Insect Responsible Sourcing Regions

More than just flower strips

LIFE project Insect-Responsible Sourcing Regions – For more insect protection and biodiversity at landscape level

Layperson's report 2025

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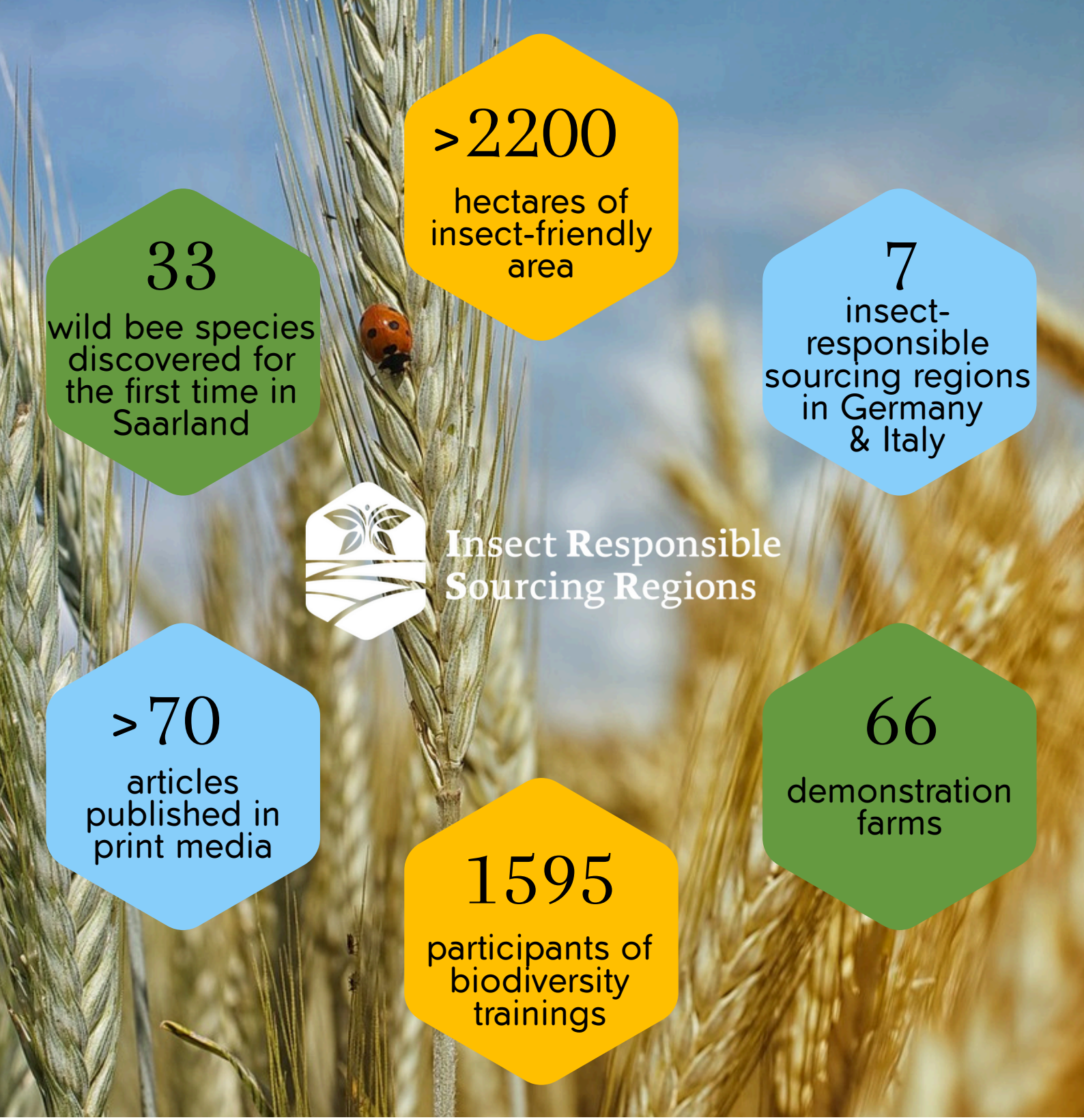

EU LIFE Insect-Responsible Sourcing Regions

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The EU LIFE project "Insect Responsible Sourcing Regions" has a volume of 3.4 million euros. The costs are 55 % funded by the European Commission's LIFE environmental programme.

