

NATIONAL RURAL NETWORK MALTA



GOVERNMENT
OF MALTA



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EU FUNDS FOR MALTA 2021-2027 LAUNCH EVENT

In January, €2.2 billion in EU Funds for Malta for 2021-2027 were officially launched. These funds will be invested in several sectors including health, agriculture, culture, education, and training.

Malta will be investing €167 million in the agricultural and rural sectors through the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which include €18.1 million to support farmers income and €5.1 million to young farmers. Malta's CAP SP will support the transition towards a smart, sustainable, competitive, and diversified sector while ensuring long-term food security.

The CAP Plan also supports a strategy that will cover all the main CAP Funded instruments: direct

payments, support for rural development and interventions specific to certain market sectors.

Overview of the CAP SP Allocations
Pillar I will target resilience and ensure continued management of agricultural landscapes as well as the survival of key farming sectors.

Under Pillar I, Malta will also allocate €15 million for farmers in sectors undergoing difficulties such as those in the beef, dairy, sheep and tomatoes sectors. These sectors face a number of disadvantages due to the small size of Malta and also due to the island's insularity.

Malta will also aim to significantly increase the share of organic farming from the current 66HA. The Plan will

also introduce eco-schemes under Pillar I, under which farmers are supported for voluntary practices going beyond the minimum legal requirements. Malta will also invest €30 million in water investments such as water storage, recycling, water collection and water treatment.

With an ageing farming population, young farmers face different challenges to start their agricultural activity, hence the CAP SP shall encourage young farmers to take over agricultural holdings with the support of €100,000 grant.

The LEADER programme is another crucial element of the CAP SP and is designed to support rural communities and enhance



Rural Development Programme for Malta 2014-2020

Part financed by the European Union
Co-financing Rate:
75% European Union; 25% Government of Malta



*The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:
Europe investing in rural areas*

competitiveness in the agricultural sector. Malta will allocate €5.2 million between the years 2023-2027. This program is implemented through a bottom-up approach, empowering local communities to identify and prioritize their own development needs and to lead the implementation of locally led development strategies.

Knowledge sharing, innovation and digitisation will be given priority under the CAP SP through the AKIS. The need for training and advice among Malta's farm and rural population is significant since many farms are managed on a part-time basis and management practices passed on informally from one generation to another.



Eco-Schemes

REQUEST PERIOD FOR THE AGRI-ENVIRONMENT CLIMATE COMMITMENTS (AECCS) AND ECO-SCHEMES INTERVENTIONS UNDER THE CAP STRATEGIC PLAN FOR MALTA 2023-2027

On the 14th of November 2022 the first 'request period' of the CAP SP was launched for the new AECCs and Eco schemes under the CAP SP. During this period which closed on the 13th January 2023, farmers had the opportunity to register their interest for these new Environmental interventions.

Farmers/breeders could request their interest for the following AECCs during the request period

- AECC 1: Integration and maintenance of autochthonous Maltese species

The aim of this intervention is to promote the protection, maintenance and enhancement of autochthonous Maltese farm species encouraging an increased level of awareness and responsibility amongst farmers for the following native breeds

- o Maltese Black Chicken
- o Maltese Ox
- o Carob and Mulberry (both white and black) trees



- AECC 2: Maintenance of trees

To encourage the planting of new non-productive trees on fields and the maintenance of the planted trees. This shall allow for regular clearing of weeds, the removal of dry undergrowth in summer months to prevent any fire outbreak, any trimming, pruning or support required to safeguard and protect the trees.

- AECC 3: Control of weeds in orchards and vineyards

The objective of this measure is to incentivise farmers to control weeds growing in vineyards and orchards between 15th October and 28th February, using mechanical means. The measure will oblige farmers to use a grass cutter/mower to control weeds growing in vineyards and orchards during the winter season

- **AECC 4: Introduction of bee boxes on holdings**

The objective of this measure is to incentivise farmers to set up bee boxes on their holding and to support established beekeepers, to encourage them to continue in the apiculture sector. This measure would be particularly beneficial in areas which have a high garrigue/ maquis to agricultural land ratio, due to the wild-flower varieties naturally occurring in such areas.

- **AECC 5: Implementation of soil management and conservation plan on a parcel**

The objective of this measure is to incentivise farmers to prepare and implement a Soil Management Plan (SMP) on their parcels targeting three primary soil related threats on a parcel level; erosion, compaction and low soil organic matter. Moreover, soil quality shall be improved by ensuring the sustainable use of soils, soil restoration, prevention of nutrients run off and reduction of the use of harmful chemicals.

- **AECC 6: Animal Welfare Scheme**
The objective of this intervention is to incentivize broiler breeders in the Maltese Islands to improve broiler welfare during the growing period by reducing the stocking density of broilers per square meter during the growing period on their farm, which is set at a thirteen (13) birds per square meter.

- **AECC 7: Conversion to Organic Farming and Maintenance of Organic Farming**

The objective of this intervention is to incentive new farmers to convert to organic practices and to encourage organic farmers to maintain their organic practices. Farmers could also submit their interest request their interest for the following eco schemes during the request period

- **Eco scheme 1 Land parcels dedicated for biodiversity purposes**
Under this intervention, farmers will be required to dedicate at least one land parcel for plant species that enhance biodiversity and that attract pollinators. Farmers will not be allowed to use any Plant Protection Products, including fertilisers, on these parcels

- **Eco scheme 2 Integrated Pest Management Plan**
This intervention was designed with the objective of encouraging farmers to adopt and follow an Integrated Pest Management Plan. This measure is aimed at guiding the farming sector to cultivate in a more holistic manner taking into consideration the health of the crop and at the same time using more environmental friendly methods and allowing the farmer to have constant access to knowledge.

- **Eco scheme 3 Biodegradable Mulch**
Beneficiaries must commit to use Bio-degradable mulch instead of the conventional plastic mulch for at least one growing cycle of a crop.

Infosessions

As part of the promotion of these Measures a series of information

sessions were held in both Malta and Gozo where farmers were invited to attend to learn more about these schemes.

Farmers interested in these schemes can contact ARPA on tel:22926148 or email: arpa.mafa@gov.mt . Further information on these schemes including the guidelines can be found on the ARPA website <https://agrikoltura.gov.mt/en/arpa/Pages/guidelines.aspx>



Coriander (*Coriandrum sativum*) - Kosbor



Common Lavender/True Lavender (*Lavandula angustifolia*) - Lavanda/sombor



Rosemary (*Salvia rosmarinus*) - Klin



Sulla (*Hedysarum coronarium*) - Silla



White clover (*Trifolium repens*) - Xnien Abjad



Sage (*Salvia officinalis*) - Salvja tal-ikel



Some of the biodiversity crops allowed under eco scheme 1

Executive Summary of the Thematic Evaluation of the Soil under the RDP 2014-2020 which was carried out in November 2022

This Thematic Evaluation relates to Focus Area (FA) 4C of the Rural Development Programme (RDP) for Malta. The focus area is concerned with the prevention of soil erosion and the improvement in soil management. This FA is chiefly addressed through Measures 4.4 (support for non-productive investment linked to the achievement of Agri-environment-climate objectives) and 10.1 (payment for Agri-environment commitments) of the RDP, with the bulk of the budget being allocated to Measure 4.4.

The methodology of the evaluation is based on the 'Guidelines on the Assessment of RDP Results: How to prepare for reporting on evaluation in 2017' issued by the European Evaluation Helpdesk for Rural the Development as advocated by the European Evaluation Helpdesk, the evaluation consists of a mixed methods approach which ensures appropriate triangulation of different data sources.

The evaluation notes that Malta has poor soil quality and faces a high risk of soil erosion in addition to facing severe water challenges, both in terms of water quantity and water quality. This situation could be further aggravated by climate

changes impacts including reduced precipitation, increasing risk of droughts, and extreme heat rendering the agricultural sector particularly susceptible to these impacts. Taking into account the main threats to soil quality, the 2014-2020 RDP aims to address soil quality and preservation of Maltese soil through the implementation of measures 1,2, 4.4, 10.1 and 16.2.

The budget allocated towards Focus Area 4C in the Programme stands at €27,636,125, representing approximately 14% of the total budget. Since measures 1, 2, and 16 only indirectly contribute to soil management, the focus of the evaluation was on measures 4.4 and 10.1. The uptake of both measures registered very good progress with the allocated budgets for both measures being exceeded. The target of 3% of agricultural land under management contracts to improve soil management and/or prevent soil erosion was exceeded and the indicator is currently estimated at 12.6%. The indicator is very close to the EU target of 14%. The success of the measure is attributed to the uptake of AECM 5.

In terms of soil erosion and soil organic matter, data obtained shows

that 171,960 linear metres of walls were funded (of which 78,645 m were in Gozo and 93,315 m in Malta). It was further estimated that the area of soil protected by the rubble walls in Malta and Gozo is 8,104,499 m². Assuming that the UAA is 10,730 ha²(or 107,300,000 m²) then the area of soil protected by rubble walls in the RDP is 7.55% of the UAA. In terms of soil erosion, it was estimated that the average annual soil loss for those parcels that benefitted under measure 4.4 is substantially reduced because of the rubble walls. It was estimated that there is a 66% reduction in soil loss due to the rubble walls. With regards to soil organic matter the data obtained from the beneficiaries of AECM 5 was collected and analysed for the years 2018 to 2020 (the years where SOM data was collected). The evaluation showed that there has been a substantial increase (over 50%) in SOM between 2013 and 2018. Furthermore, when the AECM was launched in 2018 the average SOM has also increased by about 11% over the two years on those parcels that implemented AECM5. Although these results are very encouraging both in terms of the general improvement in SOM between 2013 and 2018 and also as a result of the programme

(2018-2020), the SOM values are those obtained from beneficiaries and not part of a national study – which was used to compute the SOM value in 2013.

Therefore, results need to be interpreted with caution. In terms of recommendations, on a national level there is the need to halt and reverse the depletion of natural resources in agriculture by supporting management practices that reduce water-induced soil erosion, and investments in modern productive systems, enhancing sustainable water management and other practices lowering nutrient losses to water and air.

In line with the National Agricultural Policy, the incentivization of the consolidation of land parcels as well as incentives to improve soil, need to be taken forward for both the sustainability of the agriculture community as well as to protect soils. Sustainable cultivation practices are also advocated in the National Agriculture Policy as well as the importance of organic farming. The

development of a Soil Action Plan is required to improve soil quality.

To conclude, it is clear that Measure 4.4 was a successful measure both in terms of uptake as well as its potential impact on preventing soil erosion. The continued popularity of the AECMs indicates that accompanying training measures are having a positive effect on farmers. It is therefore recommended to support the consolidation of knowledge and its transmission to farmers through quality advice on sustainable soil management. Soil management is also expected to play an important part in the future CAP strategic Plan. Measures that clearly impact soil and therefore contribute to the indicators on soil should be identified and incentivised and data collection related to the implementation of the measures should be in-built into the requirements of the measure.

The full evaluation report can be found on the EU funds website FONDI.eu



RDP Funded Project under the LEADER Gozo Action Group Foundation (GAGF)

ART BETWEEN PAST AND PRESENT

– Optimising prime locations in the heart of Victoria to showcase Gozo's Heritage.

This project funded through LEADER, aimed to transform two historical sites into modern, accessible and fully equipped venues capable of hosting cultural and networking events that would promote the island.

Teatru Astra and the Victoria Local Council are two historic buildings in Victoria, Gozo. LEADER funds were used to upgrade the infrastructure of these sites in to enhance visitor experience and make them capable of hosting a variety of events. In addition, a new approach to multi-event public programming was trialled in the renovated spaces, including a lecture series, conferences and performances, as well as exhibitions of the work of Maltese artists.

The historical town hall of the Victoria Local Council, dating back to 1733, was built to house the University of Gozo and the local authorities, but by 2019, it was badly in need of infrastructure investments to improve the facility. Promoting these historical sites and enriching the local cultural landscape has improved the city's tourism experience and made the island more attractive to visitors during and outside of the peak tourism season.

This project included:

- Investment in infrastructure by Socjeta Filarmonika La Stella, and the private partner;

- Investment at Teatru Astra owned Socjeta Filarmonika La Stella;
- Exhibition area featuring different aspects of Gozo's heritage;
- Temporary exhibition space;
- Theatre production and history exhibition;
- Cinematography exhibition;
- Socjeta Filarmonika La Stella historical journey.

The success of the cultural offer was due to its innovative theme, the number and diversity of participating artists, the uniqueness of the venues and the duration of the programme (some aspects, such as the exhibition, were available for three weeks). Funding for arts and heritage programming provided an opportunity to bring local creative and academic communities together to showcase their work, shine a light on local history and identity, and reach new audiences.

The project addressed the need to promote Gozo's cultural heritage and local identity and to boost its tourism offer. The cultural programme was well attended, in contrast to previous events held in Gozo, and there is interest in organising similar offers in the future.

The project also included an event organised by Socjeta Filarmonika La Stella and Victoria Local Council with a number of exhibitions of art connected to Gozo, audio visual presentations and a concert amongst other activities.

A quote from a project stakeholder "I believe that this a best-case example of proper use of EU funds, which have assisted in the regeneration of a public space which was in bad shape. In the process such space was made accessible and reinvented into a new cultural hub the potential of which was tested in the first events organised, and co-currently, a new business undertaking is taking off – which will leverage on the new activity created by the new cultural hub".

This project was co-financed by the LEADER measure and managed by the Gozo Action Group, which aims to develop Gozo's tourism.



