

Extensive areas account for at least 42% of agricultural land

Claude Vidal

Since the reform of the CAP in 1992, extensive agricultural production areas (called here "extensive areas") have been the subject of a number of specific measures and have received special attention. They therefore require improved monitoring and clear methods for assessing their development. The European Union has little information on such areas (Box 5). In particular, it is impossible to quantify extensively farmed arable land and permanent crops. By comparing a number of sources, we can draw up an inventory of areas of permanent grassland. The Farm Structure Survey (FSS) also gives precise information on woodland managed by farmers. In 1997, the FSS recorded 45 million ha of grassland and 23 million ha of woodland managed by farmers. These 68 million ha form part of the extensive agricultural areas and are predominant in the Utilised Agricultural Area (UAA) of a third of EU regions. Owing to their structure, the CORINE Land Cover (CLC) survey and the LUCAS survey give slightly different figures. Agri-environment measures have had some definite successes: a million hectares afforested in five years, 366 000 ha of arable land converted into pasture recorded in the 1997 survey, and a number of projects carried out.

68 million hectares of pasture, rough grazing and woodland

Public concern in the European Union about food safety, the environment, the landscape and rural development is growing daily. Society increasingly expects farmers to play a role in maintaining the landscape, and in fact they managed a little over half of the territory of the Union in 1997 (Statistics in Focus, 1998/S01, Special Edition, *European Landscapes: farmers maintain more than half of the territory*).

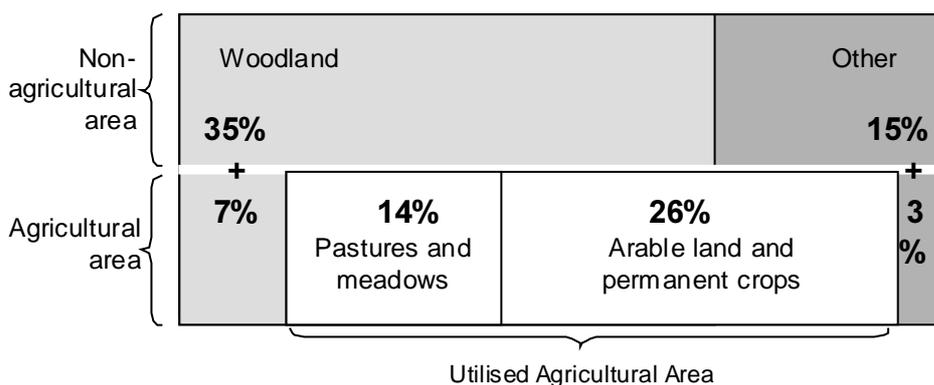


Figure 1: Breakdown of EU-15 territory in 1997
(FSS 1997 – TBFA 2000)

A part of these areas is devoted to intensive (highly productive) agriculture. However, at least a fifth (21%) of the total territory of the European Union, which is 42% of the agricultural areas maintained by farmers, can be classified as extensive (Figure 1), since pasture, rough grazing and woodland alone covered 67.8 million ha in 1997. To this figure must be added the non-quantifiable extensive agricultural areas included under arable land and permanent crops.

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AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

THEME 5 – 23/2001

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45 million ha of permanent grassland, at least a third of which is rough grazing

Permanent grassland is difficult to quantify, since the classifications are linked to the observation tools (**Boxes 1, 2 and 5**). Permanent grassland can vary quite considerably from one data source to another (**Figure 2**). By analysing the data of the 1997 FSS, we can draw up an inventory of the permanent grassland managed by farmers. These data should be analysed in the light of the CLC data, for comparable headings.

