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Policy brief

Results-based payments for behavioural change

Lessons learnt from case studies of the Horizon Europe Project ENFASYS in Wallonia (Belgium), Hauts-de-France (France) and Canton Zurich (Switzerland)

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Problem statement

Results-based payments[1] (hereafter RBP) have emerged as a policy approach to **support the transition** towards more **sustainable agricultural systems** by linking financial support directly to the achievement of environmental outcomes (EU CAP Network, 2024). In contrast to traditional measure-based payments that compensate farmers for the implementation of predefined measures, RBP aim to **motivate farmers** to adopt behavioural changes that promote agrobiodiversity by **paying them for actual environmental outcomes** and providing them with **the flexibility to choose** which biodiversity-enhancing practices to implement. This responds to a **broader policy challenge**: ensuring that **public expenditure leads to tangible environmental improvements** in the context of complex and heterogeneous agricultural systems.

However, despite growing interest in their potential**, uncertainty remains around their actual uptake** and **effectiveness**, **related costs and benefits**, and the **conditions under which they perform best** (Wunder et al., 2020). This policy brief relies on the evidence of four years of research in the Horizon Europe project ENFASYS[2], and in particular on regional case studies conducted in France, Belgium, and Switzerland.

The context: agri-environmental policies, green payments and behavioural change

Agri-environmental policies in the European Union are embedded within the **Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**[3], which provides the main policy framework and funding scheme for supporting environmentally sustainable agricultural practices. Since the 1992 reform, **agri-environmental and climatic measures (AECMs)** have become a central component of **CAP green architecture**[4] and are currently implemented in the **CAP Strategic Plans** framework that was established by Regulation (EU) 2021/2115.

In **Switzerland**, the transition from production-linked subsidies to decoupled payments also took place in the **early 1990s**, with compensation payments to reward environmental practices first introduced in 1993. Today, Swiss agricultural policy includes various payments designed to achieve environmental objectives. The most significant of these, in terms of the allocated budget, are the **biodiversity payments** (BLW, 2025), which support the **promotion of native species** and their habitats. Other types of payments, such as those for production systems and resource efficiency, promote environmentally friendly, resource-efficient production and animal welfare. Swiss agricultural policy has undergone several reforms since the 1990s.

Traditionally, **green payments**[5] have been designed as measure-based payments, introduced as **voluntary contracts** (typically 5 to 8 years) under which farmers receive compensation for adopting pre-defined farming practices that are considered beneficial for the environment. Such payments aim at **supporting farmers' uptake of environment- and climate-friendly practices** and at aligning the farming sector with environmental objectives. The specific list of eligible farming practices is defined by Member States, reflecting the **principle of subsidiarity governing EU (agricultural) policy**. In

[1] Result-based payments link financial support to the achievement of predefined environmental results or indicators, allowing farmers greater flexibility in the choice of practices used to deliver these outcomes.
[2] https://www.enfasysproject.eu/
[3] The CAP is the agricultural policy of the European Union and it's Member States (MS).
[4] The CAP's 'green architecture' is the suite of rules and tools for improving the environmental and climate performance of farming, food production, land management and rural areas (EU CAP Network, 2024).
[5] Green payment describes in this policy brief the agricultural policy measures designed to promote ecological and climate-related practices in agriculture.

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Switzerland, the practices are defined through a **combination of federal and cantonal measures**, with the Federal Government setting the framework, objectives, and requirements, and the cantons playing a key role in the specific design and implementation of these measures. Payment levels vary by the type of prescribed practices and by Member States.

In contrast, eligibility and payment rates of RBP are determined by the achievement of **environmental outcomes** (e.g. biodiversity, water and soil quality, animal welfare, antimicrobial use, climate change mitigation), which are translated into measurable **indicators** and assessed through a **monitoring system** (EU CAP Network, 2024). Under such framing, greater implementation flexibility is granted to farmers, who can decide how to manage their land to achieve the required results. Moreover, various scientists are proposing this approach to ensure that farmers engage more with biodiversity on their farms and make efforts to improve it (Hagemann et al., 2025; Herzon et al., 2018; Santos et al., 2021). RBP are sometimes accompanied by **advisory services**, which provide farmers with support, both on suitable farming practices and land management choices. While the provision of such services remains under the **discretion of Member States**, the **CAP** regulatory framework **explicitly allows Member States to allocate financial support to advisory activities** under Article 78 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115. In **Switzerland, advisory services organized at the cantonal level** play a central role.