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https://insect-responsible.org/en/

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Cooperation Partners

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The Goal: Creating Insect-Responsible Sourcing Regions

The need to protect insects is no longer a question of 'if', but of 'how'. The aim is to improve protection and create better conditions for pollinators and all insects over an area as large as possible. To achieve the sustainable protection of insects and biodiversity across large contiguous areas, various land users worked together in the five-year Insect-Responsible Sourcing Regions (IRSR) project. In seven insect-promoting regions (Allgäu, Lake Constance, Bliesgau, Hohenlohe, Northern Upper Rhine, Wendland, and Vinschgau/South Tyrol), measures were implemented by 66 agricultural demonstration farms. More than 1,500 people were trained, including representatives of local authorities and forestry administrations as well as numerous farmers and advisors.

In a nutshell, IRSR aimed to build regional alliances for the promotion of insects, strengthen insect expertise, improve existing agricultural policy measures, and increase consumer awareness of the importance of insect conservation.

The main project objectives were to

- apply and disseminate measures for the promotion of pollinating insects in agriculture
- monitor the project's impact at farm level and track biodiversity performance over time using citizen science
- train competences and awareness, especially among farmers, decision makers of food companies and retailers, and consumers.

1 About the project

What is an Insect-Responsible Sourcing Region?

Insect-Responsible Sourcing Regions are whole regions that are beneficial for insects. They are created through co-operation between farmers, nature conservationists, the food industry, municipalities, and other users of the landscape. Together, these actors define a plan (Biodiversity Action Plan - BAP) for each region, which specifies how habitats for insects can be improved. Farmers implement this plan on their farms and thus help to better protect insects.

The aim is to halt and reverse the decline of insects. Not only are known measures utilised, but new, more effective methods are being tried out. Each region decides for itself which insect species should receive special support - depending on what nature looks like locally. Such a region should be at least as large as an average administrative district in Germany (around 1,200 square kilometres). However, it can also encompass several districts.

Central to the IRSR project was the landscape approach, in which not only individual areas, such as fields or protected areas, are considered, but the entire landscape as a unit. Measures are planned and implemented jointly within this framework so that nature, agriculture, and human needs are harmonised. This creates a sustainable and liveable region for everyone, with a diverse landscape and enlarged insect habitats.

Goals of an Insect-Responsible Sourcing Region

More ecological potential: create new habitats for insects

- Improve the quality of existing habitats
- Reduce pollution by using less fertilizers and pesticides
- Test and disseminate innovative measures that have not been widely used to date

Increase the area impact of insect-promoting measures

- in agriculture
- in other land uses, such as forestry, municipal, commercial, private

Build regional alliances for insect promotion

- Place insect promotion on a broad social basis
- Enlist as many land-users as possible in long-term insect promotion efforts
- Maximize the area effect through regional coherence

Create market-oriented value for insect protection

- Implement marketing concepts for insect-friendly products
- Raise consumer awareness through attractive communication by the food industry

1 About the project

Our regions

- Wendland, Germany
- Bliesgau, Germany
- Northern Upper Rhine, Germany
- Hohenlohe, Germany
- Allgäu, Germany
- Lake Constance, Germany
- Venosta Valley, Italy

The regions for the project were selected by experts with many years of experience. Important factors for the selection were
- the type and size of the local farms,
- how closely agriculture is linked to the food industry,
- and how urban and rural areas are linked.

The aim was to select different regions so that general recommendations could later be derived for Central Europe.

