LATTANZIO
ADVISORY Public Sector

Regione Marche

Environmental Report of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020

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Non techincal summary

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1 Non technical summary

Marche Region has elaborated its **Rural Development Programme** (RDP) for the 2014-2020 programming period and activated the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA).

One of the founding principles of the EU approach to policies for rural development is to ensure **environmental sustainability** of the projects funded; planned measures/actions and interventions must be designed to ensure maximum environmental protection. Nevertheless there are some types of actions that must find the right balance between environmental protection needs on one hand and production needs on the other. In order to verify whether there is a potential environmental impact of the measure foreseen by the RDP the Strategic Environmental Assessment has been activated.

The evaluation carried out has identified some areas that - rather than showing real critical environmental risks - need to be monitored during subsequent f implementation phases, when the objectives set out in the planning period will have to be transferred at the implementation level (tender, announcements).

1.1 Programme description

Marche RDP follows the **six Priorities** and related **Focus Areas** foreseen by the rural development policy of the European Union for 2014-2020 period. With regard to environmental issues Priority 4 and 5 are play the main role in the Programme strategy, and must also fulfill the needs expressed by the territory and collected by the Managing Authority in charge of drawing up the RDP:

PRIORITY		FOCUS AREA		NEEDS
4	Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry	4a	Restoring, preserving and enhancing biodiversity, including in Natura 2000 areas, and in areas facing natural or other specific constraints, and high nature value farming, as well as the state of European landscapes;	• Manage agro-forestry-pastoral mountain environments • Encourage active participation of farmers for the sustainable land management with collective approaches • Supporting production and management methods with lower environmental impact • Preserve and enhance agricultural and natural biodiversity • Hydrogeological safeguard and sustainable management of agricultural soils
		4b	Improving water management, including fertiliser and pesticide management;	
		4c	Preventing soil erosion and improving soil management	
5	Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift towards a low carbon and climate resilient economy in agriculture, food and forestry sectors	5a	Increasing efficiency in water use by agriculture	• Efficient use of water resources • Improve energy efficiency of farms and agro-industry • Promote the production of energy from forestry biomass and agricultural by-products on a local scale • Hydrogeological safeguard and sustainable management of agricultural soils • Enhancement of production, protective and public use capacity of forests
		5b	Increasing efficiency in energy use in agriculture and food processing	
		5c	Facilitating the supply and use of renewable sources of energy, of by-products, wastes and residues and of other non food raw material, for the purposes of the bio-economy	
		5e	Fostering carbon conservation and sequestration in agri-culture and forestry	

In response to the regional needs the RDP strategy planned the activation of specific interventions (measures) taken from the list provided by the EU regulation. The total financial resources available to the Marche RDP is of **537.96 Meuro of public expenditure**, of which 217 Meuro (41%) is expected to be allocated for purposes related of the environment.

1.1.1 State of the environment and critical issues

The analysis of the current state of the environment underlined few significant regional problems and threats:

- A deep transformation of land use in mountain areas
- conflict with human activities in Natura 2000 areas
- Intensification of phenomena linked to climate change
- Low efficiency of irrigation systems
- Soil erosion
- Widespread of landslide risk
- Insufficient implementation of active management of wooded areas, low quality of forests and of forest products
- Consumption of land and loss of landscape elements;
- Conflicts between wildlife and agricultural and livestock activities
- Low diffusion of biomass energy facilities
- Risk related to further loss of organic matter in agricultural soils.

1.2 External Coherence

It was verified the consistency of the RDP with other regional plans and especially with the **Regional Forestry Plan** and the **Regional Environmental Energy Plan**, with which it has been declared to be **broadly consistent** with the objectives of the RDP. In the forestry sector both the programmes support the need to promote **sustainable forest management** and to better exploit its wood products (for energy purposes but also for the production of industrial round wood and / or enhancement of other products such as truffles). To achieve the objectives, the critical situation on a lack of dynamism of the forestry sector as a whole must be unlock.

With regard to the Regional Environmental Energy Plan there is uniformity of purpose between the two programmes. The energy-saving activities and the promotion of energy production from renewable energy are widely promoted by the RDP. To ensure more effective intervention it would be appropriate to increase the spaces (and their budgets) for those wishing to invest in the production of renewable energy, not only for the coverage of the company consume but also for sale.

