



# The *One* Europe *More* Nature Approach:

*Solutions through Partnering Business with Nature*





The *challenge* for Europe's *rural workers* to make *income* from the *countryside*, while *protecting* the **environment**, is as old as *human civilization* **itself**.



# Summary

“Businesses  
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*revenues*. Local  
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farmers have  
*new jobs* and  
*incomes*. Local  
and regional  
governments  
are *cooperating*.”

The challenge for Europe’s rural workers to make income from the countryside, while protecting the environment, is as old as human civilization itself. However, local and external pressures, from poverty to climate change, often make the challenge too difficult, leading to environmental degradation and local conflict. But there is an answer.

WWF’s “One Europe More Nature (OEMN)” project provides a new and innovative approach for forging unusual partnerships for different sets of people where they never existed before. Based on eight key factors, the approach is based on the principle that business and nature can and should co-exist, and that the creation of new mechanisms can lead to win-win solutions for all.

OEMN has already tested its approach and mechanisms at a number of pilot rural locations throughout Europe, from Spain in the southwest to Estonia in the northeast, from Netherlands in the northwest to Greece in the southeast.

“Businesses are making revenues. Local workers and farmers have new jobs and incomes. Local and regional governments are cooperating. Local economies are slowly being diversified and made more resilient to external drivers of change. And there is more nature, including quality natural products, restored habitats, protected species and secure environmental services.”

Many successes on-the-ground have already been “magnified” to new locations, sectors and businesses. Now is the time to continue to magnify the OEMN approach and successes, to trigger a domino effect of new activities that will eventually lead to the mainstreaming of conservation into everyday business life throughout Europe.

The purpose of this brief document is to explain OEMN’s innovative mechanism-based approach, and to encourage its continued application to other damaged (or soon-to-be damaged) rural landscapes across Europe. It is aimed mainly at rural people who are looking to find business solutions to their local economic and environmental problems, as well as businesses that can make profit through innovative and sustainable solutions.



1 Digging the clay for these bricks opened the door for wetland and grassland revival  
2 Harvesting strawberries in Doñana, Spain for export to northern European markets  
3 Marketing Greek Prespa organic beans to accelerate local conservation





# In Europe's countryside, *many if not most* European workers *continue to* depend on the land for their *incomes.*

Preserving traditional practices in Maramures, Romania

## Challenges for Europe's Countryside

In Europe's cities, much of the work is increasingly done – inside walls – in the service and office sectors. In contrast, in Europe's countryside, many if not most European workers continue to depend on the land and natural resources – outside under the sky – for their incomes, made from farming to forestry to fishing, as they have done for ages. In fact, agriculture continues to be the dominant form of land-use in Europe, using 50% of our territory. Yet it is seemingly ever in decline, ever less profitable and ever less attractive.

In these rural areas, a key challenge has always been to make money from the land, and at the same time, protect the environment including species and “ecological benefits” such as clean water and healthy soils. “If you don't give back to the land, then one day the land won't give back to you” says the wise old man to his farmer-to-be grandson.

Locally, however, that challenge is often made difficult because of competition among resource users, or the short-term desperation that comes from rural poverty. The challenges have also become increasingly complex because of powerful external drivers of change beyond the reach or control – or even the awareness or understanding – of people.

Each driver significantly impacts local “landscapes” near European villages and towns and the ways that rural workers use and protect them. The unfortunate result of many of these local and external drivers is often poor and unsustainable land and resource management, and environmental damage. This has led to a decimation of European biodiversity and degradation of vital functioning ecological systems.





## External Drivers of Change

**One key recent *driver of change* has been the opening up, or liberalization, of European economic markets.**

One key recent driver of change has been the opening up, or liberalization, of European economic markets, including those of the former communist countries since about 1990. A result is that the production of many goods in the countryside, and their consumption in cities, can now take place at opposite ends of the continent. Take, for example, the recent strawberry boom in Spain's Doñana region. Years ago, farmers looking for opportunities discovered the land's capacity for strawberry cultivation. Soon enough, new farms were everywhere – driven by rising demand from supermarkets and their consumers in northern countries. Without proper management, however, many farmers illegally used the land and groundwater. This led to unplanned infrastructure, a loss of natural forests and ecological corridors, threats to species and groundwater depletion.

Another driver is global climate change which has contributed to ever more disastrous floods across Europe, wreaking havoc to farms and water management. In Hungary's Tisza region, for example, massive floods have become typical rural events. Past human actions have made flood impacts there even worse by cutting off the natural floodplains of rivers, thereby eliminating their valuable potential for retaining flood waters. And in the Mediterranean, climate change has increased the impacts of droughts.

