



# Synergies between Nature Conservation and Organic Agriculture

Good Practices from Bavaria

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- Bavaria's oldest nature conservation organization  
(founded 1913)
- Over 270,000 members advocating for biodiversity
- Key initiator of the 2019 "Save the Bees" referendum
- Agricultural consultant: bridging farming and conservation

# BAVARIAN AGRICULTURE: KEY FACTS

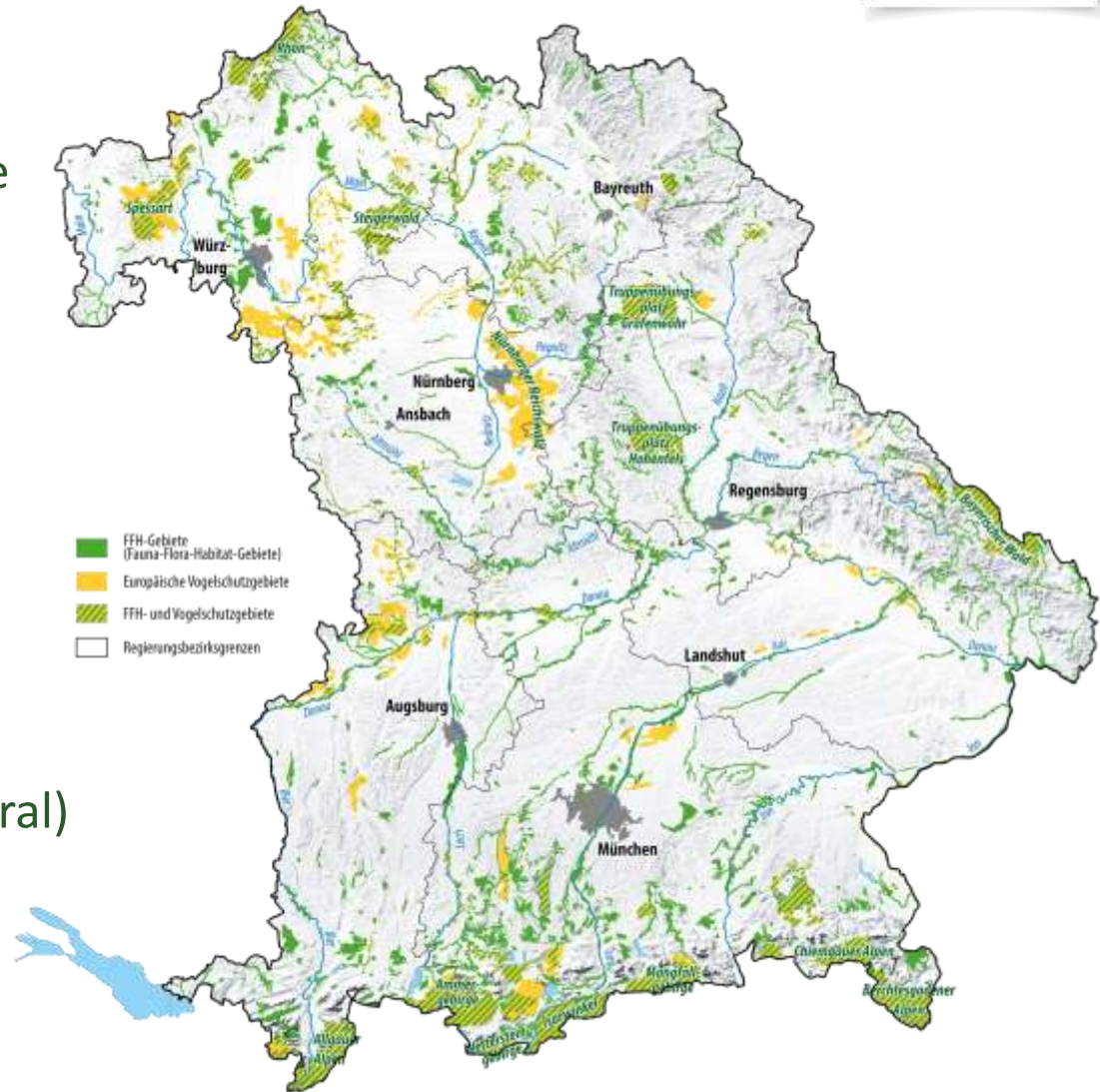
- 3.1 million hectares agricultural land (45% of Bavaria)
- 65.5% arable land, 34% permanent grassland
- 14.3% organic farming (430,000 ha by 2024)
- Diverse landscape: Alpine regions to fertile lowlands

