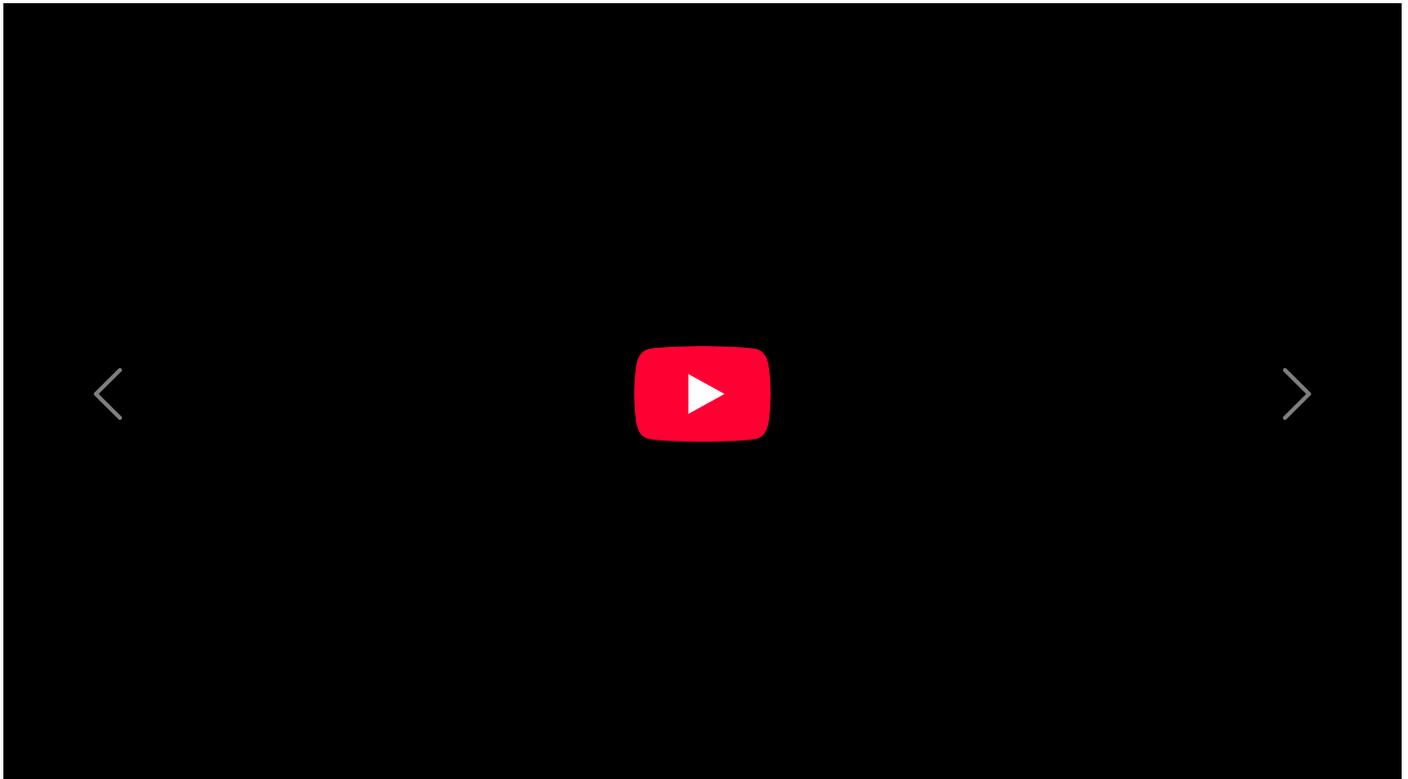


Agriculture in Support of Ecosystem Service Providers

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Farmers are in a deadlock due to the increasing regulatory restrictions on the use of pesticides. On the one hand, they are required to limit their use in order to reduce the harmful impacts on the environment. On the other hand, they lack alternatives that would allow them not to use pesticides. Despite the conviction of most farmers that biodiversity is an essential part of a successful and sustainable farm, the majority of them lack the knowledge and tools to implement biodiversity-based practices. In addition, regulations and European legislation are not adapted to the needs of agricultural producers. Globalized markets and the changing climate put at risk the sustainability of most farms.

When inappropriate and widespread practices are applied, especially those related to plant protection, the providers of ecosystem services are destroyed and the balance of ecosystems is disrupted.

Treatment with pesticides, without accounting for the population density of pests, is often unnecessary, and by eliminating a small number of pests, their natural enemies – predators and

parasites, as well as all pollinators, are inevitably killed. The balance is disturbed and restoration is a slow and difficult process.

Recognizing the potential of ecosystem services, the EU finances large-scale projects and introduces regulations in support of their conservation. One such scientific project, funded under the “Horizon 2020” programme, EcoStack, aims to develop and support environmentally, economically and socially sustainable agriculture through the use and protection of functional biodiversity, thereby also supporting the providers of ecosystem services.

The project involves 24 partner institutions, including the Agricultural University in Plovdiv, from 13 countries, covering all major production zones and agricultural production systems (conventional, organic) in Europe. Through the use of interdisciplinary research methods and with the active participation of all stakeholders (farmers, traders, processors, policymakers, etc.), new knowledge and crop production systems, as well as concepts for generating economic and environmental benefits for farmers, will be generated and promoted.