

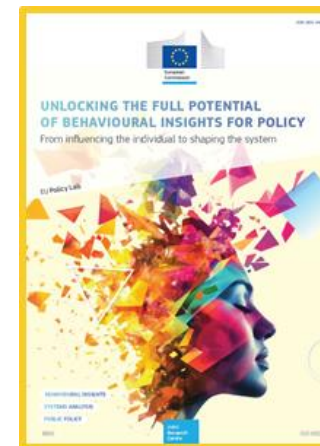
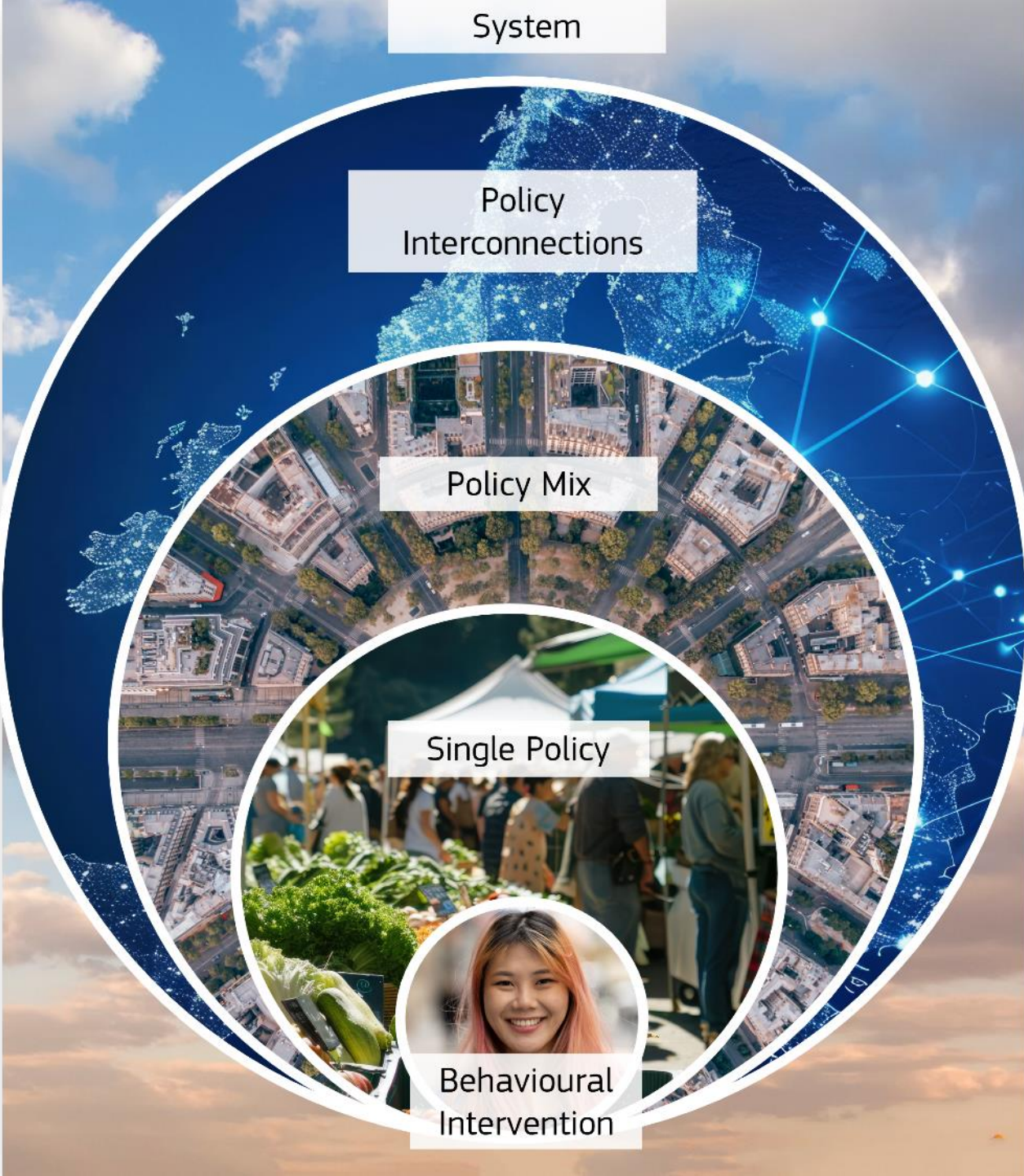
Behavioural insights in policy making for food systems

Jesus Barreiro-Hurle

Economics of Food Systems Unit - JRC

FAGN policy Webinar – GREEN NUDGES IN FOREST AND AGRICULTURAL SYSTEMS: EVIDENCE, CASE STUDIES AND POLICY PERSPECTIVES
ONLINE 26 MARCH 2026



