



# MONITORING THE MEDITERRANEAN STRATEGY FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT(MSSD)

## AGRICULTURAL AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT National Study Spain, Summary

In Partnership with:



Financed with support of the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries

Document reserved to Bari 2008 workshop. Do not diffuse.  
Original study realized in French. Author can't be held responsible for this translated content

---

**Plan Bleu**  
Centre d'Activités Régionales

Sophia Antipolis  
May 2008

The various latitudes and the diversity of the climates and reliefs endow Spain with a great environmental variety and richness. There is an appreciable network of national parks and nature reserves, and a high percentage of the national territory is either listed as protected area or belongs to the EU Natura 2000 Network. At the same time, there is in Spain a considerable richness of intensive land and forestry systems that are quite adapted to the environment. In sum, it may be concluded that, from an environmental point of view, Spain is today a country still presenting a large variety of habitats, biodiversity and landscapes, with good prospects for the use of alternative energies, in particular wind energy. Yet, it is also a country marked by: a) rare and irregular rainfall over most of the territory, which gives rise to problems of drought and, consequently, competition among the economic sectors over the use of the water available; b) a high risk of erosion and desertification in a significant portion of the territory; c) an increasing problem related to the treatment of wastes (packaging, fertiliser, manure, slurry, etc.); and d) a marked resistance to a reduction of fire in the summer season. Besides, forecasts about the impacts of climate change make of Spain one of the countries most affected in the future. The whole of these physical conditions, coupled with the historical, economic and social variables, have established quite diverse agricultural forms and development levels throughout the Spanish rural environment. As much as 91.29% of the national territory is rural, hence the importance of rural areas with regard to all aspects pertaining to land use planning, not only from a socio-economic perspective but also from an environmental standpoint.

In Spain, the conservation of biodiversity is a major issue to be taken into consideration in the preparation of programmes and measures related to the agricultural sector and rural areas. Within the framework of rural development, agro-environmental measures, compensatory indemnification and forestation of farmland are part of meeting the objective of protection of biodiversity and habitats of community protection interest. Good agricultural and environmental conditions also take into consideration the conditions of conservation of habitats and biodiversity. The new National Strategic Rural Development Plan (2007-2013) grants special attention to the protection of biodiversity, and requires that it be considered as a major issue in the preparation of programmes and measures related to the agricultural sector and rural areas, in general. Lastly, the new *Sustainable Rural Development Act* grants a key role to environmental aspects.

State *decentralisation* and the implementation of the EU Rural Development Policy have also given concrete expression to such principles as “*subsidiarity*” and “*co-management*”, thus encouraging rural areas to take over decision-making power and management authority, which used to rest exclusively with the State Administration. The implementation of these rural development programmes has required new institutions, new “*rules of the game*”, both community and Spanish. These new institutions have fostered new forms of participation, cooperation and supervision. In this regard, it is worth emphasising the importance acquired by gender-based associations. The presence of women in local government and local bodies has been constantly on the increase since the beginnings of democracy.

Besides the significant adaptation of agricultural bodies to a more competitive context, it is worth highlighting the major changes that have taken place in the agricultural field following the necessary adaptation of the new demand, environment and market conditions. Proximity, quality and safety of products are factors that the consumer puts forward as decisive when making a purchase. In this context of consumer requirement, Spain is in the lead in matter of quality production, within the EU. As regards the alignment of farming practices with environmental requirements, it is worth highlighting the efforts made in water saving in the field of agriculture. In this respect, the concept of integrated production seems to be an alternative. Also, organic farming in Spain is looked upon as quality farming. Both are quite dynamic. A further major

environmental challenge for the agricultural and silvicultural sector in Spain is how to contribute to mitigating climate change and implementing the international conventions entered into by Spain in this regard. Furthermore, the conversion of land dedicated to food crops into land dedicated to energy crops plays a key role; so much so that Spanish agriculture is starting to become productive of renewable energies. Besides the practices used on farms to adapt to the changing context of this activity, it is worth emphasizing the implementation of both agricultural and rural diversification strategies.