In order to plan insect protection measures well, one needs to know the region well. A lot of research was carried out for this purpose: What does nature look like there? What special insects are there? Which people or other factors influence the number and diversity of insects? This information made it possible to identify species or species groups that are typical for the region, approach regional stakeholders as quickly as possible, plan support measures with them, and, if necessary, network them with each other.

Characteristics of our regions:

Wendland, Germany	1,428 km^2	This region belongs to the federal sate of Lower Saxony, northern Germany. Lower Saxony is the No. 1 agricultural state in Germany. Irrigation plays a major role for many farms in the region, for example in the cultivation of herbs.
Bliesgau, Germany	360 km^2	The Bliesgau is characterized by extensive orchards, species-rich rough pastures, beech forests, and a meadow landscape criss-crossed by the meandering Blies river. It has the highest density of endangered species and habitat types in southwest Germany.

2 Key measures & achievements

Northern Upper Rhine, Germany	2,572 km²	Due to the introduction of large quantities of loess during the Ice Age, the region is characterized by very fertile soils that enable intensive arable farming. The mild climate and terraced slopes along the Rhine valley are ideal for fruit and wine growing.
Hohenlohe, Germany	7,934 km²	Agriculture in this rural region is diverse and important. Almost all types of agricultural cultures are represented here, from fruit, wine and vegetable cultivation to all sorts of animal husbandry.
Allgäu, Germany	6,107 km²	The predominant agricultural use in the Allgäu is grassland farming for milk and meat production, with milk and cheese being the main products. The average farm size of 25-37 hectares is far below the farm sizes of other regions in Germany.
Lake Constance, Germany	1,483 km²	The landscape in this region is characterized by Lake Constance and the adjacent hilly countryside with fruit orchards, vineyards, meadows, and forests. Besides arable land and grassland, special crops such as fruit, wine and hops can also be found.
Venosta Valley, Italy	1,442 km²	The Venosta Valley in South Tyrol, Italy, was used to grow cereals in the past. Today, apple cultivation has taken hold. Meadows and pastures with intensive grassland farming are, however, the most important agricultural areas.

IRSR measures and area types

From the end of 2020 to 2025, partners in each region implemented a specific concept and package of measures. The aim was not only to disseminate established and proven measures to promote insects in agriculture, but also to test and strengthen the ecological effectiveness and practicability of more extensive cultivation practices.

Together with farmers in the pilot regions, practical biodiversity action plans were developed, and more than 2,200 hectares of insect-friendly farmland was created. This means less fertilizer, higher soil fertility, and more biodiversity.

To increase insect conservation expertise, farmers, advisors, and certifiers were trained so that they can better assess the quality of the measures implemented. Experts documented the impact of the measures through annual monitoring. Citizens and farmers participated in the monitoring of the insect population.

2 Key measures & achievements

The following measures, amongst others, were implemented in the Insect-Responsible Sourcing Regions:

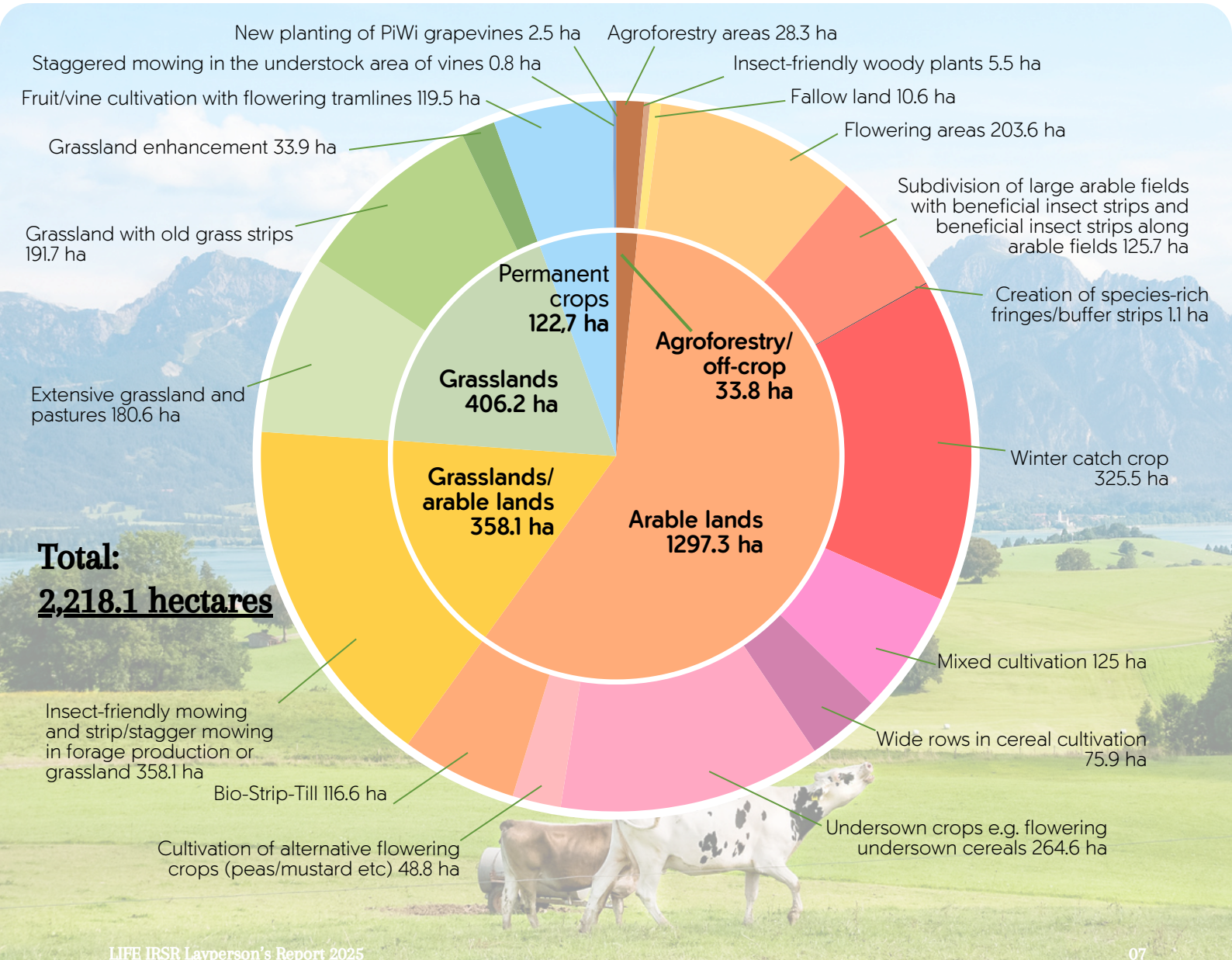
Arable farming
- Field margins, flower strips
- Wide row
- Fallow land
- Intercropping
- Agroforestry
- Extensive farming

Grassland
- Insect-friendly mowing
- Orchards
- Species enrichment
- Agroforestry
- Graduated grassland management

Fruit farming & viticulture
- Species-rich drive rows
- PIWI grape varieties
- Flowering shrubs, nesting trees

Landscape structures
- Hedges
- Flower strips, hem
- Rock and deadwood piles

Gardens
- Front gardens without gravel
- Insect-friendly balcony and container planting



Biodiversity on the pasture!

"I want my cows to be better off; I want them to be out of the sun and out of the wind," says farm manager Schleinkofer.

The organic-certified farm Schleinkofer was a demonstration farm in the LIFE IRSR project. They mainly keep dairy cattle but also grow cereals. Hot, dry summers and strong westerly winds cause problems for their farm animals. Trees on agricultural land help: they provide shade, protect against wind, improve animal welfare, and offer important long-term benefits for nature.

