

Accepted Manuscript

Title: The Agglomeration Bonus in Practice—An Exploratory Assessment of the Swiss Network Bonus

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PII: S1617-1381(17)30272-8
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnc.2018.03.002>
Reference: JNC 25632



To appear in:

Received date: 2-6-2017
Revised date: 16-3-2018
Accepted date: 19-3-2018

Please cite this article as: Krämer JE, Wätzold F, The Agglomeration Bonus in Practice—An Exploratory Assessment of the Swiss Network Bonus, *Journal for Nature Conservation* (2018), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jnc.2018.03.002>

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The Agglomeration Bonus in Practice – an Exploratory Assessment of the Swiss Network Bonus

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Abstract

Incentivising farmers in the context of agri-environment schemes to provide spatially-connected conservation measures is a challenging task. The idea of an agglomeration bonus – where farmers are paid a bonus on top of a spatially homogeneous payment if they provide spatially connected conservation areas – has been suggested in the literature as a possible solution. Existing literature on the agglomeration bonus focuses on its theoretical analysis whereas we provide an evaluation of an existing policy that exhibits strong features of the agglomeration bonus idea – the Swiss network bonus scheme. We present an evaluation of three conservation projects that include the network bonus scheme using the criteria of ecological effectiveness, monitoring and enforcement, cost-effectiveness and dynamic incentive effects. Given the limited amount of data available and the fact that ours is the first investigation of this policy, we carried out a qualitative, exploratory study.

Key words: agglomeration bonus, biodiversity conservation, nature conservation policy instrument, group-based payments, agri-environment programmes

Introduction

The purpose of agri-environment schemes (AES) is to compensate farmers for costly land-use that benefits biodiversity, landscapes and the environment. AES have become an important policy instrument in many European countries but also in other parts of the world. Assessments of their ability to halt and reverse the decline of farmland biodiversity are, however, mixed. While successes are acknowledged (Bullock et al., 2007, Uthes and Matzdorf 2013), there is also plenty of criticism that if AES were designed better, more biodiversity could be conserved for the financial resources spent (Kleijn et al. 2011, Pe'er et al. 2014, Wätzold et al. 2016).

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