- Farm consolidation: fewer, larger holdings
- Intensification: higher inputs and mechanization
- Shift to maize (26% of arable) and energy crops
- 67.8% growth in organic farms (2012–2020)

- 745 Natura 2000 sites (800,000 ha, 11% of territory)
- 60+ protected habitat types, 370+ protected species
- Unique species found only in Bavaria
- Rich diversity: flowering meadows, wetlands, Alps

# NATURA 2000 AND AGRICULTURAL LAND

- 80% of protected areas include agricultural land
- 65% of bird protection areas contain farmland habitats
- Extensive grasslands critical for biodiversity
- 220,000 ha peatlands (95% drained, mostly agricultural)



- Habitat loss: removal of hedgerows, margins, ponds
- Field enlargement and landscape simplification
- Monoculture farming with narrow rotations
- Loss of permanent grassland to arable conversion
- High pesticide and fertilizer inputs
- Nitrogen pollution displacing natural vegetation
- Drainage of wetlands (6.7M tonnes CO<sub>2</sub>/year)
- Industrial animal husbandry intensification

# 2019 REFERENDUM: "SAVE THE BEES"

- 1.75 million signatures (18.4% of eligible voters)
- Most successful referendum in Bavarian history
- Led by BUND Naturschutz and biodiversity alliance
- Became law on August 1, 2019

VOLKSBEGEHREN

RETTET DIE BIENEN

- 30% organic farming by 2030 (from 10% in 2019)
- 13% ecological infrastructure network creation
- 5-meter buffer zones along all watercourses
- 10% green spaces to flowering meadows

- Citizen-driven conservation + farmer cooperation
- Legally binding biodiversity targets
- Financial support via national and CAP programmes
- BioRegio 2030 strategy for organic transition

## KULAP

Cultural Landscape Programme: broad agri-environment measures

Implemented by the Ministry of Agriculture

## VNP

Contractual Nature Protection: targeted biodiversity on 160,000 ha

Implemented by the Ministry of the Environment

Year	Area (hectares)	Participating Farms	Annual Funding (€ million)
2017	84,000	~15,000	~50
2020	130,000	~22,000	~70
2025	165,000	29,000	90
Target 2030	190,000 (6% of agricultural area)	~35,000	~120 (projected)

Table: Harald Ulmer 2026

- 29,000 participating farms on 165,000 hectares (2025)
- €90 million annual funding (state + EU support)
- Proven biodiversity increases on VNP grasslands
- Growth in Red List species populations

- Organic shows 30% higher biodiversity than conventional
- Both need viable farm incomes
- Combined approaches amplify benefits
- Farmer acceptance crucial for transformation

- Combining organic + VNP biodiversity measures
- Peer-to-peer transfer (100 organic model farms)
- Cooperative site-specific conservation plans
- Financial stacking: organic + conservation payments

## The Synergy Opportunity

Combining organic farming with targeted biodiversity measures creates multiplicative benefits exceeding either approach alone:

**Foundation plus precision:** Organic management provides the pesticide-free, low-input foundation; VNP contracts add species-specific measures (late mowing, wet meadow maintenance, nesting habitat creation) addressing particular conservation priorities.

**Economic stacking:** Farmers receive both organic premium prices and conservation payments, making extensive biodiversity-rich management economically competitive with intensive systems.

