

## **THE WILLINGNESS OF USERS OF FARMING ECOSYSTEMS TO ACCEPT AND APPLY ACTIONS FOR THE IMPROVEMENT OF WILDLIFE HABITATS**

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The Farming ecosystems are considered as important areas for wildlife species, mainly for the game species. The farming techniques, irrigation systems, fertilization, mono-cultivation, intensive use of farming medication, etc. have negatively influenced these areas, concerning biodiversity loss and wildlife habitats. Also the damage of natural plant-fences and other elements of natural vegetation deprive necessary place for the needs of wildlife species.

The European Environmental Policy, as well with national initiatives, encourages the application of management measures in farming ecosystems, compensating or subsidizing the farmers. However this requires the acceptance and active participation of the individuals' farmers, in order to apply environmental actions in their fields and property.

The Hunting Federation of Macedonia & Thrace created and tested a questionnaire trying to approach the willingness to accept of users of farming ecosystems in order to apply actions for the improvement of wildlife habitats. The questionnaire was used in the national Agricultural Exhibition of Thessaloniki, in Northern Greece, which is visited by thousands of farmers every year. A random sample of 200 farmers was selected, of the 4000 thousands visitors that passed from a specific steady stand –point of the Exhibition. These were equally divided during the open days and during the daily time. In the question if they would like to leave a small part of their field uncropped or unpicked in order to help wildlife species more than 80% answer YES. In the question what compensation they would demand for this the 84% of them answer that they do not wish to be compensated. The sample is divided in farmers that are also hunters and those that are not. There in the farmers that are also hunters 86% of them do not wish to be compensated, while in the non-hunters farmers the 91% do not want to be compensated. In the questionnaire are also examined the relations of farming and hunting, the willingness to participate in awareness and information actions. Also it is examined their opinion if wildlife species disturb or negatively influence agriculture.

The high percentage of WTA (Willingness to Accept) and the fact that hunting is not considered as a negative activity for agriculture is considered as an important basis to apply specific awareness campaign in farmers unions. The fact that a lot of farmers combine the activity of hunting creates precondition to apply awareness programmes as well and in the members of hunting associations.

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