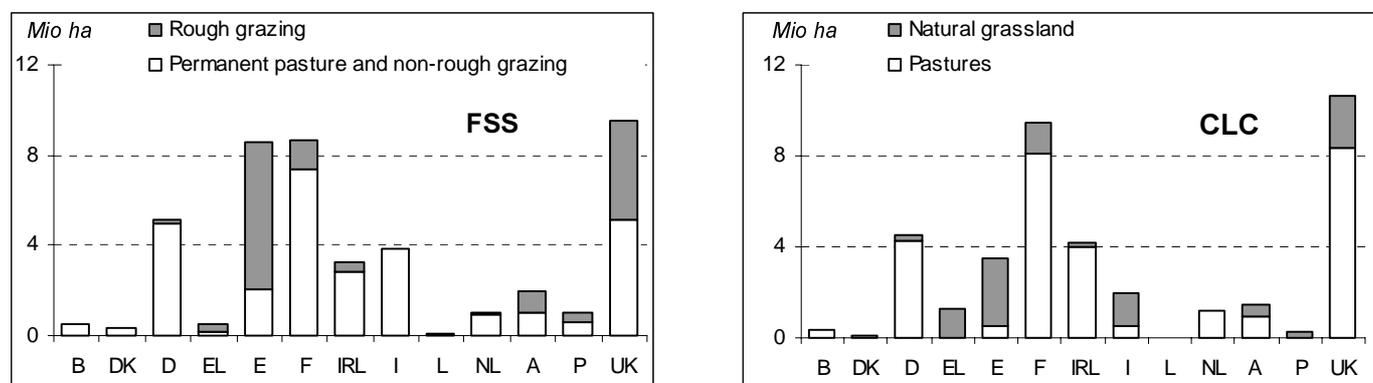


Figure 2: Grassland by country according to the FSS 97¹ and the CLC²

According to the FSS, "permanent grassland and meadow" covered 44.7 million ha in EU-15 in 1997, or approximately 35% of the UAA. A third of this permanent grassland (14.5 million ha) was recorded as rough grazing covering very extensive areas¹ (**Figure 3**). For the 13 EU countries in which the CLC survey was carried out², "pastures" cover 28.2 million ha and "natural grassland" 10.6 million ha. These 38.8 million ha represent 14.6% of the territory covered by CLC. These areas are to be regarded in the light of the 44.3 million ha of permanent grassland and meadow recorded by the FSS for the same 13 countries in 1997 (**Box 1**). For the 13 countries in which the LUCAS survey was carried out (all Member States except UK and IRL), the FSS recorded 31.9 million ha of permanent grassland and meadow in 1997 and the LUCAS survey has recorded 35,7 millions ha in 2001 (**Box 2 and Figure 4**).

These data show that there are five types of grassland organisation:

(1) the British Isles (IRL, UK) have large areas of permanent grassland occupying well over half the UAA, which itself covers a large part of the territory;

(2) in the Nordic countries (FIN, S), the UAA, which does not cover a large proportion of the territory, does not include much permanent grassland;

(3) in the Northern European plain, there is a large area of permanent grassland consisting mainly of pasture, but it does not predominate in the UAA;

(4) in the south of the European Union, permanent grassland consists mainly of rough grazing or specific types of vegetation (*maquis, garrigue, dehesas*);

(5) in the mountainous regions (a large part of Austria), permanent grassland, with large areas of rough grazing, are typical of the territory.

Some countries have a number of these types of grassland, e.g. Denmark (2 and 3), France (3, 4 and 5), Italy and Portugal (4 and 5).

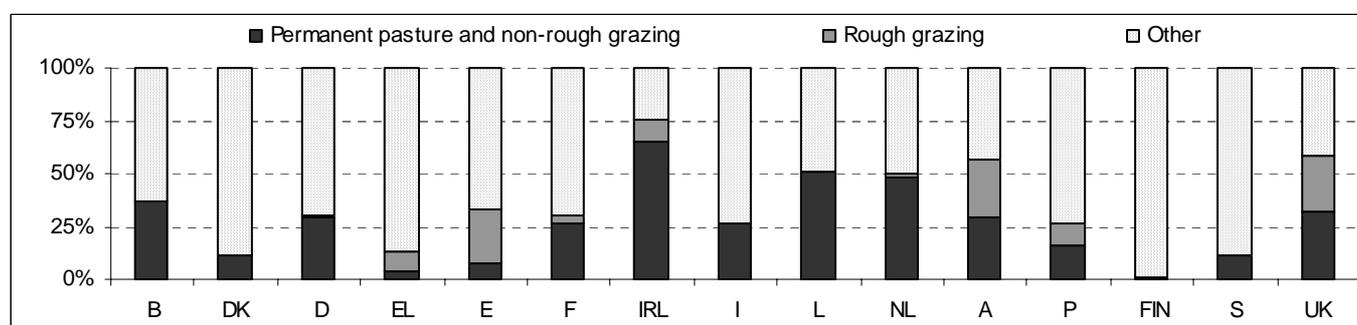


Figure 3: Distribution of UAA in 1997 (FSS 1997)¹

¹ Since Italy and Sweden make no distinction between rough grazing and permanent grassland in the FSS, the total EU figures for rough grazing are underestimated.

