

Climate-compatible agriculture is bio-logical

cc.alps: CIPRA's demands for agriculture

The agricultural sector is directly affected by climate change impacts but it also contributes to the release of greenhouse gases (GHG) and rising concentrations of GHG in the atmosphere. A sustainable climate response strategy in the field of agriculture involves anticipating, planning and long-term thinking from farm level to transnational level. Prominent fields of activity are sustainable land and soil management, sustainable water management, managing manure and soil carbon as well as organic agriculture as an overall strategy.

As agriculture is a highly subsidized economic sector, subvention policy can be used as a lever to guide the sector to sustainability and climate neutrality.

CIPRA's demands:

1 Go organic – a solution for the whole Alpine region

Given the conditions, it is inherently impossible for farms in the Alps to keep up with mass production in the lowlands. The only alternative is to go for the highest possible quality. High-quality regional products can also play an important role in sustainable tourism.

Organic agriculture combines all the principles of sustainable agriculture. It increases the CO₂ storage capacity of the soil, producing 65% less CO₂ than conventional agriculture, and it makes an important contribution to species diversity and the prevention of soil erosion.

Therefore CIPRA proposes agricultural production throughout the Alpine region on the principles of organic agriculture. Guidelines for subventions at all levels should aim at achieving this.

2 Use water intelligently

The increasing frequency of droughts resulting from climate change, especially in summer and autumn, will lead to a greater use of water for irrigation by agriculture. This can only be allowed to the extent that it does not conflict with the supply of drinking water and the proper

functioning of wetland biotopes/ecosystems. Solutions include the creation of reservoirs, drip irrigation, increasing the organic matter content of the soil so that it can retain more water and the use of drought-resistant plants. The extensive know-how of traditional agriculture should be used to (re)introduce traditional plants and livestock adapted to dryer conditions.

3 Limit the use of biomass as an energy source

Growing crops for biofuel is inefficient, because the same area can produce many times more energy with, for example, photovoltaics. Growing crops for this purpose may also be counterproductive because some production methods consume more energy than is produced. Finally, the growing of fuel crops must be questioned from the point of view of the global food situation.

4 Consume less meat - and, when you do, make sure it is from regional organic farms

Ultimately climate change mitigation is also a question of consumer behaviour. Livestock accounts for 37 % of global anthropogenic methane emissions, no less than 65 % of nitrogen oxide emissions, and 9 % of CO₂ emissions. So reducing the consumption of meat is an important contributing factor to climate change mitigation. Any meat that is consumed should be sourced from regional organic farms that use extensive livestock farming methods without buying in additional animal feed and without synthetic chemical fertilizers. This helps preserve the soil and bind more CO₂, unlike intensive farming methods where it is ploughed up releasing CO₂. A lower meat consumption and regional organic livestock farming not only help mitigate the effects of climate change, they also increase the regional value added and make a valuable contribution to preserving the cultural landscape of the Alps.

Schaan, August 2011