Still another driver is government policy and legislative change initiated from the “top” and applied “downwards”. For example, the EU's Common Agricultural Policy has for decades subsidized farmers in a way that has led to “intensive agriculture” and all of its negative impacts – from the over-use of fertilizers to the over-exploitation of soils and ground waters. And in the former communist countries, the loss of state support during the economic transition after 1990 plunged many farmers into near poverty and subsistence farming.

- 1 Irrigation system for bean crops around Prespa Lake
- 2 Eco-tourism on the rise in Gelderse Poort, Netherlands
- 3 A helping hand for Prespa's future branded beans
- 4 Meat barbeque from cattle grazed on natural grasses in Gelderse Poort
- 5 WWF surveying aridity problems in Doñana lands, Spain
- 6 Traditional woodworker in Maramures, Romania



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## A New Response

Species begin to disappear, groundwater supplies decrease, floods increase ... all of these problems at the ground level usually lead to conflict between individuals and groups. Neighbouring farms compete for water, conservationists stage public protests or governments enact new laws completely barring users from the resources they need for their life's work. These are the typical responses ... but it doesn't have to be that way.

Rather than behaving as competitors or even enemies, the different people affected can forge win-win situations for all based on co-operation. Nature can also win, but only if wise land and resource management, and creative solutions, are planned from the start.

Rural people can especially become winners by diversifying their activities into new sectors, delivering new products and providing new services. A local economy which is based on many forms of land-use and income is more resilient, vibrant and innovative than one which is solely based on agriculture.

That's exactly where WWF's "One Europe More Nature (OEMN)" project comes in.

The "One Europe" part is actually a goal to have all players participating in the same game, rather than focusing narrowly on one's own piece of land, farm, town, business, species, forest or economic sector – and competing or conflicting with each other. The "More Nature" part is the other goal which happens if we do all work together for rural landscapes in Europe, and ensure the protection of our most important and silent partner – nature.

**OEMN is new. OEMN is different.**



Species *begin*  
to *disappear*,  
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1 Wild horses roam the restored wilderness in Gelderse Poort, Netherlands  
2 Sharing the restored beach in Gelderse Poort  
3 Restored grasslands in Vainameri, Estonia  
4 Dreamy landscape in Maramures, Romania

5 Cutting invasive shrubs to feed energy production in Tiszatarjan, Hungary  
6 Preparing "green beef" from grass-fed cows in Vainameri, Estonia  
7 Doñana landscape, Spain



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# How does OEMN work?

OEMN is a new approach to solving old problems and current challenges. It is based on eight steps that help to transform rural problems into solutions and benefits for all. Here's how it works:

## 1. Starts with an on-the-ground problem

There are specific rural places in Europe where the environment and landscapes have already been, or are expected to soon be, damaged as a result of human actions. The actions come from rural residents and workers, especially farmers, inadequately using land and resources to produce goods to make income. Neither the workers nor their local governments have in place the required planning or management tools needed to ensure long-term sustainable production. Often, locals rely on one economic sector, such as agriculture, or resource for their income. Locals are further affected by one or more external driver of change such as consumers of their products in other countries, climate change or EU law.

## 2. Identifies the opportunities and players

The next step is to assess the place's unique set of concerns and opportunities. It must identify the area's natural assets and the needs of local people to make incomes for themselves. It must go beyond the rural area to discover how it is being, or could be, impacted by external drivers of change and influence. Whatever the external drivers are, good or bad, many should be adapted to – whether that means getting ready for climate change, being aware of consumer behaviour in other countries or making the best out of upcoming regional legislation. Perhaps more than anything, the assessment needs to identify who is part of the problem, and who might potentially be part of the solution.

## 3. Believes that nature and business can co-exist

Before turning to solutions, a pre-condition is needed. Basically, “nature” and “business” have to be taken out of the separate, compartmentalized spheres that so many of us have them now boxed in. Where many of us usually pit one against the other, a new approach needs to be used which believes that “what is good for business can also be good for nature, and vice versa”. Business and nature do have overlapping interests and these need to be and can be identified. Furthermore, the OEMN approach is realistic and practical, and makes the best use out of what is already there, without separating humans from nature.

## 4. Works through partnerships

The local problem or challenge can usually be transformed into an opportunity and solution. The switch is based on the assumption that something is already there that has not yet been considered. In other words, a bit of detective work is needed to “sniff out” solutions that have never yet risen to the surface.

