

Press Release No. 03/2011

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At a glance: Agriculture and its environmental impact

Federal Environment Agency present compact collection of data

What impact do modern agricultural practices have on soil, water, air, the climate, and biological diversity? The Federal Environment Agency (UBA) presents the free brochure entitled *Umwelt und Landwirtschaft [Environment and Agriculture]*, published in the Environmental Data (Daten zur Umwelt) series, with an overview of key facts and figures to enable a sound discussion about conservation in agriculture, and to present what has been achieved as well as where problems exist. Graphs, maps and tables serve to illustrate existing interrelationships. UBA President Jochen Flasbarth has no doubt that "agriculture has been and still is one of the major uses we make of our environment. For the European Union's agricultural reforms scheduled for 2013, environmental standards must be tightened in areas where they are still inadequate. This will entail redesigning agricultural subsidies so as to provide greater reward for the provision of additional services by the agricultural sector for the benefit of the environment and ecosystems."

52 percent of Germany's land area was used for agricultural cultivation in 2009, of which 60 percent alone is devoted to animal feed production. As a result, the amount of grassland area is on the sharp decline, also due to the increasing cultivation of energy crops such as rapeseed for biodiesel and maize for biogas. However, grassland is an important CO₂ sink so vital to climate protection and also important in the preservation of biological diversity.

Modern agriculture without the use of fertilisers is inconceivable, yet if surplus nutrients are put into fields, soil and water become over-fertilised and will acidify. There may be algae plague or oxygen deficiency in rivers and lakes as a result, as well as a loss of habitat for the animals and plants that do not tolerate excessive amounts of fertiliser. Despite a 20-percent decline from 1991 to 2007, nitrogen surplus-- at 105 kilogrammes per hectare-- still lies far above the federal government's stated objective of 80 kilogrammes per hectare. Effective measures for more efficient use of nitrogen are called for, especially in animal husbandry.

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Organic farming is a form of agriculture that distinguishes itself through preservation of resources and the environment. 5.6 percent of the land used for agriculture was organically farmed in 2009. This falls far short of the mark set by the federal government to allocate 20 percent of agricultural land for organic farming, even though there is a market for organic produce: domestic demand for organically grown food exceeds domestic supply and production. An appealing restructuring process should help to enable meeting demand through domestic production to the greatest extent possible.

The *Umwelt und Landwirtschaft* brochure (German only) can be ordered free of charge from the Federal Environment Agency, c/o GVP, PF 3303 61, 53183 Bonn, or by sending an email to uba@broschuerenversand.de.

Umwelt und Landwirtschaft is available for download online at <http://www.uba.de/uba-info-medien-e/4056.html>.

Dessau-Roßlau, 25 January 2011