



# Policy implementation for agricultural soil protection in the European Union and its member states: a comparative overview

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## Background

Agricultural soils are increasingly targeted by European Union (EU) policy measures including measures within the Common Agricultural Policy. Member states have implemented a variety of measures at the national and regional level that regulate the use of soils or offer incentives for the adoption of soil conservation practices. However, information on the specific purpose and implementation of these measures is difficult to access. Up to date no comprehensive policy overview exists for the EU-27, which would allow a comparative analysis. For this purpose, a policy inventory on the regulatory framework concerning agricultural soil conservation covering the EU-27 was set up.

## Methods

Policies were categorized (Figure 1) as:

<p><b>Mandatory Measures</b></p> <p>Laws, Cross-Compliance regulations as part of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), Environmental standards, Emission standards, Mandatory practices</p>
<p><b>Voluntary Incentive Based Measures</b></p> <p>Agri-environmental measures of the EU Rural Development Plans, Taxes on fertilizers and pesticides, Tradable permits for emission; Subsidies</p>
<p><b>Increasing Awareness Measures And Private Initiatives</b></p> <p>Advisory structure and extension services, Environmental workshops, Eco-labelling, Private Initiatives, Environmental farm plans, Best management practices</p>

Figure 1. Categories of Soil Protection Policies

The inventory was based on a voluntary online survey (Figure 2) mainly directed towards relevant administrators in national and regional ministries and administrative bodies.

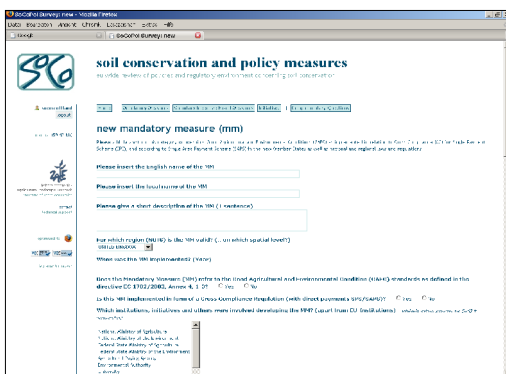


Figure 2. SoCo Online Survey

The questionnaire was designed to gather, to the best extent possible, the following information

- Main policy objective
- Soil conservation objectives within the policy (where applicable)
- Geographical coverage of the policy
- Level of implementation (EU, national, regional)
- Technical measures required
- Compliance rate or uptake
- Implementation parameters (contract length, monitoring, control and sanctioning, mechanisms, etc.)
- Expert views on appropriateness and elements of success and/or failure in the implementation.

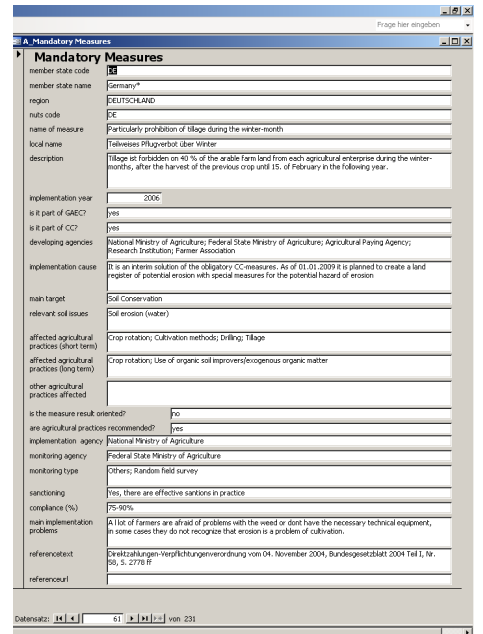


Figure 3. SoCo Database

## Results

More than 50 actors and agencies from 24 EU member states participated in the survey and more than 400 policy measures were entered in the database (Figure 3). Data were obtained at a regional level in countries with a federal structure (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom). The survey enabled a detailed and comparative analysis of the interrelationships between soil conservation practices (farming systems and single practices), soil degradation processes and policy measures at the national or regional level. Water erosion and decline in organic matter were most frequently addressed by the policies (Figure 4).

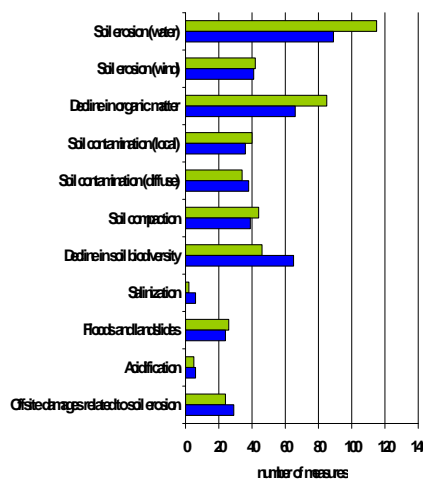


Figure 4. Soil threats addressed by Mandatory (MM) and Voluntary Measures (VIM)

<http://soco.jrc.es/index.html>

## Conclusions

A wide range of farming practices is available to farmers for mitigating or even reversing soil degradation processes. However, what is considered mandatory in one context is apparently seen in another context as an environmental outcome for whose provision farmers should be compensated. The above-mentioned interrelationships highlight the potential of the existing EU policy framework (through its national or regional implementation) and other national policies for addressing all recognized soil degradation processes in the EU. Mandatory measures were generally reported to lead to high levels of compliance with effective sanctions in practice and few implementation problems. Some experts reported difficulties with implementing control mechanisms. Implementation problems could in some cases explain differences between planned and actual uptake of incentive-based measures.