Within the 2023-2027 CAP Strategic Plans, **RBP** have gained **increased policy attention** as a potential alternative to measure-based approaches. According to the CAP Catalogue of interventions, results-based schemes represent 8% of all AECMs and are implemented only in 11 Member States in the EU. In the context of **ongoing discussions on the future CAP post-2027**, stronger emphasis has been placed on flexibility, simplification, and performance orientation[6]. Additionally, within the recent European Commission's Vision for Agriculture and Food[7], the CAP (post 2027) will move away from the current system of conditionality and towards flexibility, farmer agency, and **incentive approaches** to achieve environmental objectives. Therefore, RBP could gain attention as a potential **way to enhance the effectiveness and efficiency** of agri-environmental support, **while maintaining flexibility at farm level**. As part of the upcoming **political reforms in Switzerland (AP30+)**, there is also discussion of a **stronger focus on results**, with the aim of **reducing the administrative burden**, promoting environmental outcomes more effectively, and giving **farmers greater flexibility** (Schweizerischer Bundesrat et al., 2026). Upcoming reforms are thus expected to **strengthen subsidiarity** and the responsibility of both EU Member States and Switzerland to design dedicated green measures. A potential **shift towards voluntary schemes** further underscores the need to carefully **examine existing design options** in search of effective, cost-efficient, and adaptive approaches for farmers, administrations, and payment agencies.

As part of the **Horizon Europe project ENFASYS**, two case studies, one conducted in the Hauts-de-France region (**France**) and Wallonia (**Belgium**) (F/B), and the other in the Canton of Zurich (**Switzerland**) (CH), investigate both **structural and behavioural factors that determine farmer adoption and the environmental effectiveness of green payments**. Using a **participatory approach** and involving various stakeholders (e.g., farmers, advisors, farmers' associations, environmental NGOs, public administrations, and paying agencies), interventions were defined using **system mapping and "barriers & levers" analysis**. In the following sections, the **policy brief** presents i) the **design & implementation principles** supported by the project's results and ii) related **policy recommendations**.

[6] https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/overview-vision-agriculture-food/vision-agriculture-and-food_en
[7] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52025DC0075

Design and implementation principles for RBP

The desired outcomes need to be measurable

The existence of concrete RBP across national and regional contexts varies across topics (e.g. biodiversity, climate change mitigation, soil quality, water quality) (Elmiger et al., 2023; EU CAP Network, 2024) . The ability to assess environmental impacts using a small number of easy-to-use indicators determines whether RBP is a viable option. In contexts where such measurability is not achievable (e.g. due to complexity of ecological processes and outcomes, limited potential for local adaptability, or high monitoring costs) alternative payment mechanisms, such as measure-based payments, should be prioritised (F/B, CH).

Indicators need to be robust, locally relevant, timely and administrable

Outcome and impact indicators are of central importance for the successful implementation of RBP. Indicators must be capable of capturing environmental impacts, both i) in a timely manner during the policy implementation period, and ii) in relation to the targeted environmental objectives. At the same time, indicators must be adaptable to context-specific conditions and environmental challenges. Developing robust indicators for RBP capable of capturing environmental outcomes therefore poses a particular challenge (Elmiger et al., 2023; Pinto-Correia et al., 2022). In contrast, indicators for measure-based payments (i.e. based on specific actions) are easier to develop, collect, and verify (Lampkin & Sanders, 2025).
The indicators should include various outcome levels that are achievable, while also providing an incentive to go beyond those levels. Furthermore, indicators should be selected that can be incorporated into a self-assessment tool that allows farmers to evaluate their progress on their own (Schaub et al., 2025). One key leverage point identified in the Swiss case study, and also highlighted by Bredemeier et al. (2022), is to involve farmers in the design process in order to ensure feasibility and, through their participation, foster their willingness to implement the measures (CH).
Finally, indicators should be selected that can be integrated into a simple monitoring system that reduces transaction costs, is administratively feasible, and provides timely and reliable information on environmental impacts at the farm level and on the program's effectiveness. Various monitoring mechanisms can be considered, such as conventional spot checks or self-assessment by farmers (Chaplin et al., 2021).

