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Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF)

Environmental Action Germany (Deutsche Umwelthilfe)

Page | 1

AgoraNatura is now online: Germany's first online-marketplace for certified nature conservation projects

As of the end of September 2020, companies and private individuals can use the new online-marketplace at www.agora-natura.de to invest in biodiversity and ecosystem services in

Germany. Through voluntary, flexible payments they can, for instance, contribute to the preservation of meadow orchards, the development of biodiverse agricultural fields or the implementation of protection sites for certain target species.



The involvement of civil society is essential to tackle the urgent environmental challenge of biodiversity loss and habitat degradation. AgoraNatura aims to generate additional private funding for the safeguarding of nature and to strengthen public knowledge about biodiversity and ecosystem services. To achieve this goal, AgoraNatura connects land users and environmental organisations with committed private individuals and companies. The online-marketplace is an engaging, easy-to-use digital tool that strives to facilitate more collaborative, voluntary conservation action on the ground. The regional scope of AgoraNatura is presently limited to projects located in Germany.

In order to appeal to new private conservation supporters, AgoraNatura puts the scientific ecosystem services concept into practice: all projects on AgoraNatura are certified according to the newly-developed and independent Natur^{plus} standard. This science-based standard describes criteria for effective conservation projects, which ensures a high quality of all projects on the platform. In addition, the Natur^{plus} standard requires the quantification of expected project benefits on biodiversity and ecosystem services. The standard provides recognized methods to assess the effects of various project types, for example regarding plant and animal diversity, genetic diversity, avoided CO₂ emissions and reduced impacts on ground water and surface waters. To support project developers, such as farmers and local

environmental actors, in planning their AgoraNatura projects, quantification methods and various project type templates are being further developed. In relation to this, Dr. Bettina Matzdorf, Professor for Ecosystem Services Governance and leader of the AgoraNatura project, points out that "the ongoing development of the Natur^{plus} standard is an open and collaborative process, to which interested researchers are welcome to contribute". The currently accepted methods can be found at naturplus-standard.de/english (more English information on the website will follow soon).

The actual "products" of the online-marketplace are nature conservation certificates, which describe and visualize the expected positive effects on biodiversity and ecosystem services. Each certificate is an area-related share of a certified conservation project with a validity of 100 m² and one year. Thanks to transparent information about project effects and location, businesses and individuals can make targeted investments in biodiversity and ecosystem services precisely where it is important to them. AgoraNatura has something to offer for every budget – some certificates are available from less than 10 Euros. Already prior to the launch of the platform, five pilot projects have been financed by companies, which shows the appeal of this concept for private funders.

Word about the AgoraNatura has already spread among international ecosystem services researchers. Dr. Rudolf de Groot, Chair of the Ecosystem Services Partnership (www.es-partnership.org) and Associate Professor at Wageningen University in the Netherlands, supports the idea of an online-marketplace for biodiversity and ecosystem services. "It is one thing to demonstrate that nature is important and has many economic values. But to translate that value into real money is an essential next step. This marketplace provides the opportunity for that", de Groot says.

As AgoraNatura establishes itself over time, it will develop into a valuable data source to analyze a real market for public environmental goods. "For example on the demand side, information about preferences and motives is collected. On the supply side, data is gathered about the kinds of ecosystem services offered and the contractual designs used", explains Professor Dr. Matzdorf. Research experiments in the field of environmental communication are equally as feasible as the integration of surveys or other digital tools.

www.agora-natura.de



Through donations from private individuals or environmentally conscious companies, projects like this one in the Ferbitzer Bruch near Fahrland can be supported. | The picture can be used for editorial purposes by stating the source: © Klemens Karkow | Picture in color and print quality: <http://www.zalf.de/de/aktuelles>

Project partners:

- Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF)
- University of Greifswald
- German Association for Landcare (DVL)
- Environmental Action Germany (DUH)

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Press contact:

Hendrik Schneider
Head of press and public relations
Phone: + 49 (0) 33432 82-405
Mobile: + 49 (0) 151 405 455 00
Email: public.relations@zalf.de

Press contact:

Matthias Walter
Public relations Deutsche
Umwelthilfe
Phone: + 49 (0) 30 2400867-20
Email: presse@duh.de

Scientific contact:

Prof. Bettina Matzdorf
Head of AgoraNatura project
Head of ZALF Working Group
"Governance of Ecosystem Services"
Phone: + 49 (0) 33432 82-150
Email: matzdorf@zalf.de

About the Leibniz Centre for Agricultural Landscape Research (ZALF) in Muencheberg, member of the Leibniz Association:

Mission of ZALF is to deliver solutions for an economically, environmentally and socially sustainable agriculture –together with society.

As a contribution to overcoming global challenges such as climate change, food security, biodiversity conservation and resource scarcity, we develop and design crop systems, integrated in their landscape contexts, that combine food security with sustainability. Therefore we process complex landscape data with a unique set of experimental methods, new technologies and models as well as socio-economic approaches.

ZALF research is integrated systems research: starting from processes in soils and plants to causal relationships on the field and landscape level up to global impacts and complex interactions between landscapes, society and economy. www.zalf.de