1.3 Assessment of environmental effects of the RDP

The Environmental Report provides the analysis of the major effects of the RDP measures and activities on the Environmental Topics identified:

Biodiversity

Along with water protection is the most supported topic - also in financial terms – by the RDP. Numerous interventions are activated: support to **organic and integrated farming systems, support to agricultural activities in disadvantaged areas**, etc.. A more specific support is instead secured in favor of **local genetic resources** (plant and animal), with the support to the introduction of **non-business manufacturing structures** (hedges, isolated trees, wetlands, crops lose) or with the possibility of having financed wildlife defense structures, so as to facilitate the coexistence with agricultural and livestock activities.

Activities that could potentially cause adverse effects are those related to **access** (especially in woodland), where - especially in the construction phase - disturb to the fauna can occur or, in the case of new tracks, possible deterioration in some forest ecosystems quality can be a risk. The need to find a balance between minimizing disturbances to local ecosystems and the need to ensure the necessary viability to forestry workers, is important to avoid a generalized abandonment of the management of the existing wooded heritage, which is exactly the opposite of the objective pursued by the Sustainable Forest Management.

Water

There are two aspects that can be considered for this topic: **water quality protection** and **efficiency in water use**.

The first aspect is fielded with numerous and well-funded interventions that aim to **reduce the amount of chemical and fertilizers used** (organic and integrated farming systems), impacts that are larger the more intensive farming areas are covered, lower in marginal areas where production systems are already characterized by very limited use of synthetic products. There are other collateral actions, which further strengthen the positive impact on surface and ground water quality ("filter effect" as a result of the achievements of hedges, riparian, wetlands).

In relation to actions that affect the amount of water used for irrigation purposes, Marche RDP promotes the **adoption of more efficient irrigation systems**, the **recovery of rainwater** and the maintenance of the farm adduction systems so as to minimize losses.

The only factor potentially critical with respect to this issue could affect the incentives foreseen to the transformation of dry farming areas to irrigated cultivations. The legislation provides, however, that these investments can be financed only if it is verified that in the area affected the status of the water body can support further use for irrigation purposes and in any case the implementing provisions of the RDP measures linked explicitly exclude the possibility to increase the irrigable area.

Soil management

With regard to **soil quality** the greatest benefit may arise - also in this case - from the application of **organic and integrated farming methods**, which tend to promote practices that improve organic matter content and in general the structure of agricultural land, and to spread permanent grassing, which have as a secondary effect also to increase resistance to surface erosion phenomena. Even the forestry sector is involved, promoting a further **extension of wooded areas**, both by financing activities for the prevention of forest fires, which prevent the denudation of land, therefore preserving the soil from erosion. In a more indirect but still significant way the RDP promote incentives for the support of farming in marginal areas, ensuring the maintenance of drainage networks - especially in areas with steep slopes - with positive results on soil protection.

Any measures in foreseen to have a negative impact on this topic.

Energy

The regional situation is characterized by a strong deficit with regard to the **production of energy from RES**. It should also be noted that EU targets require that by 2020 the share of total energy consumption to be **covered by regional renewable sources should reach 15.4%** (in 2012 the regional figure recorded was 6.7%). The Regional Environmental Energy Plan specifically assigns to the agricultural sector the task to contribute through: a) Construction of **plants producing energy from biomass** from active forestry management and by-products and residues of organic origin, from short chain; b) Incentives for **active forest management and for forest planning**; c) Construction of **biogas powered plants** rom animal waste and / or by-products coming from a short chain; d) Development of **logistics platforms and networks** for the collection of biomass from short chain to be conferred to the plants.

In this framework, support for improving energy efficiency of production facilities is supported both in farms, in processing / marketing structures and for forest holdings. Support is reinforced by

providing **minimum standards of energy efficiency** for the eligibility of projects, supporting actions for the realization of agreements for the construction of wood-energy chains.

Support for the production of energy from RES is intended for private companies and for public projects, both for home consumption and for sale (such as non-agricultural activities), trying to create **micro energy chains**, entrusting the management phase of the energy production directly to the agro-forestry holdings, joining the biomass production phase to that one of its use.

A separate discussion deserve the **plants for the production of biogas**, which already in the 2007 - 2013 programming period have raised many problems mainly related to the opportunity of financing structures supplied with dedicated crops, taking away space for food crops. The programmer intend to prevent such potentially critical point providing that the facilities financed **can not be fed with energy crops**, but only with farm by-products or of local agricultural activities.

Air quolity and climate change

The role that the agriculture and forestry sector can play on the issue of the **reduction of greenhouse gas emissions** is related to **CO_2 storage in woody biomass and in soil organic matter**. In the latter case, implementation strategies designed to introduce farming practices can increase **soil organic matter content**, namely integrated and organic farming. As regards the increase of woody biomass, strategies can address the incentives for the use of **wood as energy source and / or the use of wood for construction** (which would ensure a balance even more favorable). It must be realized, however, that in the latter case the quantities in play may only be very reduced.

Initiatives related to incentives for the **afforestation of agricultural land** (in part still connected with the payments related to past programming periods) appear instead like **a non-priority**, because the areas that could possibly be reforested are very limited, but also because it would exacerbate the phenomenon of gradual expansion of natural wooded areas of the region (in terms of surfaces much greater than that induced by the incentives on forestation), resulting from the abandonment of farming in marginal areas. The problem again is to be brought back to the lack of attractiveness of forestry as a source of income for operators.

Landscape and cultural heritage

The program includes measures to **prevent forest fires and natural disasters**, which would cause damage to the regional landscape heritage, and specific interventions to improve forests quality (renewal of the species of interest, cleaning of the undergrowth, selective thinning, etc.). Interventions of a more general / indirect effect are those on **supporting marginal areas**: through the maintenance of the populations in marginal areas (mountain) is supported the maintenance of the rural area and the preservation of the characteristic features of the rural landscape of the region.

Any adverse affect on the landscape could result from the **construction or renovation of farm facilities or infrastructure**. In this regard, it might be useful to grant priority to the projects with a low visual impact, inserted in the environmental context, using bioengineering techniques and / or low-impact materials.

1.4 Conclusions

The analysis developed helped to define unequivocally that **Marche RDP - as a whole - can be considered environmentally sustainable**.

The bulk of the **expected environmental impacts** - in most cases positive - derived from a **small number of measures**, which also for the financial resources available can actually produce significant effects on a regional scale (**Investment in agricultural holdings, support for integrated and organic farming, forestry actions, and disadvantaged areas**). It is given emphasis to the "**Agro-environmental Area Agreements**" approach, which should ensure a

concentration of local initiatives, in order to maximize the positive effects and not to waste resources.

1.5 Adaptation, mitigation and orientation measures

No compensation measures are suggested in this report as EU norms and guidelines already exclude all interventions with a serious potential environmental risk. The observations reported in this report are mainly "**guidance measures**", as in the RDP are already present in principle the requirements sufficient to prevent negative environmental effects. The following recommendations have as their main purpose to provide some ideas (which may constitute elements of discussion in the public consultation phase of this Report) to try to maximize the positive environmental effects of the RDP.

1.6 Reccomandations

- **Promote** - to a greater extent than in the past - **forestry activities, trying to balance environmental protection requirements with the operational needs of forest managers**. Review and simplify wherever possible - in cooperation with the competent authorities - the procedures for implementing forest legislation;
- Finance investments for reforestation possibly only to support truffle production and use funds to better promote the wood-energy chain;
- Provide the **introduction of "energy classes**" for farms and processing holdings, in order to better promote interventions for energy efficiency;
- Confirm **the ban of dedicated crops for biogas plants** (exception given only to particular case studies);
- Focus resources allocated for **organic farming on intensive agriculture and / or critical areas**, limiting the premium for extensive crops and / or in mountain / marginal areas;
- Give priority to projects for **facilities with low visual impact**, inserted in the environment, using bioengineering techniques and / or low-impact materials, in order to minimize any negative impact on the rural landscape
- Aim, as a priority, on the production of **energy from RES** and particularly on woody biomass for energy purposes (also in view of the need to achieve 2020 targets). To this end, high priority should be given as part of the overall Regional strategy, in activating a coordinated series of specific initiatives, from training / information on the granting of adequate funds to implement similar initiatives.