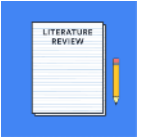


BI's roles in policymaking

	Behavioural Intervention	Single Policy	Policy mix	Policy interconnections	System
WHAT	BI targets individual actions	BI informs single (traditional or behavioural) policy interventions in specific areas	BI aligns policies to work together towards a shared goal within a policy area	BI examines how policies across areas interact from a behavioural perspective	BI maps stakeholders, their behaviours, influential factors and key relationships (behavioural systems mapping)
HOW	By using interventions like nudges and boosts	By understanding and analysing behavioural factors relevant to the policy context	By coordinating traditional and behavioural interventions based on relevant behavioural factors	By bringing a human perspective into the policy landscape and identifying behavioural issues leading to policy fragmentation	By pinpointing leverage points where behavioural analysis and targeted interventions can help unlock the system
WHY	<i>To influence individual behaviour and improve communication of existing policies.</i>	<i>To ground policy choice and guide policy design.</i>	<i>To leverage synergies between traditional and behavioural interventions in a policy area.</i>	<i>To enhance coherence across policy areas.</i>	<i>To achieve a better-functioning, more cohesive system.</i>

Use of behavioral insights for sustainable food systems

A behaviourally informed framework for assessing farmer behaviour with regards to environmentally friendly farming



Assessing the power of nudging to enhance enrolment on environmentally friendly measures



Increasing environmental performance of farming: willing or complying?



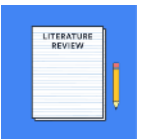
Do consumers care about the dual food quality debate in their purchasing decisions?



How to implement UCPD recommendations for dual food quality in practice



Which nutrition and sustainability labelling to implement





Single Policy



BI recommending and informing traditional policies:

Increasing environmental performance of farming: willing or complying?



Willing or complying? The delicate interplay between voluntary and mandatory interventions to promote farmers' environmental behavior[☆]

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ABSTRACT

Agri-environmental policies generally build around two complementary approaches: mandatory requirements and (compensated) voluntary measures. One of the challenges of the future EU Common Agricultural Policy is precisely to find the right balance between these two types of interventions. We conducted an experiment with farmers in three EU Member States to assess the impact of (1) increasing mandatory contributions to the environment, and of (2) decreasing unconditional income support. We also assess the effect of two key behavioural factors: environmental concern and trait reactance. Results show that both interventions reduce voluntary contributions to the environment, but the reduction is higher when mandatory contributions increase than when income decreases. However, when mandatory contribution increases substantially, this more than offsets the reduction of voluntary contributions, leading to higher total contributions.

1. Introduction

Agriculture has significant negative impacts on ecosystem multifunctionality, including climate mitigation, soil and water quality, and biodiversity preservation (Díaz et al. 2019; Clark et al. 2020; Wittwer et al. 2021). In contrast, organic and conservation farm management, including no-till systems, precision farming, integrated pest management, and cover crops, can reduce these externalities, and therefore directly contribute to various United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Ladha et al. 2020).

Policymakers have different types of interventions at their disposal

to encourage farmers to adopt more sustainable practices against this backdrop (Pineiro et al. 2020). These interventions can be either mandatory or voluntary. Mandatory interventions generally consist of regulatory measures that impose certain practices on farmers. Voluntary interventions, instead, leave freedom to farmers and may incentivise them, for instance, through compensation for the cost incurred and/or income foregone to voluntarily adopt sustainable practices, through technical support, technological transfer or certification of food produced with environmentally friendly farming practices.

The EU's interventions to improve agriculture's environmental performance also revolve around these two approaches. Mandatory

[☆] The authors would like to acknowledge the continuous and insightful guidance provided throughout the completion of this study by Florence Buchholzer and Sylvie Barel from the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Commission. We would like to thank all the farmers who participated in the pilots and in the study. The final version of the manuscript benefited from the insights provided by two reviewers and the guest editor which have made the presentation and interpretation of the results clearer, of course the usual disclaimer applies regarding any remaining errors. This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors. The views expressed in this paper are purely those of the authors and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission.

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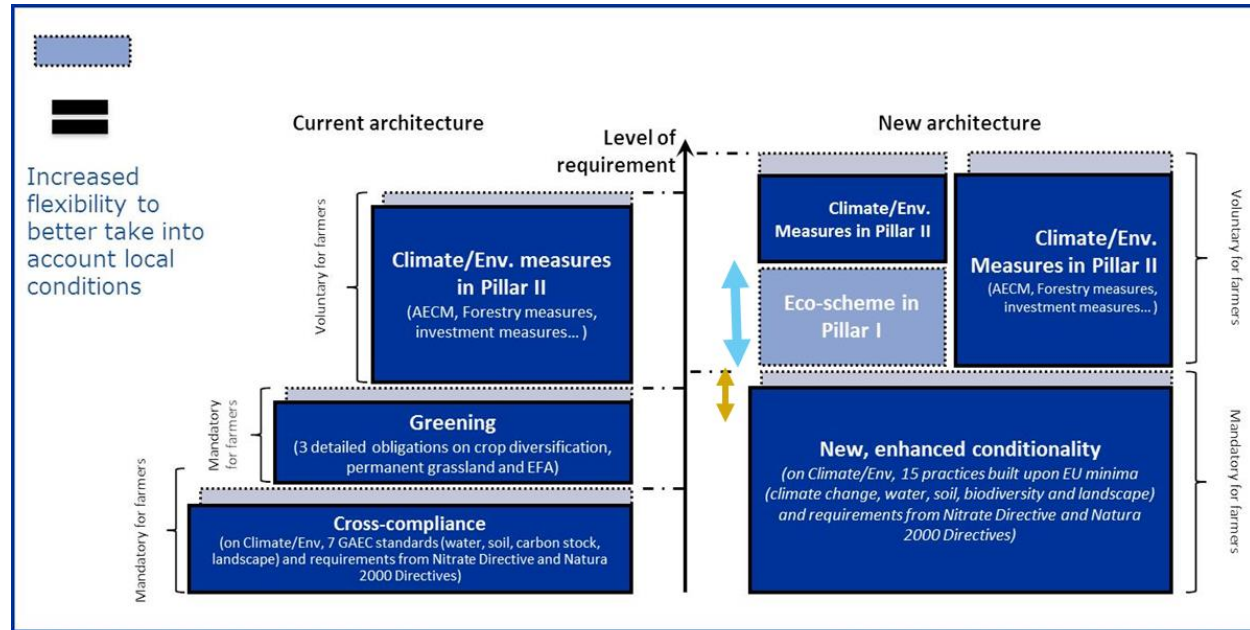
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Policy background