Concerning the problem location in question, there are already a number of players currently interacting with each other in a certain way. But as a result, one or more of them is losing. One is always the silent partner called “nature”. In many cases, this situation was never planned – it just happened, with one event in reaction to others before it.

The trick is to re-formulate, or re-engineer, the situation by creating new partnerships so that everyone wins. And that is where the OEMN scoping work and planning come in. It's taking a good look at the players involved, the work being done, the way that nature works and external realities. This means bringing in new players into the game, or turning problem players into solution players.

“Creating partnerships” is not a new concept by any means. Actually, it has become so over-used for the wrong reasons that many now find the concept meaningless, like the term “sustainability”. But OEMN seeks out unusual partnerships for different sets of people where they never existed before ... and often where nobody even dreamt they ever could exist. Situations are sought out where there is power in numbers, where unity brings more benefit than conflict, where looking at the problem as an opportunity is itself the solution.

A sure ingredient is business involvement – with one or more businesses that has the financial resources and/or know-how to make the required changes work. Sometimes, this might be a business located outside the area – be it a national supermarket chain in another country or a multi-national energy provider. They will demand a “business case” before they get involved, which means they have to be shown how exactly they will benefit. At the same time, it is usually the people on-the-ground who best know the assets of their local environment. They too often have entrepreneurial ideas, but sometimes lack access to markets, distribution networks, certain information or the capital required to make it work.



# 5. Creates new mechanisms

The eventual change that occurs through the new partnership is known as the “mechanism” – the new action or actions taken that will lead to win-win solutions for all of the players.

The business wins, rural jobs and incomes are supported and the environment is protected, all at the same time. And it’s not just a matter of saving some trees or animals while making money. Actually, the work to be done is based on reaping maximum benefits from natural resources and processes while ensuring those resources and processes stay intact and are strengthened.

**What the mechanism is depends on the place and the situation, such as:**

- Using local natural resources in a way previously overlooked, such as turning invasive plant species into biomass and biofuel to generate electricity, while tying the purchase contracts of the power station to investments into floodplain grassland and forest restoration (Tisza floodplains, Hungary).
- Bringing in cattle to graze in a natural way on mountain meadows, resulting in enhanced grasslands biodiversity and high quality, healthy, landscape-supportive beef for sale (Maramures plateau, Romania).
- Switching supermarket and consumer demand for winter strawberries to those cultivated on legal lands using legal, and more efficient, water sources and in locations which do not provide physical obstacles to migratory species (Doñana marshes, Spain).
- Partnering with a brick-making company to remove clay from former floodplains, restoring natural floodplains, reducing negative flood impacts, creating space for nature and guaranteeing raw materials for industry (Gelderse Poort floodplains, Netherlands).
- Creating a new, cross-border, “National Park” market brand for beans and other food products according to production criteria which minimise the impact of agriculture on the lake ecosystems of a World Heritage wetland area shared by three countries (Prespa Park, Greece, Albania and Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).
- Stimulating a “sustainable village” development path through the joint work of the local mayor and a new eco-business, while utilising and protecting the valuable biodiversity of a remote Carpathian village (Sinca Noua, Romania).
- Transforming the local economy towards interlinked green beef production, tourism, and handicrafts sectors and thereby conserving and enhancing coastal grasslands biodiversity on small Baltic islands (Vainameri, Estonia).

# 6. Supports and builds a “new economy”

Many rural areas continue to rely on one economic sector for their jobs, incomes and survival – often farming or forestry. That is very risky, especially because of the countless external drivers of change, beyond rural control, which could overturn the situation almost overnight – from closed markets, to changed consumer behaviour to natural disasters. To reduce this vulnerability and risk, and increase sustainability and resilience, local rural economies need to become more diversified, especially through identifying additional streams of income through using existing natural assets.

To date, “natural assets” have typically been perceived as “products” such as wood, food or minerals. However, awareness is now being raised about the crucial “services” provided by nature that we often take for granted or ignore. Examples include wetlands purifying our water and helping to retain flood waters, much like a sponge. And forests help to stop erosion, and by storing carbon they also reduce the rate of climate change. Increasingly, rural farmers and land owners are being paid to ensure that such environmental services from their lands are secured – a concept now known simply as “payments for environmental services” or “PES”.

Furthermore, the “new economy” also applies to European and global markets. Producers and consumers continent-wide should consider the impacts of their actions and purchases on the health of rural environments and landscapes. The changes they then make to their purchasing behaviour have the power to transform markets.

The transition to a new economy needs powerful economic stimuli, hence the focus on – together with partners – identifying and building up the mechanism. Once the mechanism is in place and working, other business opportunities spring up, and the primary mechanism together with these “supporting pillars” constitute a diversified and resilient new economy with opportunities for all.