² The CLC survey was conducted throughout the EU except in Finland, Sweden and the United Kingdom. However, the United Kingdom has recently made its national sources compatible with CLC, which is not yet the case for Finland and Sweden.

Box 1: CORINE Land Cover and FSS, explainable differences

The data provided by CORINE Land Cover (CLC) and the Farm Structure Survey (FSS) sometimes "diverge" significantly [1]. CLC surveys more agricultural land than the FSS in most survey districts. Since there are differences both in the fields of observation (EU territory as a whole *versus* territory of agricultural holdings) and the data-collection methods (photo-interpretation *versus* census), three factors help to explain these divergences:

- **semantic:** the definition of the CLC classes means that non-agricultural land is recorded as agricultural land and *vice versa*.
- **geometric:** the minimum size of 25 ha of the CLC cartographic units means that some non-agricultural areas are classed as agricultural land while in fact they are only partly agricultural (urban fringes, semi-natural areas), and *vice versa*.
- **temporal:** the data-collection period was a single survey year for the FSS (1997 or 1989/90) and various years within a 10-year range (1985 to 1995) for CLC, depending on the country.

Box 2: LUCAS (Land Use/Cover Area Frame Statistical Survey)

LUCAS (Land Use/Cover Area Frame Statistical Survey) should provide more accurate information on extensive agricultural areas. Its main objectives are:

- to obtain harmonised EU-wide data on land cover, land use and the changes in them, with an accuracy of 2% for the major categories;
- not to confine itself to traditional agricultural areas but to cover the entire territory. It also touches on aspects such as the environment and landscape.

To achieve these objectives, data are collected in two ways:

- during the first phase (spring), data on land cover/use and environmental data are collected on the ground for approximately 100 000 observation points which are systematically distributed throughout the territory (two-level area frame survey) and four photographs are taken from 10 000 points.
- in the second phase (autumn), 5 000 interviews are conducted on holdings selected on the basis of points on arable land. The farmers are questioned on technical and environmental matters at parcel level and at the level of the holding as a whole.