The policy choice: how can we optimize new green architecture



Policy options:

Budget shift from BISS to eco-schemes

Enhancing conditionality

Policy objective:

Achievement of environmental and climate benefits

what did we know before experimenting.... (I)

Will or comply?

Mandatory is better	Voluntary is better
deliver more certain environmental benefits (Piñeiro et al. 2020), given proper monitoring and sanctions	evidence suggesting that farmers prefer voluntary over mandatory measures (Dessart, 2019) -> dissatisfaction and protest on the side of the farmers
enforcable mechanism = no dependence on farmers' willingness to enrol (no self-selection, or low rates of adoption) (Brown et al. 2021)	might be too complex or inflexible (Schirmer et al. 2015; Gaymard et al. 2020)
law have the potential of being internalized as norms (Nyborg et al. 2016, Nyborg 2018)	more stringent environmental regulations, if applied unilaterally or not compensated for, can hamper the competitiveness of agriculture
General public does not support unconditional subsidies focused primarily on production and farm income (Pe'er et al. 2018), given the conflict between their environmental and income support objectives.	reinforce farmers' intrinsic motivation to protect the environment through education, more so than compulsory instruments (Bosch et al. 1995)

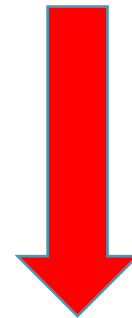
what did we know before experimenting.... (& II)

Behavioural pathways

Reactions to increased mandatory requirements

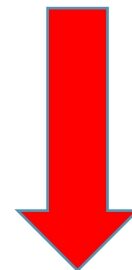


Act consistently (cognitive dissonance)
Spill over effect
Moral norms
Foot in the door



Moral licensing
Mental accounting
Distrust and reactance

Reactions to lower income

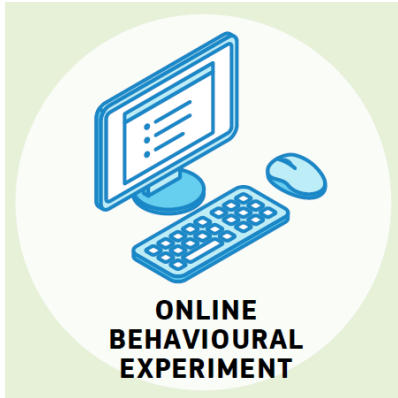


Dictator games

1. Reduced contribution in absolute terms
2. Increased contribution in relative terms

Increasing environmental performance of farming: willing or complying?