Hybrid approaches to increase uptake

In contexts where RBP indicators and monitoring frameworks remain complex or uncertain, or in cases where farmers have limited capacities or willingness to engage with RBP, payments could combine results-based and measure-based mechanisms through hybrid payment systems (EU CAP Network, 2024; Prager et al., 2025; Stolze et al., 2015). Hybrid schemes may facilitate a gradual transition from existing measure-based systems by building upon already established practices and administrative structures, while introducing incentives aimed at achieving better environmental outcomes. Moreover, they may provide a higher degree of predictability and lower perceived risk for farmers compared with purely results-based schemes (OECD, 2022). Findings from the Swiss case study highlight the importance of continuing to offer measure-based programs so as not to leave behind farmers who are unwilling or unable to promote biodiversity

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in a results-based system (CH). In Wallonia, a specific subset of locally targeted AECMs already goes beyond the standard measure-based approach by introducing (i) an initial local environmental assessment prior to the signing of contracts and (ii) mandatory support from advisory services throughout the contract period (5 years) to assess progress in the achievement of biodiversity outcomes so that practices can be adapted if necessary.

Seeking new opportunities for private-public partnerships

Co-funding opportunities through private-public partnerships (PPP) could provide an answer to the growing need for funding (both to reinforce payment rates and increase farmers reach) but have been insufficiently developed and researched (Bredemeier et al., 2022; Reed et al., 2014; Voglhuber-Slavinsky et al., 2023). RBPs generate verifiable evidence of environmental performance, which enables private actors (e.g. retailers, food companies, investors) to substantiate sustainability claims and work towards ESG commitments. In practice, co-funding arrangements typically involve public actors designing and overseeing the monitoring framework with private value-chain operators contributing additional payments linked to verified outcomes (Voglhuber-Slavinsky et al., 2023). In Wallonia, initiatives such as Cultivaé[8] and Farm for Good[9] are examples of value-chain actors engaging in co-financing arrangements linked to environmental performance indicators, including soil, biodiversity, and production practices. However, combining public and private funding streams can increase transaction costs and the administrative burden on both farmers and administrations, so such schemes require careful design to avoid deterring participation (Reed et al., 2014).

Opportunities beyond co-funding could be to integrate certification and scientifically grounded labelling frameworks into RBP. For example, reframing monitoring requirements as auditing processes that support accountability rather than administrative controls would address the demotivating feeling held by farmers that they are "inspected" rather than trusted as environmental stewards (Stöckli et al., 2024). However, robust standards remain essential to preventing misleading claims and reducing potential risks of greenwashing (Gowland, 2024), and independent, science-based verification would build trust among farmers by ensuring objective evaluation criteria, and among consumers by guaranteeing the integrity of environmental claims. As environmental labels multiply, fostering synergies among schemes is equally critical as label proliferation risks creating confusion and overload for both farmers and consumers, undermining the credibility of results-based certification overall (Voglhuber-Slavinsky et al., 2023).

The key role of advisory services

Farmers are responsible for selecting the practices that generate the desired environmental outcomes, which means that their knowledge and skills are central determinants of the success of results-based approaches. In this context, advisory services are a key intermediary between policy design and on-farm decision-making (Bartkowski et al., 2023; Felder et al., 2025). They can generate spillover effects by providing information on baseline environmental conditions (e.g. biodiversity levels at farm scale), which supports the identification of appropriate management options and contributes to risk assessment under variable environmental conditions (CH). Advisory systems typically require competencies that span both agronomic and ecological

[8] https://www.cultivae.be/fr/
[9] https://www.farmforgood.org/en/

domains, enabling a more integrated and holistic understanding of farming systems and their environmental interactions (CH). At the same time, implementation processes are also shaped by farmers' local knowledge and experiential understanding of their own land, which interacts with formal advisory inputs. Communication on equal terms is a key factor in the successful adoption and implementation of RBP (CH). The challenge lies in ensuring that advisory services can be provided on a widespread basis in cases where programs are rolled out on a large scale (Prager et al., 2025). Regional stakeholders and public authorities across both case studies emphasised the need to strengthen the financial and human resources dedicated to advisory services, for both results-based and management-based approaches (F/B). Limited administrative capacity was also identified as a constraining factor, particularly with regard to the implementation and follow-up of agri-environmental schemes (F/B).

