

Integrated Farming „Topic Sheet“ no 1 /2013

“Eh da-Flächen” (*land in hand*) – potential to enhance biodiversity in our cultural landscapes



***Land in hand*: just there – and not used ...**

They might be called trump card for biodiversity in landscapes: Areas, which according to the definition are neither used for agriculture, nor for settlements or ecologic measures up to now – the so-called “*land in hand*”. Road- and waysides as well as traffic refuges, ditches or small terraces belong to these “Eh da-Flächen” (*land in hand*) which could be valorised to promote the diversity of species in general and the diversity of insects visiting blossoms – such as honeybees, bumblebees or solitary bees – in particular.

When planning measures for the conservation of biodiversity in our cultural landscapes, one dangerous idea tends to be at the forefront of all major requests: Just take some percent of the area which now is still used to produce food, feed and fibre, and dedicate this area to the conservation of biodiversity. With this approach, the burden is solely put on the shoulders of farmers, who lose valuable arable land or high-yielding pasture – and the income from this land.

Strangely enough, there is public concern whether food will become more expensive when one or two percent of the land used for agriculture is affected by flooding – but no one asks the same questions when five or more percent are to be taken out of production for nature conservation. In the medium to long run, however, there is a huge opportunity for society to support the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity outside of agricultural areas.

One of the key challenges: Resource use efficiency

Resource use efficiency being a paramount challenge in our economies – and hence in agriculture – such an approach is neither fair, nor efficient, nor sustainable in the long run.

And yet: The cultural landscape offers a resource for nature conservation which was completely ignored in the past: There are so many roadsides, traffic refuges, central reserves on dual carriageways, embankments of railway tracks and headland corners not used for cropping, which all could be dedicated to nature conservation. The charming idea is: These areas are there! They are not taken out of their present use, no one has to abandon or cut down his economic activities. No one loses – and biodiversity gains!

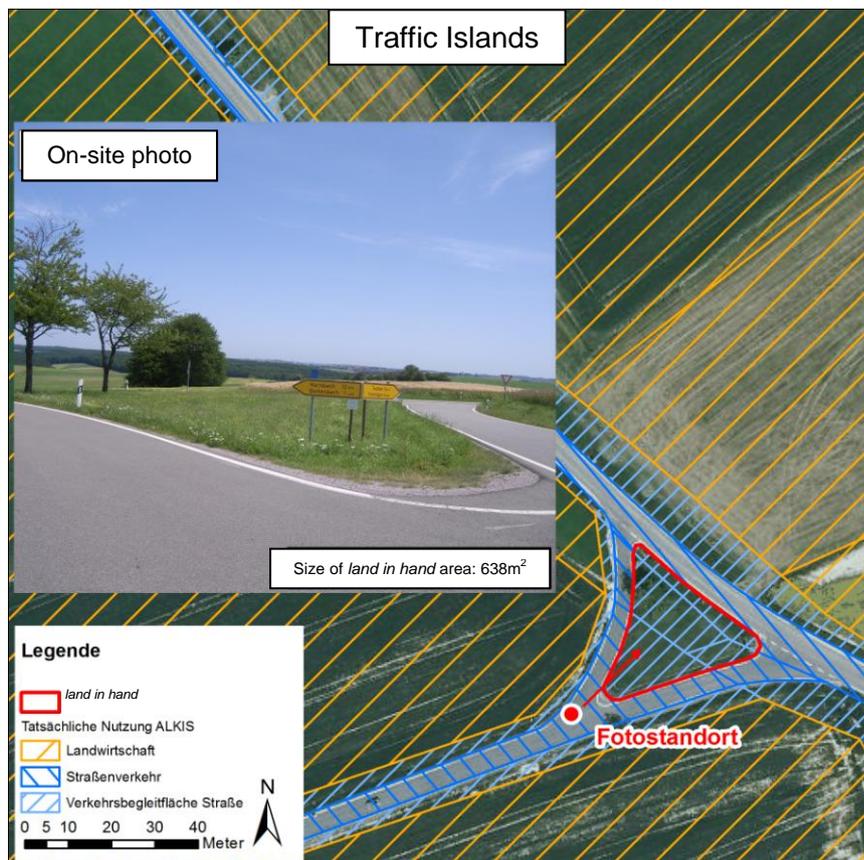
Is the potential big enough?

In a first research project, conducted in Rhineland-Palatinate this spring, astonishing details became obvious: The “Eh da-Flächen” (*land in hand*) in this Federal State of Germany alone amount to approximately 5 percent of the total area. In a mutual scientific

study, the Institute of Agro-Ecology and RIFCON GmbH have determined “*land in hand*” in close proximity to areas either used by agriculture or for settlements, and have evaluated their potential from an ecologic viewpoint. The results of this research have been published in an experts’ meeting lately.

Having initiated this project, Fördergemeinschaft Nachhaltige Landwirtschaft e.V. (FNL – Association for the Promotion of Sustainable Agriculture) as German EISA member supports the determination and evaluation of “*land in hand*” in Germany as part of its initiative “Innovation & Natural Environment”. Estimates with regard to the potential throughout Germany will be available in a second step, following the analysis of further research areas in the federal states of Lower Saxony and Brandenburg – representing intensively used agricultural areas – in spring 2014.

“Whenever the protection of biodiversity in our agricultural landscapes is addressed, all eyes focus on agriculture. EU-Commission for example has claimed that about five percent of arable land of our farmers should be identified as ecological compensation areas in the future. These areas would than no longer be available for the sustainable



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intensification which is badly needed within agricultural production”, says Dr Anton Kraus, general manager of FNL and chairman of the EISA Executive Committee. “The protection of biodiversity, however, is an issue for all of us. This important task may not be put as burden on the backs of farmers alone. Given the present public discussion, the “land in hand” project is of central importance. With this project, we have a trump card which needs to be made understood – and used in the future – far beyond Germany.”

Please direct inquiries to:

FNL / Innovation & Naturhaushalt, Kerstin Krohn, Wilhelmsaue 37, 10713 Berlin, Germany, tel.: + 49 – 30 – 88 66 355 14, k.krohn@fnl.de, www.fnl.de