Methods



Dictator game: split income between self and the environment

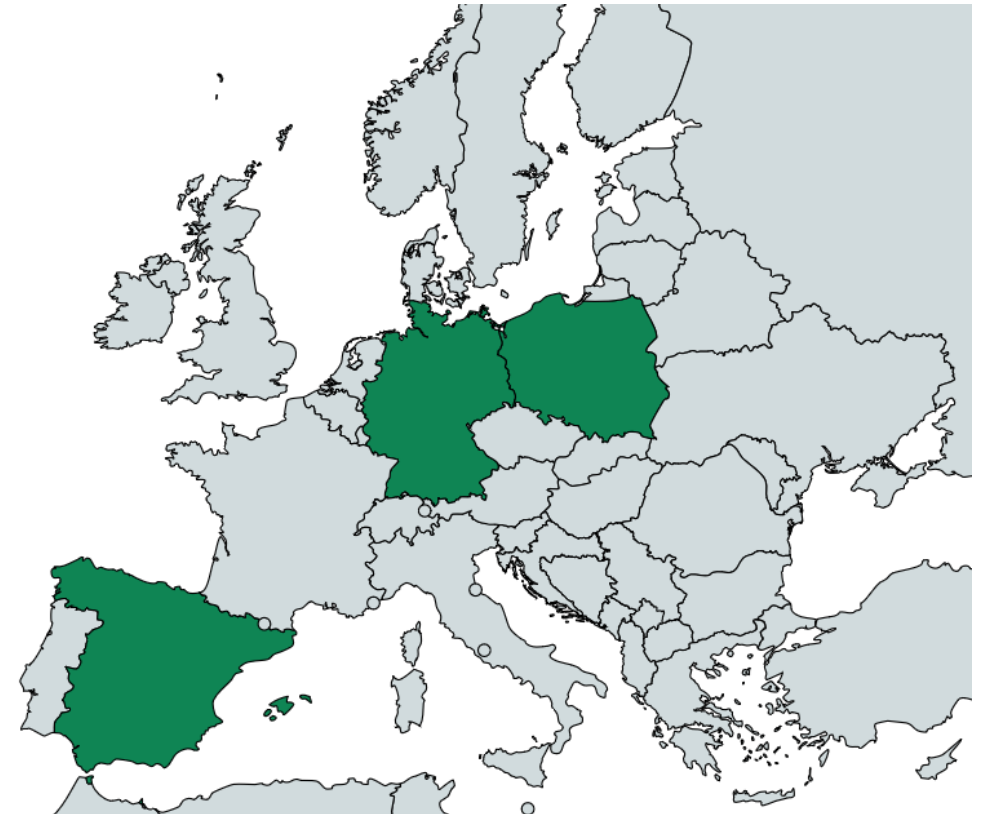
Self-administrated

- Semi-contextualised
- Incentivized (1 in 20; gift card + donation to NGO)
- Pre-registered

AS PREDICTED









600 farmers (200 x country)

Push to web approach by market research company KANTAR



Increasing environmental performance of farming: willing or complying?

Methods

Framing of variation		Parameters	Within-subject factor (Every participant was exposed to all three levels, one after the other, in random order)		
			Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
Between-subject factor (Every participant was randomly allocated to one and only one of these two experimental conditions)	Variation in mandatory contribution to the environment	Held constant: Your initial net income is 300 tokens 	MANDATORY  You must give 5 tokens to the environment.	MANDATORY  You must give 40 tokens to the environment.	MANDATORY  You must give 90 tokens to the environment.
		Gap from Level 1		+ 35 tokens	+ 85 tokens
		Disposable initial net income (= initial net income – mandatory contribution)	295 tokens (= 300 – 5)	260 tokens (= 300 – 40)	210 tokens (= 300 – 90)
	Variation in income, framed as variation in direct payments	Held constant: MANDATORY  You must give 5 tokens to the environment.	Your initial net income is 300 tokens. 	Your initial net income is 265 tokens. 	Your initial net income is 215 tokens. 
		Gap from Level 1		– 35 tokens	– 85 tokens
		Disposable initial net income (= initial net income – mandatory contribution)	295 tokens (= 300 – 5)	260 tokens (= 265 – 5)	210 tokens (= 215 – 5)

Framing of variation:
Individuals assigned randomly to one of two treatments

Intensity of variation:
equivalent across framings & presented in random order

Increasing environmental performance of farming: willing or complying?



Table 3

Descriptive statistics of main outcome variables per treatment and level (pooled across countries and decisions).

Framing	Treatment	Intensity of Variation			Voluntary contribution		Total contribution (voluntary + mandatory)		Relative voluntary contribution (%) [*]	
		Mandatory contribution	Initial net income	Sample size	Median	Mean (S.d.)	Median	Mean (S.d.)	Median	Mean (S.d.)
Variation in mandatory contribution (net income = 300)	MAND_0	0		300	70	77.8 (47.2)	75	82.8 (47.2)	23.7	26.4 (16.0)
	MAND_35	35		300	30	42.45 (35.3)	70	82.5 (35.3)	11.5	16.3 (13.6)
	MAND_85	85		300	10	19.1 (26.9)	100	109.1 (26.9)	4.8	9.1 (12.8)
Variation in initial net income (mandatory contribution = 5)	INC_0		0	300	60	70.1 (42.9)	62	75.1 (42.9)	20.3	23.8 (14.5)
	INC_35		-35	300	47.5	52.2 (39.0)	52.5	57.2 (29.0)	18.3	20.1 (15.0)
	INC_85		-85	300	20	34.7 (39.7)	25	39.7 (39.7)	9.5	16.5 (18.9)

^{*}Calculated as voluntary contribution divided by income available for voluntary allocation (initial net income minus mandatory contribution).

Source: own elaboration.



Increasing environmental performance of farming: willing or complying?

Results

Table 4. Pairwise tests (Mann-Whitney U test for between subject comparisons and Wilcoxon-rank for within subject ones) of single treatments against each other for meaningful levels (pooled across countries and decisions)

	MAND_0	MAND_35	MAND_85	INC_0	INC_35	INC_85
MAND_0 (n=300)						
MAND_35 (n=300)	19.985*** -1.585 19.036***					
MAND_85 (n=300)	20.703*** -14.531*** 19.779***	20.781*** -19.501*** 19.504				
INC_0 (n=300)	1.776 1.776 1.776					
INC_35 (n=300)		-3.761** 9.264*** -3.761**		14.335*** 14.335*** 9.901***		
INC_85 (n=300)			-6.248*** 17.856*** -6.248***	18.053*** 18.053*** 11.594***	17.752*** 17.752*** 11.511***	

For each cell, we report the value of the z-statistic for rejecting the null hypothesis of equal values and significance level based on Mann-Whitney or Wilcoxon rank tests for (i) voluntary contributions, (ii) total contributions and (iii) voluntary contributions as % of income available for voluntary allocation are reported. Significance levels are corrected for multiple hypothesis testing (nine comparisons).