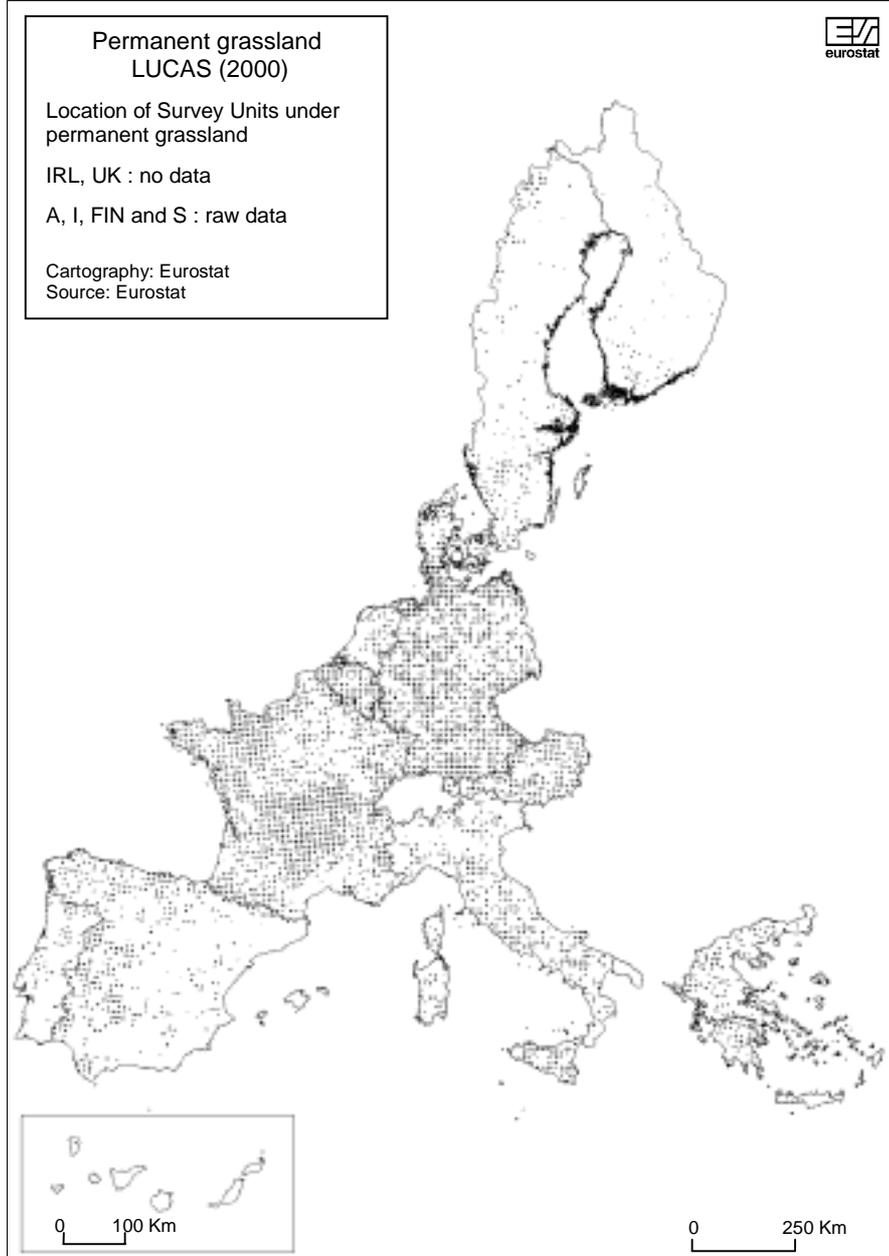


Figure 4: Distribution of permanent grassland according to LUCAS (2001)

Farmers manage a sixth of the wooded area

Woodland (including forests) maintained by farmers covered 23 million ha in EU-15 in 1997 (**Figure 5**). It can be estimated that this is equivalent to about a sixth of the wooded area in the Union (according to TBFRA). More than one in four holdings in EU-15 have woodland, which they maintain (i.e. 1.9 million holdings).

In **Sweden** and **Finland** it is also common for farmers to own woodland. The wooded areas in these countries are forests, which are a major capital reserve for them. 94% of Finnish holdings and 73% of Swedish holdings own woodland. These forests maintained by farmers are often larger than the UAA. The average wooded area per owner holding is thus 60 ha in Sweden and 45 ha in Finland for an average UAA of 35 ha and 24 ha respectively. The trees (conifers and birch) are used for fuelwood and pulp.

In **Austria**, three out of four holdings have wooded areas, which are often relatively small. The average wooded area per owner holding is 16.6 ha, and nine out of ten of the holdings concerned have less than 20 ha. Woodland serves mainly for the production of timber and fuelwood for use by the holding. Forestry is not a significant source of income below a wooded area of 20 ha. In some regions, woodland may predominate. In *Südösterreich*, for example, wooded agricultural areas account for half of the total agricultural area and 43% of the area of the region.

In the **Iberian Peninsula**, woodland also forms an integral part of agricultural holdings. It corresponds, however, to very different types of area, e.g. particular types of vegetation such as *dehesas*³ and *montados*⁴. Besides their ecological and aesthetic value, they are of definite economic interest, since they combine arable land with long crop rotation (every four or five years), extensive livestock farming, and woodland (production of oak timber, cork etc.). These agricultural ecosystems are specific to the Mediterranean region. Their multiple functions give rise to classification problems. In the FSS, for example, such areas are classified as agricultural areas and not as woodland. It is estimated that *dehesas* cover 3.7 million ha in Spain.

In **Spain**, only one holding in six manages woodland, but the average area is considerable (20 ha).

In **Portugal**, one in two agricultural holdings owns woodland, with an average area of 4 ha. Wooded areas per holding are small and fragmented. Almost nine out of ten holdings have less than 5 ha of woodland and only one in a hundred has 50 ha or more.

In the south of France, Italy (in particular *Liguria* and *Trentino*) and the west of Germany, woodland represents a fairly considerable part of local agricultural areas. In contrast, in the North of France, Benelux, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Greece, it accounts for less than 5% of the agricultural area. There are two main reasons for this small percentage:

- little or no woodland for climatic or historical reasons;
- the woodland is managed by others (forestry companies, local authorities, central government etc.).

