

# Newsletter

Issue 1, October 2013



Merit based income from sustainable land management in mountain farming  
<http://www.umweltbuero.at/merit>

## Content

Introduction

About the MERIT project

Consortium Coordinator and Partners

- eb&p Umweltbüro GmbH - Austria
- IfLS Institute for Rural Development Research – Germany
- Eurac European Academy of Bozen/ Bolzano – Italy
- FiBL Forschungsinstitut für biologischen Landbau – Switzerland
- ISARA-Lyon Engineering School for Agriculture, Environment and Food – France
- IRSNC The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation

Next Steps

Meetings/Events

Case Study Area

- Austria
- Germany
- France
- Switzerland



## Impressum:

Publisher: eb&p Umweltbüro GmbH, Bahnhofstraße 39/2,  
 A - 9020 Klagenfurt, Austria  
 Tel.: +43 463 516614  
 E-Mail: [klagenfurt@umweltbuero.at](mailto:klagenfurt@umweltbuero.at)  
[www.umweltbuero.at](http://www.umweltbuero.at)

Layout: Andrea Perkonigg, Sophia Neuner  
 © eb&p Umweltbüro GmbH

## Introduction

Mountain farming in the Alps gained in the last years more attention from the EU. The biodiversity in the European Alps is extraordinary, because of its natural conditions. So I am very glad, that the EU invests more in the protection and the research of mountain farming and the correlations to biodiversity. Also the "Bottom up" approach is valued in these projects.

We are especially delighted, that we are included in the Ruragri ERA-NET Project and could so construct the MERIT Project. The cooperation in our international team for the next two years, is something I am really looking forward to.



*"The diversity of plants and animals in the Alps is for me a personal concern."*

Dr. Daniel Bogner is executive director of the eb&p Umweltbuero GmbH and has more than 18 years experience in agriculture, cultural landscape development and regional development and the analysis of agro-environmental schemes and agro-economics. Daniel Bogner will be Team leader of the MERIT project.

## About the MERIT project

To evaluate current agro-environmental programs if they ensure biodiversity in the alps in the future the MERIT project, Merit based income from sustainable land management in mountain farming, was initiated.

Due to trends of industrialization, urbanization and intensification of the production in certain areas in particular with keeping more animals, often achieved with imported concentrates. A strong increase of fallow land is identified as well. These trends 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.

Hence regions and countries try to counteract this development by strengthening financial incentives for biodiversity conservation and landscape maintenance measures. Many EU member states are developing new agri-environmental schemes for the period 2014-2020. Pilot projects on outcomeorientated nature protection have been implemented in Switzerland and parts of Germany. This innovative system is handing over more responsibility to farmers for managing their land considering biodiversity and ecosystem services. The general idea is to agree with farmers on outcome and results in terms of quality/quantity of species and habitats, water, erosion or biodiversity.

The MERIT project will develop such 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 project will focus on the potential to generate sustainable income for farmers having a high performance in land and ecosystem management. The aim is providing recommendations for enhancing vitality of mountain farming also regarding new sources for funding farms such as private food sector.

## Consortium Coordinator and Partners

### eb&p Umweltbüro GmbH - Austria

eb&p Umweltbuero GmbH, eb&p Environmental Consulting Ltd., is an independent Austrian environmental consulting firm founded in 2004. Umweltbuero is specialized in environmental management and consulting and all related planning, economic, legal, political, sustainability and social aspects.

The overall project coordination, which includes the overall scientific coordination, will be performed by the eb&p Umweltbuero GmbH.

Umweltbuero will be involved in all workpackages and will lead WP3.



DI Dr. Monika Dubbert has her field of expertise in Rural Development, especially in multifunctional agriculture, alpine pasture management and regional development. She will be main researcher for the Umweltbuero.

*"The comparison of the variable agro-environmental programs of the different countries, is for me very interesting."*



Sophia Neuner, B.A. will perform the overall project coordination. She will be the main contact for all partners.

*"For me the project is unique, because all alpine countries bordering are participating."*

### IfLS Institute for Rural Development Research – Germany

The institute for rural development research is an independent research institute attached to the University of Frankfurt. The main fields of research and consulting are the integration of agricultural with rural development and sustainable development goals, the monitoring and evaluation of the effects of agricultural environmental and rural development policy with advice on policy formulation.