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

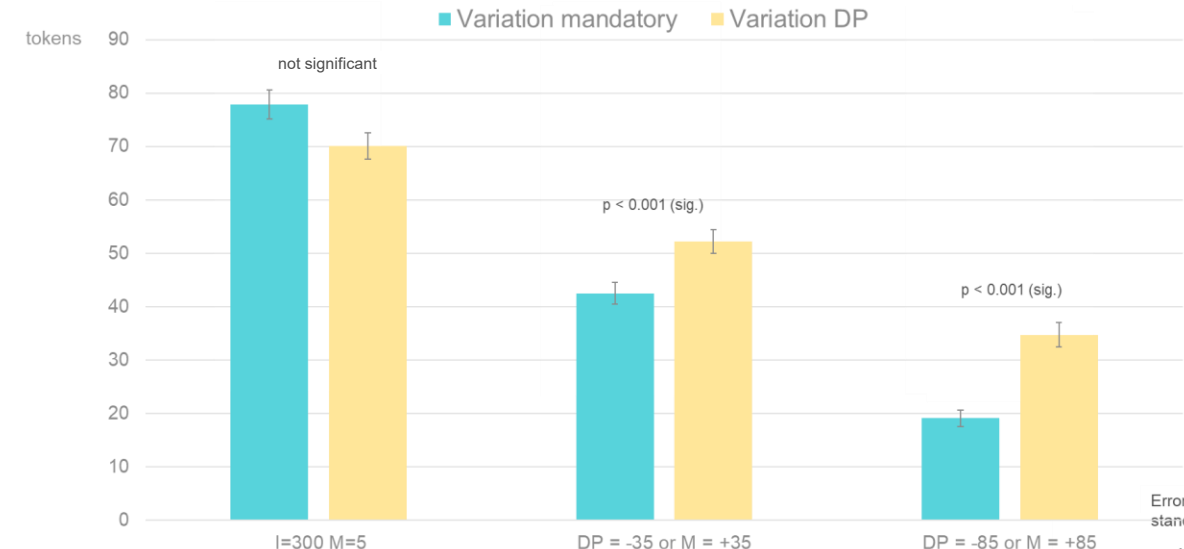
Source: own elaboration



vs.



Voluntary contributions



Error bars: +/- standard error
p values based on Mann-Whitney U

Increasing environmental performance of farming: willing or complying?

Results

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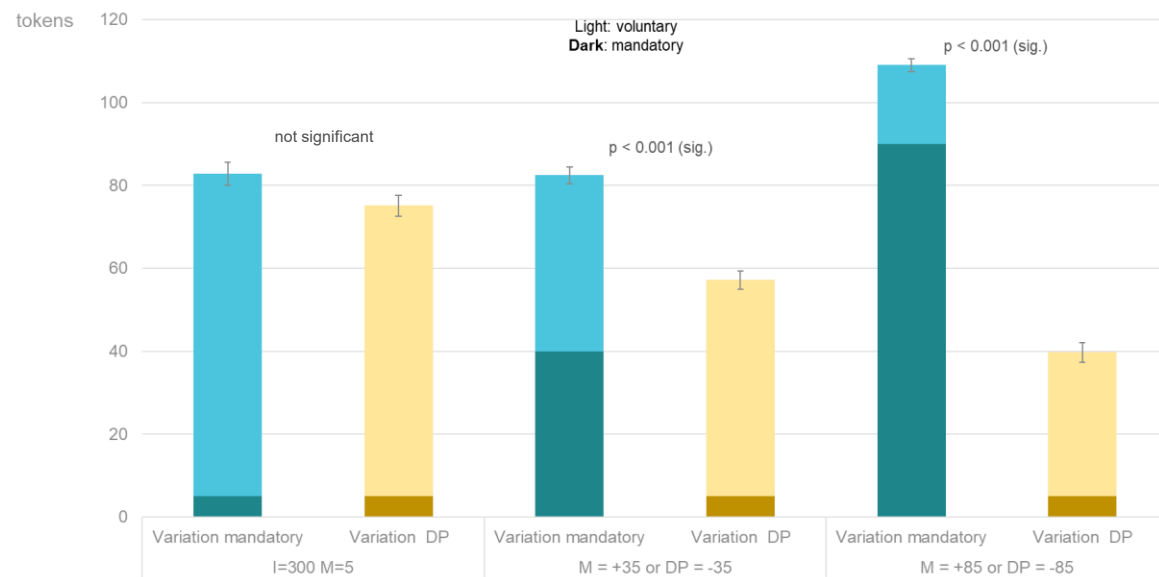
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* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Source: own elaboration



Total contributions



Error bars: +/- standard error
p values based on Mann Whitney U

Increasing environmental performance of farming: willing or complying?