Farmer Susanne Schleinkofer has planted 600 metres of tree rows with willows on her farm. These provide a habitat for many insects, butterflies, beetles, birds, and bats. Fungi also colonise the area if the trees are pruned regularly. The pastures provide additional feed and bedding for the cows – fresh or dried. They contain important nutrients and are readily eaten.

The trees also help to store CO_2 – important in the fight against climate change. For agriculture to be sustainable, nature conservation and climate protection must be considered together with food production.

Discovery of wild bee species in Saarland

33 new species of wild bees have been discovered in the Bliesgau biosphere reserve in Saarland. The findings originate from the IRSR project: a detailed study of the wild bees in the Bliesgau was conducted.

Previously, 213 species of wild bees were known in Saarland. The new discoveries show how much there is still to be researched. The IRSR wild bee expert even found very rare species that have been recorded in Germany for the first time – such as the highly endangered French rock bee. The reasons for this could be climate change, immigration from neighbouring regions, and a lack of evaluations to date.

In order to improve the protection of wild bees, a team of experts developed a special flower mixture.

'We can only protect what we know,' says Jenja Kronenbitter, project manager for Bliesgau (Global Nature Fund).

Key events

To inform about insect-protection and the IRSR, a series of events were organised or attended by the project partners. The project was represented on at a total of 113 events. They were aimed at farmers, agricultural organisations, the food industry, political decision makers, as well as other stakeholders and the general public.

European Conference for more insect protection and biodiversity at landscape level, 21 May 2025 in Frankfurt/Main

- 80 participants, including farmers, farmers' associations, food companies, land users, NGOs, political decision-makers, authorities, civil society, other EU projects, and scientific institutions
- Key topics included the landscape approach, biodiversity in land management, biodiversity and insect conservation in municipalities, citizen science and monitoring, policy and incentives, and future models of insect and biodiversity conservation

Workshops: Experiences and recommendations for more and better insect promotion at landscape level, 2024/2025 in Brussels (online)

- 130 participants, including representatives from politics, administration, agriculture, nature conservation and the food industry throughout the EU
- Key topics included: How to achieve a better area effect for insects in agriculture? How to move from individual farms to a landscape approach? How can policy-makers promote insect-friendly agriculture?

Trainings for farmers

- 1,595 participants in total, including farmers, students & scientific staff, regional NGOs, and municipal employees
- Key topics included agri-environmental cooperation, climate-resilient grazing systems, maize undersowing, insect-friendly grassland and mowing

Excursions and informational events for citizens

- 372 participants at 30 citizen-science trainings
- Training courses on the use of citizen science tools for insect identification, imparting background knowledge on insect protection, etc.

Key publications

To maximise the project outreach, the IRSR team published the "Guidelines for more and better insect promotion at landscape level. Recommendations for agriculture and forestry, local authorities and companies". Most of the measures presented have been tested in the IRSR. These experiences have been incorporated into the supplemented catalogue of measures.

The measures are tailored to the Central European region but can be adapted for implementation in other regions. Many of the measures can be financed by EU programs as well as national or regional programs. By combining different measures, a coherent network of structures can be created to promote biodiversity.

The guidelines and catalogue of measures are available for download on the project website in German and in English.

Media and dissemination

All main IRSR publications were launched with a press release. In total, 30 press releases on the project were sent out by the partners. Seven media tours were organised to accompany IRSR events. The project's work has been referenced in 252 media articles, videos and audios, including WELT and welt.de, Süddeutsche Zeitung, ARD, Topagrar, The European Project Repository and Dissemination Journal, and was mentioned in 91 partner newsletters. All publications, events and main findings have been shared via the IRSR project website at insect-responsible.org with an average of around 1,000 page views per month. The social media reach comprised 483,882 people through the project's own channel on Twitter/X and distribution via the partners' channels on LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram.

Key success factors

Protecting insects is a task that no single player can tackle alone. This requires more than just flower strips at the edge of fields – more land and co-operation are needed. All land users must work together to promote insects effectively: Farmers, the food industry, politicians, local authorities, businesses, and nature conservation.