The IfLS will contribute to all work packages of the project but will take the lead in WP1 and WP5.



DI Jörg Schramek is managing director and senior researcher at the IfLS. He has 18 years experience in consulting, appraisal, research and long-term project work at the interfaces of agriculture, environment and rural development.

*"This project provides the chance to develop agri-environmental schemes by taking farmer's knowledge into account."*



Heike Nitsch holds a Diploma in Geoecology. Her main expertise is in the field of Environmental aspects of agricultural land use and associated management tools from the fields of agricultural, environmental and energy policy.

*"I am very interested in the exchange of experiences with agri-environmental measures and further best practice examples across regions."*

### Eurac European Academy of Bozen/Bolzano – Italy

The EURAC is the academic research centre of South Tyrol. The major tasks of the research Institute for Alpine Environment are focused within the pulsing field of conflict between man and nature, namely mountain farming and mountain forests, nature and landscape as well as environmental precaution, all of which belong to the topic, "Sustainable development in mountain regions".

The institute will contribute to the WP2, WP3 and WP4.



Priv.-Doz. Dr. Mag. Erich Tasser is Senior researcher at the Institute for Alpine Environment of the EURAC. His research topics are related to ecological effects of land-use changes and its socio-economical driving forces, biodiversity, and conservation biology.

*"An intact cultural landscape generates significant ecological services for the society, like e.g. soil protection, preservation of biodiversity and provision of clean water. Therefore it is important to develop innovative and highly effective systems for rewarding farmers for sustainable land management."*

### FiBL Forschungsinstitut für biologischen Landbau – Switzerland

The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) is a private non-profit organisation. FiBL is one of the world's leading organic farming research and technology transfer centres dedicated to sustainable agriculture. FiBL Socioeconomics Department has substantial competences in model based agricultural policy analysis, policy evaluation, and sustainability impact assessment as well as in rural development, farm economics and consumer/market research.

FiBL will be involved in all workpackages and will lead WP4 on innovative governance systems.



DI Otto Schmid is Senior Researcher and agro-economist. He is involved in research on farm economics, marketing, analysis of agricultural policies and rural development.

*"For me it is important that the mountain farmers can bring in their views and expectations regarding more outcome-oriented programmes/measures, which are important for the design of future public support systems and private market-driven incentives which are attractive and find a high acceptance of farmers."*



Dr. Matthias Stolze is Head of Socio-Economics Department and has ample international research experience in the field of organic farming, agricultural policy and economics.

*"A particular strength of this project is that it facilitates the exchange of experiences with and expectations towards outcome oriented agri-environmental measures between the MERIT case-study regions in Austria, France, Germany and Switzerland. For our partners in the case-study region, this is an important benefit from this project."*



Dr. Sibylle Stöckli is researcher for biodiversity, climate change, Sustainability in agriculture.

*„Protecting biodiversity is of critical relevance to insure ecosystem processes such as pollination or biological control under environmental change. Mountain areas have a high responsibility for biodiversity conservation and*

*more income for mountain farmers respecting biodiversity and ecosystem functioning will account for that.”*

### ISARA-Lyon Engineering School for Agriculture, Environment and Food – France

ISARA-Lyon Engineering School for Agriculture, Environment and Food – is a private engineering university dedicated to higher education, research and extension in agriculture, food industry, and environmental sciences in France.

For the MERIT project the Department of Agroecology and Environment and the Department of Social Sciences will be involved. Their research activities focus on: organic farming, crop production, conception of innovative practices in agro-ecology, evolution of profession, skills and practices of farmers, organization and management of innovative food systems and development of local and regional projects targeting environmental protection.

Will contribute to all workpackages but will take lead in WP2.



Dr. Philippe Fleury is Associate Professor for Geography and Sociology and head of the department of Social Sciences at ISARA-Lyon. His research is focused on rural development, food systems, organic and mountain agriculture, as well as interrelationships between organic farming and environment.

*“Merit is challenging the capacity of the Alps to be a powerful laboratory to imagine in a participative way innovative strategies and policies in favor of biodiversity.”*



Dr. Alexander Wezel is Head of the department Agroecology and Environment. In the last years his research focused on land use, resource conservation, as well as agroecosystems analysis and management, in particular the relation of agricultural practices with biodiversity and water quality.