Conclusions

Farmers are willing to contribute to the environment – 11% to 30% of their income which lead to income loss of up to 3% [compensation is 90% lower adoption might be related to lower compensations once you account for transaction costs]

Compliance focus can backfire – only if really ambitious is total contribution expected to increase

Striving incomes as environmental policy - more environmental contributions will be obtained from increased farmer incomes

Special issue article

Behaviourally informed interventions to maximize environmental delivery under the new CAP green architecture

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Received 26 February 2024; Final version accepted 23 June 2025

Abstract

A pre-registered online experiment with 1,745 European farmers in four countries tested if behaviourally informed interventions (BII) can increase participation in voluntary measures under the green architecture of the 2023–7 Common Agricultural Policy. We tested seven BIIs including framing (non)adoption as benefits (costs), framing the payment as compensation or reward and the provision of social norms both as stand-alone interventions or when combined. The results showed BII did not increase stated adoption for eco-schemes, but combining social norms with changes in payment framing or framing non-adoption as costs had a positive effect on agro-environmental and climate measure adoption.

Keywords: nudging; information effects; experimental economics; lab-in-the-field experiment; Germany; Romania; Spain; Sweden.

JEL classification: Q18, C93, D03

1. Introduction

The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023–7 saw the introduction of a new green architecture that expanded both the scope of and budget for voluntary measures aimed at improving farm environmental performance. This meant that, in addition to strengthening the conditionality requirements for the receipt of direct payments, it now requires countries to allocate at least 25 per cent of the direct payment budget (previously contingent on compliance with mandatory management practices) to the so-called eco-schemes (ECS). In practice, this implies that farmers will have to implement more

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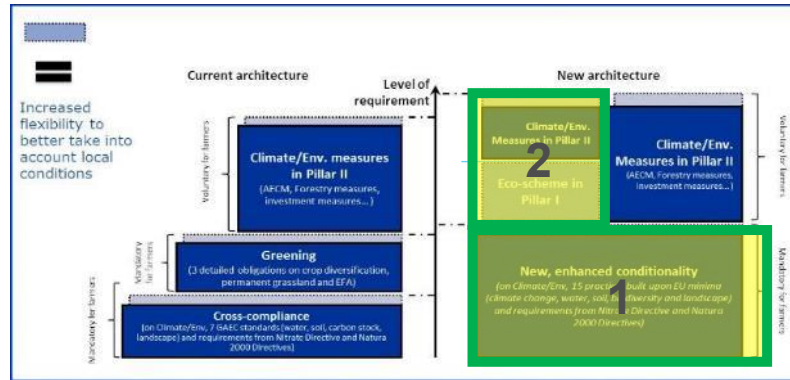
Behavioural
Intervention



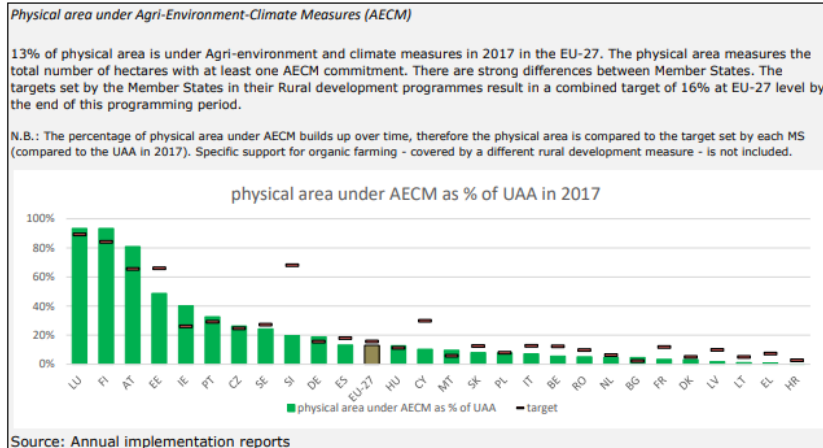
BI devising behavioural interventions:

Assessing the power of nudging to enhance enrolment on environmentally friendly measures

Policy background



1. Farmers will need to do more to receive payments
2. More budget will depend on farmer behaviour



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Willing or complying? The delicate interplay between voluntary and mandatory interventions to promote farmers' environmental behavior*

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Parcelled field experiment; Distaste game; Common Agricultural Policy; Agri-environmental policy; Germany; Poland; Spain

ABSTRACT

Agri-environmental policies generally build around two complementary approaches: mandatory requirements and (compensated) voluntary measures. One of the challenges of the future EU Common Agricultural Policy is precisely to find the right balance between these two types of interventions. We conducted an experiment with farmers in three EU Member States to assess the impact of (1) increasing mandatory contributions to the environment, and of (2) decreasing unconditional income support. We also assess the effect of two key behavioural factors: environmental concern and trait reactance. Results show that both interventions reduce voluntary contributions to the environment, but the reduction is higher when mandatory contributions increase than when income decreases. However, when mandatory contribution increases substantially, this more than offsets the reduction of voluntary contributions, leading to higher total contributions.