Promote collaboration amongst farmers

To ensure the effectiveness of RBP from a landscape perspective, it is essential to gain and support farmers' collaboration as a partner, rather than as a subject, of the payment scheme, which leads to engagement and ultimately to outcomes (Šumrada et al., 2022; Thiermann et al., 2023). Result-based approaches can be combined with the existing approach of collective schemes, thereby aligning with evidence that environmental outcomes improve when interventions are coordinated beyond the individual farm level (CH). Moreover, farmer collaboration is important for peer-to-peer learning and support. Farmers within the F/B case study expressed appreciation of recent pilot initiatives of collective schemes that provided groups of farmers with structured advisory support and dedicated incentives to foster joint implementation of agri-environmental commitments. These schemes aim to improve ecological coherence across farm boundaries by coordinating management practices (e.g. habitat management and biodiversity-friendly field margins) and providing collective advisory support to facilitate implementation and monitoring. However, such initiatives remain primarily framed as measure-based collective arrangements rather than fully results-based schemes, which points to the practical challenges of scaling collective RBP design.

Key Policy recommendations

Design: Ensure that design fits the local realities and is adapted to local needs	**Advising:** Invest in agri-environmental advising and peer learning capacities	**Monitoring & Evaluation frameworks:** Invest in indicators measuring environmental outcome, ensure independent auditing process and adapt controls	**Funding:** Increase funding for payments, advisory systems and administrative capacity
Ministry of Agriculture • Ensure that, while designing RBP, robust and easy-to-use indicators are available and allow tracking of outcomes; if indicators are not available, it is preferrable to opt for measure-based payments • Establish a regulatory framework enabling structured public-private partnerships for RBP, linking public payments with private co-funding through certified outcome-based standards and audit systems embedded in value chain reporting and verification processes, led by scientific committees. **Public administrations & regional authorities** • Support pilots that embed results-based approaches within collective AECMs structures to align territorial coordination with performance-based remuneration and reduce monitoring and transaction costs	**EC & other EU institutions** • Introduce mandatory advice for farmers participating in RBP in EU regulation (current **Regulation (EU) 2021/2115**[10]) **Regional authorities** • Set up public farmer's advisory networks and services, including peer-learning activities taking insights from farmers local knowledge	**EC & other EU institutions** • Continue to support data platforms and encourage interoperability and accessibility of open data sources (e.g. JRC and Agriportal data, IACS, FADN, Eurostat) • Invest in the development of harmonized indicators for environmental outcome monitoring at farm and territorial level (including biodiversity) • Ensure independent and scientifically-sound auditing frameworks to facilitate public-private partnerships **EC Court of Auditors** • Reinforce auditing and communication efforts to engage MS to respect their binding targets (Including by ensuring the effective translation of EU specific objectives - Regulation **(EU) 2021/2115**[12]) **Payment agencies** • Adapt compliance systems for results-based approaches by maintaining robust but proportionate controls	**EC & other EU institutions** • Increasing the financial support for advisory services available under Article 78 of Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 (currently set at 200,000 EUR) **Ministry of Agriculture** • Further ring-fence budget for advisory services at national and regional level • Reinforce administrative capacity through dedicated funding and targeted training for public administration, in order to support the implementation and monitoring requirements specific to results-based and hybrid payment schemes

[10] European Union. (2021). Regulation (EU) 2021/2115 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 2 December 2021 establishing rules on support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the common agricultural policy (CAP Strategic Plans) and financed by the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund (EAGF) and by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and repealing Regulations (EU) No 1305/2013 and (EU) No 1307/2013. Official Journal of the European Union, L 435/1.

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