**Landscape complementarity:** Clustering organic farms with VNP participation creates larger habitat networks enhancing metapopulation viability and ecosystem functionality.

**Knowledge integration:** Organic farmers' ecological understanding and observation skills facilitate successful implementation of targeted conservation measures.

From BUND Naturschutz's agricultural consultancy perspective, this integration represents optimal practice—harnessing market mechanisms (organic premiums) and public funding (VNP payments) to make biodiversity conservation financially attractive while achieving conservation outcomes impossible through either mechanism alone.

**Case 1: BioRegio Model Farm Network**

**Case 2: Alpine Grassland Conservation**

**Case 3: Wiesenmeisterschaft (Wildflower  
Meadow Championship)**

**Case 4: Naturland-LBV Partnership**

# CASE 1: BIOREGIO MODEL FARM NETWORK

- 100 organic demonstration farms across Bavaria
- Peer-to-peer consulting for conventional farmers
- Focus on economics and biodiversity
- 86.6% organic land growth (2012–2020)

Year	Organic Area (ha)	Share of Agricultural Land	Number of Organic Farms
2012	230,000	6.4%	~6,000
2016	295,000	8.5%	~8,500
2020	372,000	12.1%	~10,000
2024	429,662	14.3%	~11,500

Growth in Bavarian Organic Agriculture (2012-2024)

Table: Harald Ulmer 2026

# CASE 2: ALPINE GRASSLAND CONSERVATION

- 1.06 Million hectares permanent grassland in Bavaria (35% of agricultural land)
- Organic alpine pastures: highest species richness
- Low stocking + late cutting = biodiversity hotspots
- VNP payments make extensive management viable

# CASE 3: WILDFLOWER MEADOW CHAMPIONSHIP

Since **2009**, **BUND Naturschutz** in Bayern and the Bavarian State Research Centre for Agriculture (**LfL**) have jointly organised the **Bavarian Wiesenmeisterschaft** (Wildflower Meadow Championship) — an annual competition recognising farmers who actively manage species-rich flowering meadows and pastures. Open to all farm types — full-time, part-time, organic and conventional — the competition rotates each year through a different Bavarian region, systematically covering all of the state's natural landscapes. After more than 15 years and **over 450 participating farms**, it is one of Bavaria's most prominent farmer-facing nature conservation initiatives:

An expert jury evaluates submitted meadows and pastures across **three scoring categories**:

Category	Criteria
<b>Nature conservation value</b>	Total number of flowering plant species (grasses excluded); presence of Red List / endangered species; even distribution of species across the field
<b>Agricultural value</b>	Viable integration into farm management; mowing and grazing regime; long-term sustainability of use
<b>Cultural landscape value</b>	Regional landscape character; structural elements (trees, hedgerows, water); local identity and distinctiveness

## Five Key Lessons

- 1. Meadow biodiversity is measurable:** the three scoring categories make conservation performance comparable, communicable, and rewarding
- 2. Competition as a learning format:** every participating farmer receives the complete species list of their own meadow — building ecological knowledge through participation
- 3. Regional identity as a lever:** the cultural landscape scoring criterion rewards locally distinctive management, strengthening farmers' attachment to their specific landscape
- 4. Organic farms consistently outperform** in competitions open to all farm types — structural evidence of organic grassland management's biodiversity advantage
- 5. The competition continues:** 2026 edition open for applications until **13 April 2026**, covering the Isar-Inn-Hügelland region in Lower Bavaria

- Partnership: Naturland (organic) + LBV (bird protection)
- Farm-specific biodiversity advisory since 2019
- Identifies measures with real added value
- Creates habitat while maintaining organic benefits

- Citizen engagement creates political momentum
- Voluntary cooperation works better than regulation alone
- Adequate financial compensation is essential
- Peer-to-peer knowledge builds trust

# LESSONS: SUCCESS FACTORS (2)

- Site-specific measures outperform generic schemes
- Organic provides foundation, VNP amplifies impact
- Long-term commitment (5+ years) for results
- Integration into farm management planning



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