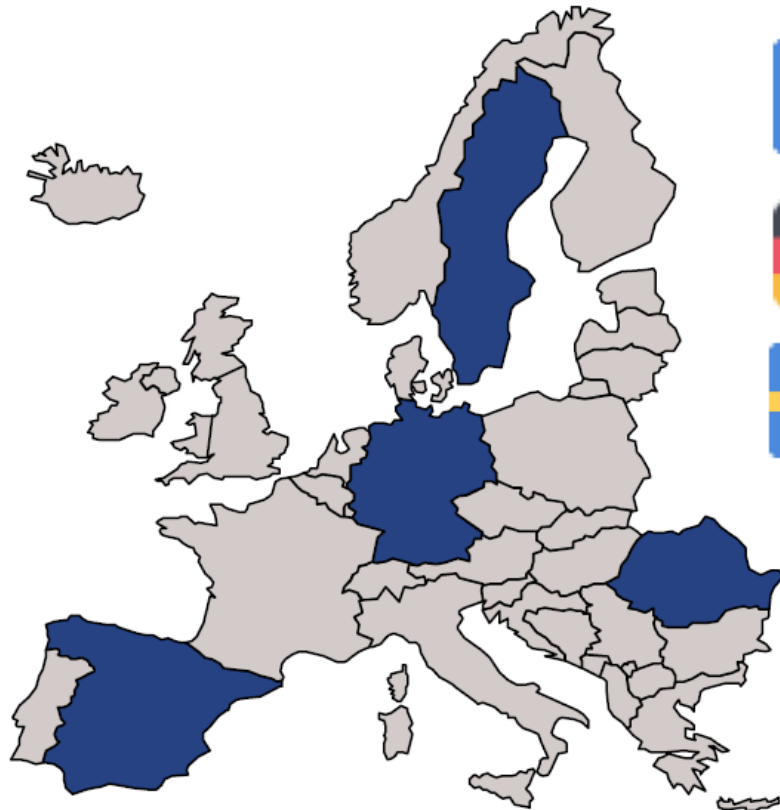
Risk of unspent budget & of unmatched environmental ambition

Low levels of adoption of voluntary schemes in the past

Reduction of voluntary contributions both when mandatory increases and income decreases....



Field work



460

Arable farmers – CATI-WEB-CATI



460

Arable farmers – FACE-TO-FACE



400

Dairy farmers – CATI-WEB-CATI + ON-LINE



400

Arable farmers – CATI-WEB-CATI



Field work undertaken from 13/07/2023 to 30/09/2023

CAP requests had already been made in the 4 countries

Treatments

Treatment	Social norm	Framing outcome	Framing payment	What do we measure?
T1	No	None	Compensation	-
T2	No	Benefit	Compensation	Benefit
T3	No	Cost	Compensation	Cost
T4	No	None	Reward	Reward
T5	Yes	None	Compensation	Nudge
T6	Yes	Benefit	Compensation	Nudge + benefit
T7	Yes	Cost	Compensation	Nudge + cost
T8	Yes	None	Reward	Nudge + reward

Assessing the power of nudging to enhance enrolment on environmentally friendly measures

Limited promise for Behavioural Interventions to increase farmer uptake of voluntary measures under the new CAP green architecture

Behaviourally informed intervention	Adoption of....		
	ECS	AECM	Both
None (control)	66.51	41.74	37.15
Adoption as benefit	66.05	39.44	37.15
Non adoption as cost	66.06	49.32*	42.08
Payment as reward	67.92	46.22	41.50
Social norm	65.89	46.54	42.39
Adoption as benefit + social norm	65.31	41.89	38.73*
Non-adoption as cost + social norm	69.54	49.54*	45.45**
Payment as reward + social norm	67.28	50.23**	43.77*

Note: *** p<0.01, **p<0.05, * p<0.10 for one-sided equality of proportion tests

**Salience of nudges not enough?
System 2 decision making Nudge proof?
Farmers being consistent with their real choices?
Effect size too small for sample size?**

Assessing the additionality of social norms and other BIs

No additionality, but also no backfiring!

Table 8. Additionality of social norm with respect to framing interventions for adoption of ECS, AECM and both.

Behaviorally informed intervention	Adoption of....		
	ECS	AECM	Both
Adoption as benefit	66.06	39.45	37.16
+ social norm	65.32	41.89	38.74
Non adoption as cost	66.06	49.32	42.08
+ social norm	69.55	49.55	45.46
Payment as reward	67.93	46.23	41.51
+ social norm	67.28	50.23	43.78

Note: *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.10 for two-sided equality of proportion tests

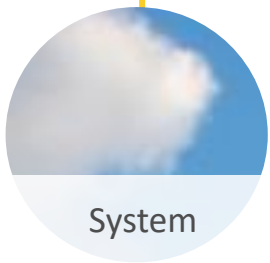
Source: own elaboration

BI enhancing policy coherence

A human perspective to better understand the system



*Inside-out perspective
(zooming in)*



BI contributing to systemic change

Combining system analysis and BI

Iteratively combining "zooming out" (synthesis) to see the broader system and "zooming in" (analysis) to focus on specific behavioural aspects.

