

Semi-natural grassland in Denmark – political instruments aiming for nature quality

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Abstract

Although semi-natural grasslands are protected physically by the Nature Protection Law in Denmark, it is not enough to ensure nature quality at the sites. It is necessary with an adequate management, and this management will only be carried out if the farmer chooses to do so. Economic incentives are given for management and the support is higher for grazing than for cutting. However the economic incentives are relatively low and therefore the farmer chooses to manage semi-natural grassland which can also obtain aid per ha from EU. 84 % of the semi-natural grassland obtaining support for management will at the same time obtain support as permanent grassland. It means that more than half of the species have to be "suitable" as forage or cultural species. Another problem is that the support for management is connected to a specific cutting date and a rule requires a low and dense sward at the end of the season. This rule is to make it easier to make a control. As the farmers are afraid that the sward is not sufficiently low and dense they often trim the grassland and they actually may destroy quite some nature quality at the sites. For the high nature quality swards the incentives are in general too small to make farmers interested in management, and the control system can have a much too heavy impact. Possible improvements are discussed e.g. higher payments for high nature quality, control with a focus on biodiversity, specific management aims adjusted to the locality and a simpler bureaucracy.