POLICY BRIEFING PAPER
"DEFINITION OF PALUDICULTURE IN THE CAP"

By the EU Peatlands & CAP Network (February 2021)

Introduction

Drainage-based agriculture on peatland causes enormous economic and environmental losses through CO2 emissions (~25 % of EU agricultural emissions from 3 % of EU agricultural land), loss of biodiversity, water pollution, soil degradation, and subsidence followed by an eventual loss of productive land. Rewetting (i.e. raising the water level near to surface) is essential to minimize emissions and peat degradation, but also impedes drainage-based land use. Paludiculture has been recognized as "agricultural activity" and "eligible hectares" in the amendments to the CAP legislative text (Art. 4 §1) approved by the European Parliament[1] and Council[2] , now under negotiation in the trilogue. CAP direct payments, together with a clear understanding of the term "paludiculture" are the key prerequisite[3] to enable farmers to take up (re)-wetted productive peatland use (Paludiculture).

Definition

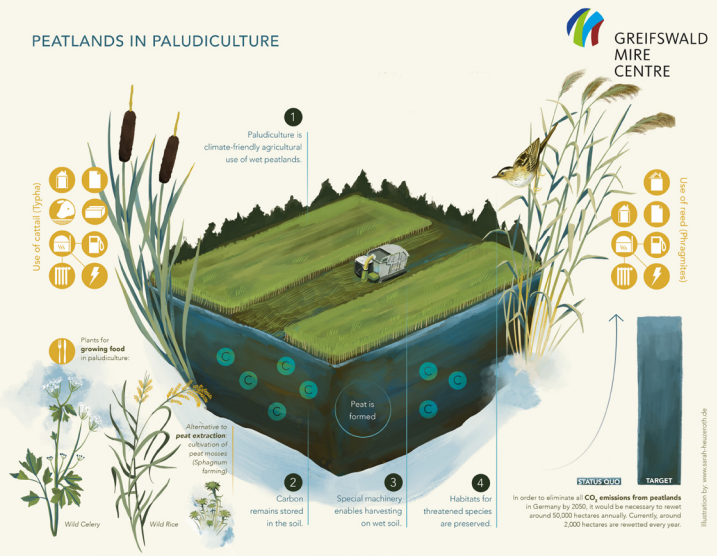
Paludiculture[5] is the productive land use of wet and rewetted peatlands that preserves the peat soil and thereby minimizes CO2 emissions and subsidence[6].

Carbon farming and co-benefits

With paludiculture, peatlands are kept productive under permanently wet, peat-conserving and potentially peat-forming conditions[4]. Thus, it is a blueprint for peatland carbon farming while still producing food, feed and energy. Co-benefits of paludiculture could contribute to the objectives of EU Green Deal policy by maintenance and restoration of multiple ecosystem services such as water buffering, nutrient retention, local climate cooling and habitat provision for rare species, while allowing agricultural production simultaneously.

Paludicultural plants and utilisation options

Paludiculture comprises various agricultural production systems that target the production of plant- or animal-based commodities - from harvesting vegetation on semi-natural sites to establishing specific permanent crops. Paludiculture uses above ground biomass, while below ground biomass, i.e. a major part of the net primary production, remains for peat formation. After establishing high water tables near the soil surface throughout the year, wet grasslands may develop by succession of vegetation or permanent crops with specific peatland species can be cultivated. The harvested biomass can be used as food, feed, fibres for industrial biochemistry, for production of construction materials, high quality liquid or gaseous biofuels, for heat production through direct combustion or for further purposes such as extracting and synthesizing pharmaceuticals and cosmetics. These diverse options for biomass from paludiculture show its great potential for future circular bio-economy applications.



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Endnotes

1 Art 4 (amend Am 866 and 1185; Ams 91 and 1148cp10; Am 1148cp11 and 1148cp12) Amendments(1) adopted by the European Parliament on 23 October 2020 on the CAP proposal

2 https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-12148-2020-REV-1/en/pdf

3 Greifswald Mire Centre (GMC), Wetlands International and National University of Ireland, Galway (NUI), Peatlands in the EU. Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) after 2020. Position Paper, https://www.greifswaldmoor.de/files/dokumente/Infopapiere_Briefings/202003_CAP%20Policy%20Brief%20Peatlands%20in%20the%20new%20EU%20Version%204.8.pdf; Tanneberger et al. (2020): The Power of Nature Based Solutions: How Peatlands Can Help Us to Achieve Key EU Sustainability Objectives, https://doi.org/10.1002/adsu.202000146

4 Peatlands must be wet: for the climate, for the people, for the future. Concluding statement of the International conference „Renewable resources from wet and rewetted peatlands", Greifswald, Germany https://www.moorwissen.de/doc/aktuelles/veranstaltungen/rrr2017//downloads/final%20statement%20RRR2017%20with%20annex.pdf

5 From Latin „palus" = swamp

6 Wichtmann, W., Schröder, C. & Joosten, H. (eds.) (2016) Paludiculture - Productive Use of Wet Peatlands. Climate Protection - Biodiversity - Regional Economic Benefits. Schweizerbart Science Publishers, Stuttgart.