

# Farming communities effectively involved in nutrient reduction measures

## The case

Three environmental NGOs from Bulgaria, Romania and Moldova received a joint grant for working with farming communities on nutrient reduction measures from the UNDP/GEF Danube Regional Project (DRP), supporting cross border initiatives within the Danube Basin. The large regional granting program assisted trans-boundary cooperative efforts for restoration and protection of the Danube.

The project addressed nutrient pollution of surface and ground waters from agriculture in the Lower Danube Basin.

It was implemented on the territory of six rural municipalities in the Danube River Basin in Bulgaria (Silistra, Dobrich), Romania (Galați, Bacău) and Moldova (Cahul and neighbouring regions). The regions shared some common background and problems reflecting on the impact of farming activities on the environment and specifically on the quality of surface and ground waters in the Lower Danube basin. The project helped to help to eliminate 'bad practices' in agriculture related to environment, enhanced the transboundary perspective of nature protection efforts and involved the rural communities in the implementation of pollution reduction measures and exchange on environment friendly farming.



## The change process

The 12-month project 'Best Agricultural Practice in My Farm' was based on the cooperation among three partner NGOs: the Black Sea NGO Network (Bulgaria), Earth Friends (Romania) and the Eco Counselling Centre of Cahul (Moldova). Each NGO coordinated the project activities in the home country and BSNN acted as main coordinator.

The partners started project activities in early 2006. Their approach was to directly involve the farming communities in the process of applying the Code of Good Agricultural Practice (GAP) thus protecting the waters from nitrate pollution. For Bulgaria and Romania it was a stepping stone to EU accession. Both countries were making efforts toward the effective implementation of the EU Water Framework directive (WFD) and the Nitrates Directive 91/676/EEC. Moldova also

has similar obligations ensuing from the Danube River Protection Convention and its involvement in the Danube River Basin management within the general framework of the EU WFD. Environmental baselines, such as GAP were gaining importance as minimum standards for agricultural support payments or entry conditions for participation in agri-environment schemes, less-favoured area schemes, quality assurance etc. So farmers in the two countries were motivated to learn and be aware of future obligations and opportunities. Moldova, chairing the Danube Commission in 2006, developed its own Code in line with the country's commitments to the Danube Convention and increased involvement with EU policies.

The term Best Agricultural Practice in the Danube Regional Project is applied to farming practices that reduce the risk of pollution from agricultural non-point sources. It is used to describe the conscientious effort on the part of farmers to integrate more environmental concerns in the day-to-day management of crops, animals and agricultural land, so as to reduce the risk of pollution from multiple small scale discharges. Therefore the project partners involved the farming communities in taking measures to improve the environment and promoted environment friendly farming.

In the first phase the partners have been involved in the exchange of information about the progress of adoption and enforcement of the Codes in their respective countries. The project focused on training the local rural communities in the application of the rules. It was an important step highlighting the significance of waters and rivers for habitat and human health and putting agricultural activities within the wider framework of human impact on the environment. The approach also included preparation and distribution of simple readily comprehensible brochures about the rules in order to serve as reference materials and raise awareness among the farming population about pollution problems and their consequences to the region.

The media played an active role in the overall process of informing the public of the environmental aspects of farming and the efforts to protect waters from pollution. A media competition launched to highlight Danube Day added interest and local colour to the cooperative effort.

Of special interest to the stakeholders were the two cross border visits to Bulgaria and Romania with itineraries featuring Danube project investment sites and environmental farming activities. Partners from the three countries toured Silistra Region, Plovdiv and other agricultural areas in Bulgaria. They met local experts and stakeholders and visited farmers taking steps to implement and promote the good agricultural practices. Some organic producers received the visitors



and shared experience in the application of the ecosystem approach. The trip to Romania took place in October and featured a visit to the village of Independența, on the Danube and its manure storage facilities, constructed as a demonstration site for a community project supported by DRP I and international donors. The

visits to the research station for vine growing and wine production in Târgu Bujor and the vegetable research and development station in Bacău provided an insight into the innovative and environmentally friendly farming practices and research in Romania.

### **The outcome**

The project is focused on getting the local stakeholders from the rural areas, such as farmers, farmers' associations, local authorities, agricultural experts and journalists involved in promoting the Codes of GAP and also in elaborating voluntary charters of good practices. The commitments reflect the local agricultural, environmental, social and economic context and the preparedness of the rural communities for the application of environmental friendly practices in agriculture.

The project educated farmers toward observing good, environmentally friendly practices of applying fertilizers in their farms. Those involved balanced use and storage of fertilizers and manure, observation of quantitative norms per ha, terrain and weather conditions, keeping diaries of the use of chemicals on the farm. The farmers were acquainted with the opportunities for organic production. The project prepared the grounds for the application of the Rules of Good Agricultural Practice.

### **Lessons learned**



The project has helped farmers and their advisers to identify best practices on farm level, which in combination produce a big positive effect on the farm production economy and in the same time prevent a big load of nitrogen, phosphorus and plant protection products from influencing negatively the environment. The project helped farmers get ready to apply the EU Water Framework Directive and the Nitrates Directive 91/676/EEC. It was

successfully replicated in the Black Sea Basin by a partner NGO.

One of the best practices require relatively big investments on the farms (manure stores), while another require availability of machine rings or similar services for spreading of livestock manure with optimal technology. The rest of the practices are cheap and can be implemented by all farms without consideration to their economy. Currently the farmers from Bulgaria and Romania who were involved in the project implementation can apply for funding to support the above best practices under measure 121, Farm Modernisation Programme of the EU Rural Development Programme.

The project activity can be extended to review tendencies in the use of fertilizers and pesticides, to review the documentation keeping process in farms, to review the monitoring results of water quality and to suggest further management measures to reduce nitrate pollution.