★ Combining **Design for Policy, Foresight and BI** to start with



Outside-in perspective (zooming out)

Source: [Hale et al. \(2022\) UCL Open Environment](#)

In line with Behavioural Systems: [Del Valle et al. \(2024\) Busara paper](#)

Challenges for the future....

Bringing experiments to the field (RCTs) - (very) limited evidence shows that impacts are small but cost effective

Alič et al. *Agricultural and Food Economics* (2023) 13:76
https://doi.org/10.1186/s40100-023-00417-y

Agricultural and Food Economics

RESEARCH

Open Access

Can information framing increase farmers' uptake of Eco-schemes? a randomised controlled trial

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Abstract

The overall success of voluntary agri-environmental programmes often hinges importantly on the level of farmer participation. Their enrolment decisions are shaped by a complex set of behavioural factors, which can be targeted by designing specific behavioural interventions—such as nudges—that aim to improve farmers' uptake of these schemes. However, the effectiveness of these approaches in real-world settings remains understudied. Here, we use two subsequent randomized controlled trials to evaluate the effect of information treatments on farmers' enrolment rates and enrolled area in a new Eco-scheme for establishing Skylark plots, which has been implemented as part of the EU's Common Agricultural Policy in Slovenia. The first trial framed enrolment as an environmental gain or loss, while the second trial framed enrolment as a negative or positive descriptive norm. In both trials, interventions had no direct effect on enrolment rates nor on the area enrolled. However, for large farms and for farms with prior enrolment in agri-environmental measures, interventions influenced the enrolment decision and the area enrolled. Our results imply that the provision of untargeted information framing alone may be insufficient to boost enrolment of all farmers in agri-environmental measures. However, such interventions may affect the behaviour of some groups of farmers. To improve enrolment, we recommend better targeting of behavioural interventions, coupled with system-level changes.

Keywords: Randomized controlled trial, Voluntary agri-environmental schemes, Nudges, Social norms, Gain-loss framing

Introduction

Sustainable use of natural resources and biodiversity conservation in agricultural ecosystems largely depends on voluntary agri-environmental schemes (AES) where farmers get paid for enrolling and conducting specific environmentally-friendly practices (Hasler et al. 2022). Such schemes include, for example, the Conservation Reserve Programme in the USA and Agri-environmental-climate measures (AECM)¹ and Eco-schemes in the European Union's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (Matthews 2013; Péter et al. 2022; Baylis et al. 2022). One of the limiting factors in the ability of such schemes to reach

¹We distinguish in the rest of the manuscript between Agri-environmental schemes (AES) and agri-environmental-climate measures (AECM). While the first refers to all types of voluntary environmental programmes for farmers, AECM is a specific AES programme in the European Union.

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Understanding how farmers view nudges – Swedish farmers have remarkably lower acceptance rates compared to general public / farmers and policy makers have different views on acceptance of nudges

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Agribusiness WILEY

Swedish farmers' approval of nudges

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Abstract

Interest in the use of behavioral policy approaches, such as

Farmers and foresters' acceptability and perceived efficacy of green nudges to foster more sustainable production patterns

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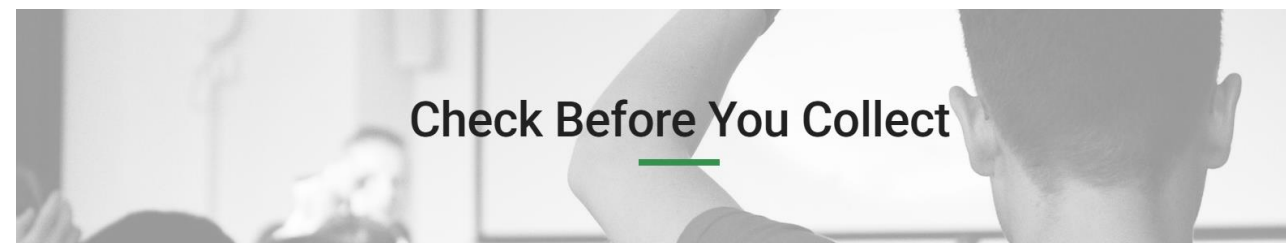
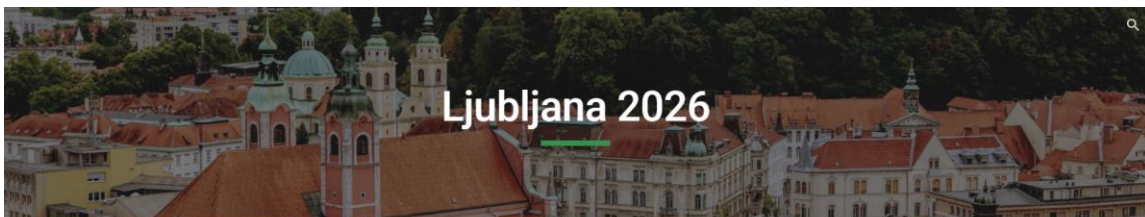
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Increasing evidence base for meta-analysis – 2022 and 2023 Horizon Europe calls focused on behavioural interventions in the food system





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Behavioural insights in policy making for food systems

Jesus Barreiro-Hurle

Economics of Food Systems Unit - JRC

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