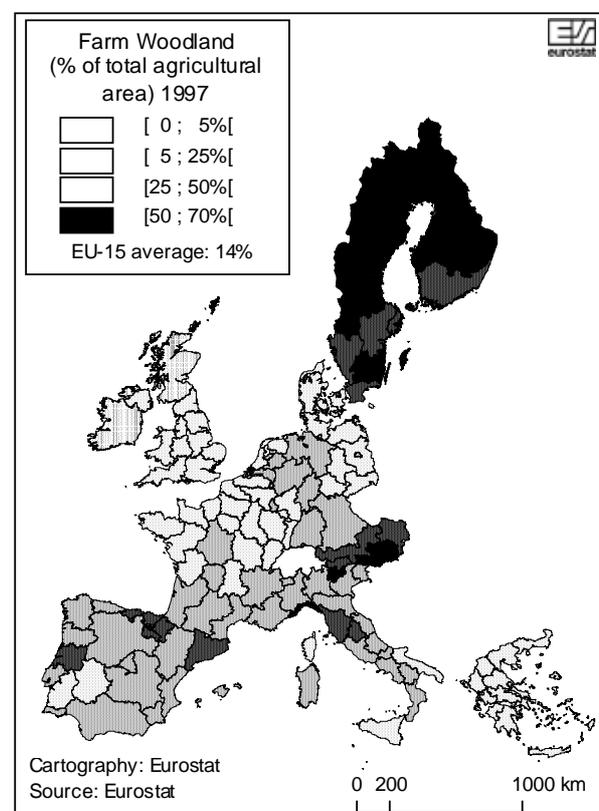


Figure 5: Woodland as % of total agricultural area (FSS 1997)

³ *dehesas*: in Spain, pastures under sparse oak-tree cover which may be associated with arable crops

⁴ *montado*: in Portugal, pastures under sparse oak-tree cover which may be associated with arable crops.

Various agri-environmental measures for extensive agricultural areas

The agri-environmental programmes aim to achieve two further objectives (**Box 3**):

- to reduce the negative effects of agriculture on the environment, particularly on water and soil quality and biodiversity;
- to promote agricultural practices which help to maintain biodiversity and the landscape, particularly by avoiding damage and fire risks.

The measures applying to the agricultural areas classed here as extensive tend to come under the

second category. They are closely linked to the local context (**Box 4**). An overall assessment is therefore hardly possible, but a few measures can be quoted by way of example:

- use of pastures (management of pasture, management of hayfields, burned areas, elimination of scrub and trees, etc.),
- landscape conservation (maintenance of sloping or previously abandoned land, creation and maintenance of terraces, dry stone walls, slopes, ponds, etc.).

Box 3: the Regulations incorporating environment and rural development into the CAP

The 1992 CAP reform included a number of accompanying measures: agri-environmental measures (Regulation 2078/92), afforestation of agricultural land (Regulation 2080/92), etc.

Regulation 2078/92 stipulated that the Member States could apply agri-environmental measures throughout their agricultural territory depending on their needs and their environmental situations. The main requirements of agri-environmental commitments were the following: a higher level of service than that of good agricultural practice, voluntary commitment, payments covering the overall cost of the measure and the necessary incentives.

Regulation 2080/92 provided for the granting of aid to promote alternative use of agricultural land by afforestation and to develop forestry activities on agricultural holdings. This aid was intended to cover the cost of afforestation, maintenance for five years and loss of income. Aid was also granted for improving woodland owned by farmers (installation of wind-breaks, access roads etc.).

These Regulations were replaced in 1999 by Regulation 1257/99, which covers the sustainable development of rural areas as a whole. Since 1 January 2000, a series of measures to assist rural development have been introduced under this Regulation, which complements the other CAP instruments. These measures involve:

- investment in agricultural holdings;
- the setting-up of young farmers and early retirement;
- vocational training;
- support for naturally less-favoured areas and/or areas with environmental restrictions;
- support for agricultural production methods designed to protect the environment and to maintain the countryside (agri-environmental measures);
- improvement of the processing and marketing of agricultural products;
- support for forestry to contribute to the maintenance and development of the economic, ecological and social functions of forests in rural areas;
- promoting the adaptation and development of rural areas.

The Regulation provides for monitoring by reference to specific physical and financial indicators agreed and established beforehand. Every year, each Member State must complete a number of standard tables (general tables and tables showing a breakdown by measure). An initial report will be published in 2003. Similarly, the Commission has provided for a system for evaluating the various measures and their impact.

