

Ecosystem services – the benefits we do not know enough about

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Agriculture must address a major challenge – to balance the pursuit of high levels of production with the impact on the environment through the development of new production strategies.

Properly functioning ecosystems – agroecosystems, forest ecosystems, grassland and aquatic ecosystems, provide free of charge the numerous and diverse benefits known as „ecosystem services“. They are often an integral part of the provision of clean drinking water, waste decomposition, and the natural pollination of cultivated and other plants.

These benefits, which until now have never been calculated in the production cost of the final product, as „ecosystem services“ fall into four categories:

- **Provisioning** – production of food, fibre, timber, biomass, water, etc.;
- **Regulating** – for example climate regulation and control of certain diseases;
- **Supporting** – nutrient cycling, soil formation and conservation, oxygen production, provision of habitat;
- **Cultural** – spiritual, restorative, therapeutic, recreational, etc.

In order to support informed decision-making, many ecosystem services are assigned an economic value.

Providers of ecosystem services include pollinators, predators and parasites, microorganisms.