Agroscope

Alternative Uses of Wet Arable Land in Switzerland – Perspectives from Agriculture

Start: From May 2026
Duration: 0,5-1 year

Working Place: Agroscope Reckenholz, Reckenholzstrasse 191 Zürich Affoltern

Language: English and German

Agroscope research group: Agricultural Landscape and Biodiversity

Contact: Yvonne Fabian ; +41 58 481 93 66; yvonne.fabian@agroscope.admin.ch

Wet and waterlogged arable land is becoming increasingly common in Switzerland due to climate change, soil subsidence, and limited drainage options. At the same time, organic soils and wet sites are gaining importance in climate, biodiversity, and soil protection strategies. Alternative land-use approaches—such as adapted wetland management, extensive use, paludiculture, or nature-oriented grazing systems—offer potential ecological benefits but require a departure from established agricultural production systems.
While scientific research on the ecological effects of such alternative land uses is growing, little is known about how these approaches are perceived by farmers, which barriers they face, and under what conditions implementation would be realistic at farm level.

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research EAER
Agroscope

Agroscope good food, healthy environment

Objective

The aim of this Master's thesis is to systematically assess the perceptions, experiences, and decision-making factors of farmers in Switzerland regarding alternative uses of wet arable land. The focus lies on the practical perspective of agriculture and on identifying prerequisites for a possible transition of existing management systems.

Research Questions

• How well known and accepted are alternative land-use forms for wet arable land (e.g. extensive use, litter meadows, wet pastures, paludiculture) among Swiss farmers?
• What opportunities and risks do farmers associate with these land-use options (economic, operational, and social aspects)?
• Which factors influence farmers' willingness to adopt such systems (e.g. financial incentives, market access, advisory services, legal certainty)?
• What role do policy frameworks, direct payments, and societal expectations play?

The thesis is expected to:

• provide practice-oriented insights into farmers' perspectives,
• identify key barriers and success factors for alternative land use on wet arable land,
• highlight implications for agricultural policy, advisory services, and research.
Overall, the work will contribute to the discussion on sustainable management of wet and organic soils at the interface of agriculture, climate mitigation, and biodiversity conservation.

Requirements

• Master's-level studies in environmental sciences, geography, agricultural sciences, or sustainability sciences
• Interest in agriculture, soil protection, and transformation processes
• Willingness to carry out empirical social research (surveys/interviews)
• German (for conducting the survey)

Supervision & Contact

The thesis will be closely supervised and embedded in the research field of sustainable land use and soil protection. Continuous coordination on research questions, methods, and analysis is envisaged.