmers' eligibility for financial support provided through various direct payments under the CAP, as well as for additional payments related to agri-environment-climate measures, afforestation, and compensation for farms located in problem areas.

The conducted analyses and evaluations indicate that a key role in agricultural landscape protection is played by the so-called GAEC standards. They are mandatory and often contested by farmers, which are further extended through various compensated agri-environmental measures. The financial resources allocated to support landscape and environmental protection activities are generally proportional to the additional burdens and costs incurred by farmers. These funds are primarily distributed through area-based direct payments and eco-schemes, which encourage farmers to adopt extensive production methods, diversify cropping systems, and protect agro-ecosystems. Particular emphasis is placed on the role of farms engaged in small-scale livestock production, especially those maintaining ruminants. Such farms are essential for maintaining the productive use of grasslands, shaping and enriching the landscape, and contributing to the regional identity, adding originality and value to anthropogenically and agriculturally transformed rural spaces.

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