*“I am very curious about this project, especially on what farmers themselves will propose as agro-environmental measures.”*

### IRSNC The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation

The Institute of the Republic of Slovenia for Nature Conservation was founded in 1999. It is a professional public organisation responsible for nature conservation with its main tasks/activities: drawing-up of nature protection guidelines, drawing-up of special nature protection guidelines for management of Natura 2000 sites, issuance of nature protection consents, issuance of consents in procedure of environmental assessment, determination of the status of valuable natural features and their protection. Together with regional units of IRSNC it covers the entire territory of Slovenia.

The IRSNC will function as an observer.



Dr. Nika Debeljak Šabec is project coordinator of the LIFE + Nature “Conservation and management of Freshwater Wetlands in Slovenia – WETMAN” project.

“This project will support exchange of best practice examples for sustainable land management. I’m very interested in development of innovative approach into result oriented agro-environmental measures for mouin areas.”

### Next Steps

- Selection of Pilot Farms
- SWOT Analysis of existing agro-environmental programs
- Inventory of variety of plants and animals on pilot farms

### Meetings/Events

On the 30th of September until the 2nd of October the Kick-Off Meeting of the MERIT project was held in Klagenfurt/Austria.

Because of this reason the partners from all alpine countries bordering travel to Carinthia.



**All participants of Kick-Off Meeting**

This meeting gave the partners the chance to get to know each other and get a common understanding of the project with the tasks. Many administrative points, the methodology of the workpackages, the competences of the workpackage leaders and the first achievements where discussed.

The main focus was on workpackage 1 & 2, here the guidelines for the interviews of farmers, the criterias for the selection of the pilot farms and the SWOT analysis where evaluated.

On the last day of the meeting, the 2nd of October the whole group went to on an excursion to the pilot area Zell. This area is south of Klagenfurt in the mountainous region of the Karawanks, very close to the Slovenian border. The whole group of researchers could get there a good impression on how the situation of farmers is in the Karawanks and what kind of problems they have with the current environmental policies.

In May 2014 the next Partner Meeting is going to be in Frick Switzerland.



Discussions of researchers with farmer



Fallow land on steep slopes

## Case Study Area

### Austria

The case study area in Austria is Carinthia. All pilot farms will be in different parts of Carinthia.

Upper Gailtal, the inner alpine are Gailtal with Lesachtal and Gitschtal are located close to the Italian border. In Lesachtal settlements are located above the gorge of the Geil river on terraces and flat screes. In Lesachtal the majority of the working population lives from agriculture and forestry. Especially in the rural region of Lesachtal extensive emigration is taking place.

Karawanks, the mountain region is located close to the Slovenian border and is economically rather weak and characterized by agriculture and forestry. Due to the location in the steep Karawank mountain the climate is rough and precipitation is high. Here main agricultural production is grasslands with some arable land for fodder production for breeding of livestock.

### Germany

The rural district "Oberallgäu" in the federal state of Bavaria is the southernmost district in Germany. Agricultural land use is nearly exclusively focused on grassland with dairy farming having high importance and summering of cattle being a distinctive feature. Tourism is a major sector of income. There are several initiatives for marketing regional products. A recent nature conservation project is the "Peat bog Alliance of Allgäu", the main goal of which is the conservation and re-cultivation of natural peat bogs as well as the conservation of endangered grassland. Within this Alliance, the involvement of local farms shall ensure the use of the litter of the ecologically valuable, nutrient-poor meadows adjacent to the peat bogs.

### France

Vercors. The area is located at the south of Grenoble at the border between the northern and the southern part of the French Alps. It is a limestone massif characterized by livestock farming, permanent meadows and pastures. In this region exists already a large diversity of environmental programs.

### Switzerland

The study region is the alpine region of Central Switzerland and in particular the Canton Lucerne, where the advisory services and eco-program administrators are very interested in the project. In this area many farmers have concerns how to ensure a sufficient income when the direct payment systems will be more targeted to the provision of biodiversity, landscape and resource efficiency measures as being envisaged by the Swiss Government for 2014-2020.

## Contact

### Project Coordinator

Sophia Neuner, B.A.

Tel: +43 463 516614-26

E-Mail: [sophia.neuner@umweltbuero.at](mailto:sophia.neuner@umweltbuero.at)