The IRSR project has shown what is important to pave the way to an insect-friendly landscape: in the beginning, people or businesses that already have good experience or are open to new ideas – for example, committed farmers or municipalities – can help. Everyone involved should work well together, so someone is needed to coordinate everything. Expertise and exchange within the region are also important to ensure that measures are implemented correctly. And finally, money is needed for all of this – ideally, public and private funds can be combined into an investment in regional biodiversity.

What politics and the food sector should do

In order for these success factors to be effective, better framework conditions must be created for more and better insect and biodiversity promotion at landscape level. This can be achieved through four main approaches:

1

Strengthen nature conservation in agriculture through cooperation
To preserve nature and biodiversity in the long term, as many land users in a region as possible must work together. This requires new support programmes that are tailored to the respective landscape. These programmes should apply throughout the EU, be open to all stakeholders and promote the exchange of knowledge. Existing structures such as the LEADER programme can help here.

2

Make support programmes more attractive and simpler
The programmes need to be revised so that more farmers participate in environmental measures. What is needed are higher payments for services to nature, more opportunities for private investment, as well as simple and flexible measures. In this way, agriculture and environmental protection can work better together.

3

Shared responsibility between agriculture and the food industry
The food industry and agriculture share responsibility for the protection of biodiversity. The food industry should:

- Invest in projects for more biodiversity,
- reward farmers for their efforts,
- help with monitoring and
- create common standards.

When public and private funds are used together, more impact is created.

4

Advice and knowledge are crucial
Good and practical biodiversity advice, as well as the integration of biodiversity into agricultural training and education are important for environmental measures to succeed. They ensure the quality and acceptance of the measures and contribute to sustainable insect protection.

4 Project partners

Lake Constance Foundation

The Lake Constance Foundation is an inter-national non-profit foundation for environmental protection and nature conservation based in Radolfzell on Lake Constance. Its main fields of activity are sustainable land use planning, sustainable use of water resources, environmentally friendly tourism, environmentally friendly agriculture, climate protection and adaptation to climate change as well as the protection of bio-diversity and ecosystem services.

Global Nature Fund

The Global Nature Fund (GNF) is a non-profit, private, independent foundation for environmen-tal protection and nature conservation. It runs projects in the areas of Living Lakes and water, nature conservation, sustainable development and business and biodiversity. The commitment to insect protection and biodiversity has a long tradition at GNF, especially for the projects that work at the interface of economy and ecology.

Netzwerk Blühende Landschaft

The Netzwerk Blühende Landschaft (NBL) was founded in 2003 by a handful of organizations from beekeeping, agriculture and nature conser-vation and anchored at Mellifera e.V. Their holistic concern is the harmonious coexistence of humans, nature and pollinating insects. The Netzwerk Blühende Landschaft focuses on the improvement of the food basis and habitats of all flower-visiting insects in addition to a partnership-based transfer of knowledge.

Nestlé Germany

Nestlé is the world's largest food and beverage company with operations in 187 countries. More than 2,000 brands are part of Nestlé. Nestlé Germany employs around 9,300 people at 12 locations and is headquartered in Frankfurt am Main. Nestlé believes that its success as a company in the long term depends on using its size to create value for society and for the environment. To achieve this, the company focuses primarily on the areas of: Nutrition, respectful treatment of nature and social responsibility.

Bäuerliche Erzeugergemeinschaft Schwäbisch Hall

The Bäuerliche Erzeugergemeinschaft Schwäbisch Hall (BESH) was founded in 1988 by Rudolf Bühler and eight farmers as a self-help initiative to save the endangered pig breed and has since acted as a vehicle for rural regional development in the Hohenlohe region. The extinction of the regional pig breed was prevented by this association and a growing number of member farms. BESH's commitment to old livestock breeds contributes to the preservation of the genetic diversity of farm animals.