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Towards multifunctional agriculture – weeds as ecological goods?

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Summary

Agricultural land use has production, ecological, aesthetic and social functions. Certainly, in Europe, the concept of agricultural land use as being multifunctional seems to be increasingly accepted. Ecological goods and services can be rewarded as results or as actions – the differences between these ways are described and an outcome-based rewarding system is elucidated for the creation of incentives for innovation and taking responsibility. The principle requirements for ecological goods are summarized. The contribution of agricultural land use to plant biodiversity is the most appropriated factor for an outcome-based rewarding system. The various types of vegetation connected with agricultural land use can be used as recognizable ecological goods. The reasoning behind defining specific arable goods is shown. Information about creating the supply is available from the research performed on weed control in different arable systems. As the majority of ecological goods are public goods, mechanisms adapted from market situations for private goods must be stimulated and organized. The decision as to which ecological goods should be stimulated could be transferred to a decentralized and region-specific public committee in which the relevant stakeholders are represented. Implementation exercises undertaken in a region of the German Federal State of Lower Saxony are introduced.

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