# 7. Proves the approach through pilot projects

What started on the ground – the problem or challenge – continues on the ground. That means that the partnership and mechanism are actually tested at the rural location. Many such “pilot projects” have already been initiated by WWF throughout Europe, with an OEMN team working with staff from national WWF offices and other NGOs. In each location, new partnerships and mechanisms were introduced. In many cases, the achievements made have been incredible. The pilot projects have become showcases and living examples of how OEMN can and does work.

Businesses are making revenues. Local workers and farmers have new jobs and incomes. Local and regional governments are cooperating. Local economies are slowly being diversified and made more resilient to external drivers of change. And there is more nature, including quality natural products, restored habitats, protected species and secure environmental services.

Businesses are not slow to react, once the opportunities are clear. In fact, in just four years of operation, OEMN has catalysed an annual overall contribution or investment from its economic partners in the various locations of more than 450,000 Euros. That’s more than the overall WWF funding for this project, and it’s a clear indication that working on the ground with business on market mechanisms is a sure way forward with relevance for all.

Some locations are more ahead than others. One lesson learned is that change can be slow, and sometimes it takes years before actual results come in. But who would expect that changing perceptions and behaviours, or restoring environments that have been damaged over centuries of misuse, to be fast? Once the changes have been made, patient investments can lead to benefits for all for decades, if not for centuries, to come.

# 8. New locations and sectors

The OEMN approach seeks “magnification”. This means that the OEMN approach itself is replicated throughout Europe, building on the successes of the pilot projects already in motion. In some cases, specific OEMN mechanisms already tried and tested can also be magnified to new locations. That’s already happening. For example, in 2007, an OEMN pilot project led to one large supermarket chain in the Netherlands agreeing to change its standards for how it purchases strawberries from Doñana, Spain. Doñana farmers are now required to use land and water legally – otherwise, the supermarket won’t buy from them. A second major supermarket chain in Germany later agreed to similar standards. Ideally, OEMN hopes that more supermarkets throughout the continent start using the new mechanism to create new win-win partnerships with Doñana farmers. The striking of one major deal often acts as a trigger or domino for others to follow! Now, WWF is investigating a similar process with farmers, retailers and local authorities across the Mediterranean Sea in Morocco.

The same can happen at one particular location. Putting one new mechanism and partnership into practice can trigger other innovative business initiatives at the same location. When others see a good thing going, the domino effect gets into high gear and the diversified new economy really starts taking off. The brick-making example from the Netherlands is a wonderful example. Once the mechanism began to work, and once nature began moving in, local people and entrepreneurs began to spot opportunities. Tourism, recreation and hospitality openings were created. Now, more than 100,000 people annually visit the area – and spend money there – on what used to be little more than (unproductive) arable fields.

Many pilot project successes have already led to the widespread media coverage of local problems and OEMN solutions. One result is that many Europeans, especially consumers in cities, are now becoming more concerned about tying what they buy and eat, and use for energy, with their associated impacts on-the-ground, sometimes in far-away places. Increasingly, they won’t buy unless nature is protected or even strengthened. Increasingly, more Europeans want more nature. They want conservation to be mainstreamed into everyday life. And the OEMN approach is helping to make it all happen.

**Magnification means targeting new locations, economic sectors and businesses. WWF is actively seeking out new opportunities where the OEMN approach can be applied and “mainstreamed”, sniffing out innovative solutions that have been previously overlooked.**



# Want to know more?

If you would like to find out more about OEMN, or if you would like to magnify the OEMN approach or one or more of its mechanisms to a specific sector, business or rural location, please view or contact the following:

One Europe More Nature website:  
**[www.panda.org/europe/oemn](http://www.panda.org/europe/oemn)**  
This brochure is also available online.

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1/2 Grazing local breeds of cattle on natural grasses in Maramures, Romania and Vainameri, Estonia – ideal for generating new incomes from “green beef” restoring lost grasslands and bringing back biodiversity





The One Europe More Nature project is funded and inspired by WWF-Netherlands through the WWF Global Freshwater Programme.

#### **OEMN Mission Statement**

WWF's One Europe More Nature (OEMN) project uses an innovative approach to forge unusual partnerships so that business and nature can co-exist. Its mechanisms lead to win-win solutions for all, allowing Europe's rural workers to make incomes from the countryside while protecting nature. OEMN, tested at many pilot rural locations throughout Europe, is now mainstreaming conservation into everyday European business life.

#### **WWF Mission Statement**

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by:

- conserving the world's biological diversity
- ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable
- promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption