

Merit Based Income from Sustainable Land Management in Mountain Farming

Mountain farming benefits biodiversity and ecosystem services, support habitats conservation and improve environmental assets in general. Due to trends of industrialization and urbanization mountain farming is in a difficult situation. Many farms have intensified their production. These cause a loss of ecosystem diversity with related services and also a general decline of rural areas in alpine regions. Cultural landscapes and cultural heritage disappear.

The MERIT project will develop innovative governance systems, procedures and tools for managing ecosystem services and public goods based on an analysis if merit based agro environmental programmes are more attractive for farmers than standard systems.

The international project team consists of well established research organizations from Germany, Austria, France, Switzerland and Italy, additionally a Slovenian partner as observer.

The MERIT project is structured in five work packages:

In **WP 1** an inventory of existing agri-environmental programs, result oriented environmental measures and related educational programs as well as further initiatives in mountain regions of the involved countries is done. Relations to relevant ecosystems services and the provision of public goods will be evaluated.

In **WP 2** five to eight pilot farms per country will be selected to evaluate the present income, motivation and qualification of farmers, involvement of women, knowledge about ecosystem services and their land use and biodiversity management. Innovative transferable merit based income systems will be tested and economical and ecological effects will be analyzed on farm level.

The focus of **WP 3** is to upscale the impact of innovative result orientated and merit based measures applied on farm level to a territorial/regional level. The upscaling process will be assessed with selected qualitative sustainability criteria on a regional scale.





In **WP4** recommendations for implementing result oriented and merit based measures to governance structures will be evaluated. Administrative needs and farmers education to foster innovative management measures will be adapted.

The focus of **WP 5** is to ensure effective communication with stakeholders policy makers and the public at all stages of the project. Trans-disciplinary exchange of knowledge between stakeholders, farmers and researchers will be established. It will also be ensured that research results are perpetuated beyond the lifetime of the project, and their impact in practice is extended.

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