Furthermore, Regulation 1259/99 lays down conditions for the granting of direct support (environmental requirements, labour force requirements etc.). If farmers fail to comply with the rules laid down at national level, their aid can be reduced (by up to 20%). The amounts saved in this way are available to the Member State concerned as additional Community support for early retirement, less-favoured areas, areas with environmental restrictions, agri-environmental measures and afforestation.

Box 4: The Cambrian Mountains ESA programme: an integrated approach

The Cambrian Mountains ESA (Ecologically Sensitive Area) in Wales is a large area of exposed plateau (154 000 ha) dominated by extensive open moorland and rough grazing with a fairly homogeneous landscape.

To conserve this landscape, it is necessary to maintain rough grazing and to improve it by appropriate management, conserve wetlands, protect the heather (*Calluna*) moors and, if possible, extend them, convert improved pasture into semi-natural rough grazing, and discontinue afforestation.

Contracts have been awarded for these various objectives. They cover the protection of wetlands (a prior condition for all use of the land) and specific stocking density. Aid is also granted for the conversion of arable land into rough grazing.

The project is being monitored by means of a GIS which includes data on the types of landscape, its special features, land cover and the commitments completed.

Denmark and the Netherlands have converted large areas of arable land into pasture

In 1997, 43 000 holdings in EU-15 (1% of the holdings possessing arable land) received aid for converting arable land into pasture⁵. In this way 366 000 ha received aid in 1997, or 0.5% of arable land areas (**Table 1**). The Netherlands and Denmark were the main beneficiaries of this measure. In 1997, they alone accounted for 82% of the areas in the EU converted and assisted under this scheme. In the Netherlands, 16% of the arable land and 12% of holdings with arable land were concernees, compared with 6% of the arable land and almost one in two holdings in Denmark. The average area converted into pasture was relatively small in Denmark (5.2 ha) and concerned almost exclusively holdings of more than 10 ha.

In Spain and Portugal, few areas and holdings received this type of aid, but the average area of arable land converted was considerably greater: 49 ha per holding in Spain and 21 ha per holding in Portugal.

Holdings <i>Units</i>	All	UAA ≥ 50 ha
	<i>ha</i>	<i>% ha</i>
Belgium	300	70%
Denmark	147 400	74%
Greece	10	0%
Spain	28 650	97%
France	12 630	66%
Ireland	9 200	44%
Italy	8 260	55%
Luxembourg	150	100%
Netherlands	152 200	30%
Austria	350	3%
Portugal	7 240	85%
EU-15	366 390	56%

Table 1: Area of arable land which received aid in 1997 for conversion to permanent grassland and meadow (FSS 1997)

Over a million hectares of agricultural land afforested between 1994 and 1999

Regulation 2080/92 (**Box 3**) introduced a Community aid scheme for forestry measures in agriculture and led to the afforestation of more than a million hectares in the EU as a whole between 1994 and 1999. This area represents 0.73% of European woodland and 4.4% of that managed by farmers. Over this period, the main beneficiaries of this measure were Spain (460 000 ha), Portugal (206 000 ha), the United Kingdom (141 000 ha) and Ireland (100 000 ha). In Spain, afforestation was carried out mainly by elderly farmers whose main occupation was agriculture. The afforested land was often marginal land of the type *erial a pastos* (fallow land used for grazing).

50% of the trees planted were broadleaved species. As a result of the improvements to forests, the production of cork oak (*Quercus suber*, 82 405 ha planted in six years) was revived and fire-prevention and fire-fighting infrastructures were created. In Portugal, the average size of new plantations was 29 ha, and the main species planted was cork oak (43% of new plantations). In the United Kingdom, trees were planted mainly on the land of farmers whose main occupation was agriculture, and the afforested areas were chiefly rough grazing.

⁵ NB: This does not mean that the conversion took place in 1997, since farmers who choose this measure receive financial support over a period of five years.

Scotland was the region which received most aid (96 000 ha) (**Table 2 and Figure 6**).

In Ireland, this Regulation contributed to the creation of 100 000 ha of forest, which accounts for a fifth of Ireland's productive forest. The new plantations were mainly of conifers (84%) on areas of rough grazing and wetlands.

	E	P	UK	IRL
Arable land	22%	32%	26%	5%
Permanent pasture and meadow	50%	37%	74%	95%
Other	28%	4%	0%	0%
Not specified	0%	27%	0%	0%

Table 2: Previous parcel use of woodland according to Regulation 2080/92 (DG AGRICULTURE)

Since the aid granted covers 100% of the costs, on marginal land afforestation is an economically profitable operation but has a less positive environmental impact.

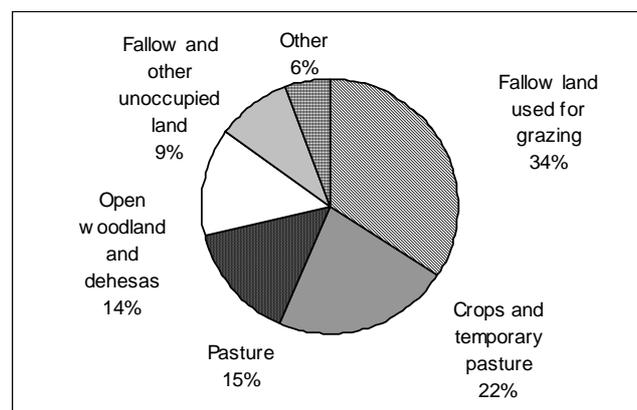


Figure 6: Previous use in Spain of woodland according to Regulation 2080/92 (DG AGRICULTURE)

Text box 5: What data for the extensive agricultural areas of the Union?

Extensiveness is by definition more linked to practices than to land use. However, in the absence of data on agricultural practices at the European level, an approach by land use allows one to sketch a portrait of this extensive Europe. Extensiveness means a limitation on pressure on the environment but also a running down or marginalisation of agriculture.

- In the Farm Structure Survey (FSS) "**agricultural land**" comprises **Utilised Agricultural Area** (UAA, headings D to G of the classification), "**wooded areas**" (H/02) and "**other land**" (H/01 and H/03), which are agricultural areas no longer used for economic or social reasons, e.g. floor area of buildings, yards, roads, ponds etc.). In the UAA there are two categories of **permanent grassland and meadow**: "**rough grazings**" and "**other pasture and meadow**". The areas described as "**extensive areas**" in this article comprise permanent grassland, pasture and woodland. The area of this "extensive areas" aggregate is underestimated since it should include:

- an unquantifiable part of "other areas": there is no breakdown of these "other areas", which include land with no real environmental value (buildings etc.) and features to be preserved (ponds, hedges etc.);
- an unquantifiable part of arable land and permanent crops depending on the way they are managed. Since no information is available on crop practices, these areas are not individualised.

On the other hand, part of the "other permanent grassland and meadow" are not managed extensively.

The SSAH definitions apply to the whole of this article. The following definitions should be added:

- **total area or area of the territory**: area of dry land;
- **forest area**: area exceeding 0.5 ha with a tree-crown area density of more than 10% and trees exceeding 5 metres in height at maturity. Forest areas are included in woodland.

- For woodland, the source is TBFRA 2000 (Temperate and Boreal Forest Resource Assessment) devised by the UN-ECE and the FAO.

- The CORINE Land Cover (CLC) geographical database has a detailed classification and allows the restitution level to be chosen (an advantage of the GIS). However, since the minimum size of the observation units is 25 ha, this produces a large number of cases of mixed land cover, resulting in a lack of precision. This difficulty means that it is not possible to obtain an accurate assessment of permanent grassland or even of woodland. No account is taken of the distinction between agricultural and non-agricultural management. Nor is it possible to monitor changes with CLC, since only one version exists at present.

- DG Agri has assessment reports on the agri-environmental measures which include data on extensive agricultural areas in the EU (areas, management methods, areas concerned by the various measures, examples of programmes etc.) [2],[3].

Further information:

➤ Reference publications

- [1] Towards Agri-Environmental Indicators - Integreting Statistical and Administrative data with Land Cover Information - Eurostat - DG Agri - DG Env - JRC - EAA.
 [2] Document de travail de la Commission - DGVI - VI/7655/98 - Etat d'application du règlement CCE n° 2078/92 - Evaluation des programmes agri-environnementaux
 [3] Evaluation du système d'aide communautaire pour les mesures forestières en agriculture du règlement 2080/92 - Rapport final - 2001

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For information on methodology

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If no number is entered, VAT will be automatically applied. Subsequent reimbursement will not be possible.