

## TRENDS IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTION: PLANT SECTOR

## AGRI 2

The type of agricultural production depends in particular on the characteristics of the soil, the topography, the climatic conditions, but also on the economic profitability of the sectors. From an environmental perspective, the way in which agricultural crops are managed (soil tillage, weed and pest control, etc.) has significant impacts on the quality and protection of rural areas.

**Agricultural activities with variable environmental impact**

The main Walloon agricultural activities can be classified according to their increasing potential impact on the environment: permanent grasslands, temporary grasslands, winter cereals, rapeseed, spring cereals, flax, maize, beetroot, chicory and potatoes. In most cases, the persistence of plant cover is a decisive factor, as the environmental risks are highest with row crops (maize, beetroot, potatoes, etc.) whereas they are very low or non-existent in the case of extensively exploited permanent grasslands. Row crops are also characterised by harvest conditions that are often less favourable for the state of the soil, and have relatively high input requirements (fertilisers and plant protection products). As such, in 2014, the doses of active substances of plant protection products applied in potato cultivation averaged 20.9 kg/ha in Wallonia, compared with 6.8 kg/ha for sugar beet and 3.0 kg/ha for winter wheat<sup>1</sup>.

**Reduction in grasslands**

In 2015, permanent and temporary grasslands covered 306,441 ha and 30,604 ha respectively, or 42.7% and 4.3% of the total utilised agricultural area (UAA). Between 1980 and 2015, the area under permanent grassland declined by an average of 2,576 ha/year, a decrease of 23%, mainly due to the increase in land take<sup>2</sup> and the reduction of soil-based herds<sup>3</sup> (herbivores). This reduction in grasslands is closely

correlated with an increase in activities with a heavier environmental impact, such as temporary grasslands (+591 ha/year on average), maize (+629 ha/year on average) and potatoes (+753 ha/year on average). In 2015, the latter two crops accounted for 59,210 ha and 34,851 ha respectively, or 8.3% and 4.9% of total UAA. The area taken up for beetroot cultivation decreased by an average of 1,262 ha/year, a loss of 55%, to 35,472 ha (4.9% of total UAA) in 2015.

**Preventive or remedial measures**

Various measures have been put in place to reduce the environmental impact of agricultural activities. Some of these are mandatory (cross-compliance of agricultural aids<sup>4</sup>), while others are voluntary (agri-environmental and climate measures<sup>5</sup>, organic farming<sup>6</sup>). The mandatory measures include maintaining areas of ecological interest, sensitive grasslands (in some Natura 2000 management units) and permanent grasslands<sup>7,8</sup>.

[1] → AGRI 6 | [2] → TERRIT 2 | [3] → AGRI 3 | [4] → CONTROL 4 | [5] → AGRI 10 | [6] → AGRI 4 | [7] The "green payment" introduced following the reform of the common agricultural policy in 2015 | [8] → Map 13

Fig. AGRI 2-1 Utilised agricultural area (UAA) for the main agricultural crops in Wallonia

