



1. INTRODUCTION

Public goods such as a stable climate and biodiversity are available to everyone free of charge. This has frequently led to their overuse and degradation, impacting the services they provide. To try to address this market failure, governments take regulatory action but in many cases, existing laws do not adequately protect public goods and ecosystem services from overuse. This is particularly true when it comes to attempts to reduce the impacts of agriculture.

In Switzerland, MAVA set up the the Foundation for Sustainable Agriculture (SNL) to address this situation, bringing four environmental organisations together into a collaborative advisory function to identify and fund targeted projects.

To shape the development of a comprehensive and sustainable agricultural policy in Switzerland, we, the advisory group, set ourselves objectives focused on politics, law, and communications. And through SNL, we have been able to support numerous players, projects, and studies in sustainable agriculture.

OBJECTIVES

- ensure that agricultural production in Switzerland is locally-adapted and that biodiversity is preserved;
- ensure that pesticides and their residues do not excessively pollute surface water, groundwater, and natural habitats;
- reduce excess nutrients to an environmentally acceptable level;
- ensure that direct payments to agriculture are fully linked to the provision of public services;
- raise public awareness of the impact of agriculture on the climate, environment and biodiversity;
- implement flagship projects based on best practices.

THE PARTNERSHIP



GREENPEACE



BUDGET ENGAGED

Total MAVA budget in CHF:

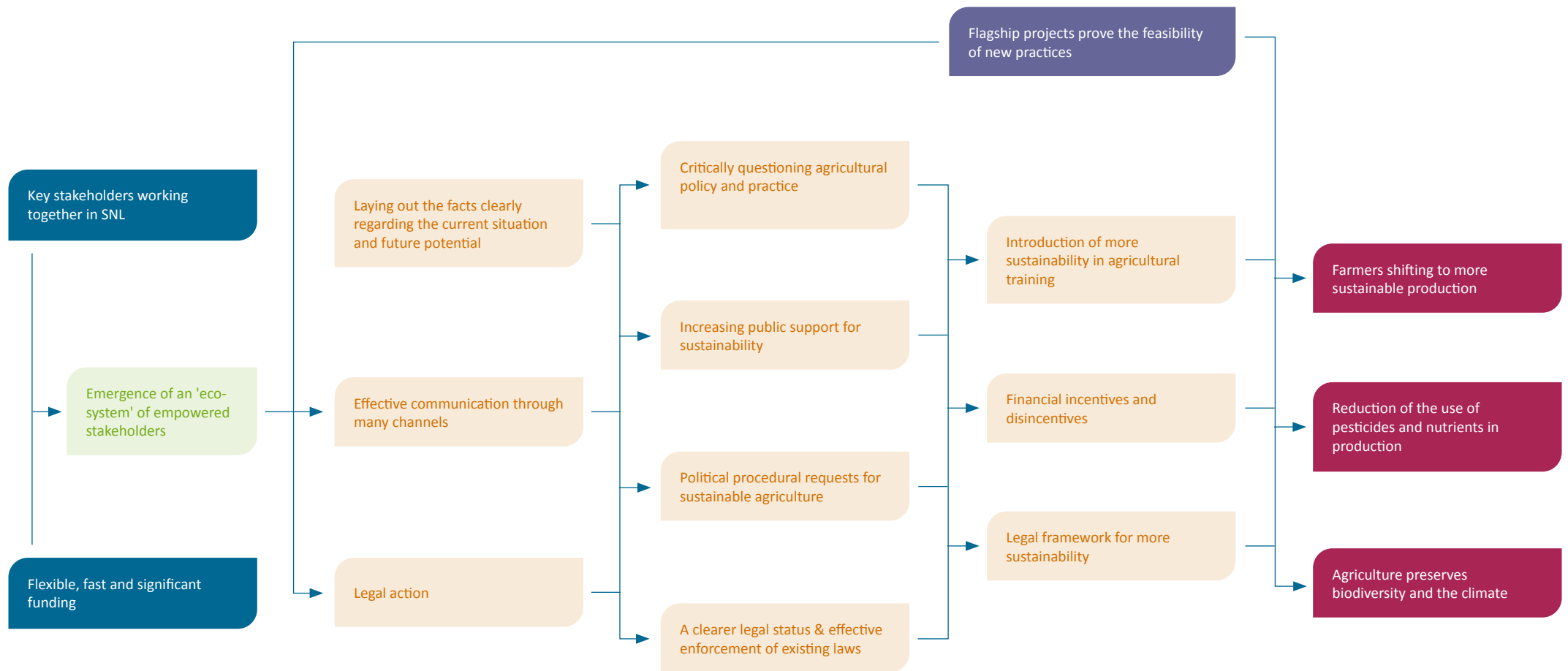
5,491 million

Co-funding in CHF:

4,950 million

PROJECT PARTNERS

- Vision Landwirtschaft (Vision Agriculture)
- Agroecology works!
- Zürcher Hochschule für angewandte Wissenschaften ZHAW - Zurich University of Applied Sciences
- Ecotopia
- Fondation des Fondateurs
- Landwirtschaft mit Zukunft (Agriculture with a Future)
- SDSN (Sustainable Development Solutions Network) Switzerland
- Schweizerischer Fischereiverband SFV (Swiss Fishing Federation)
- Biovision
- Seelandplan
- Ärztinnen und Ärzte für Umweltschutz (Doctors for Environmental Protection)
- Sentience Politics
- Umweltinstitut München (Munich Environmental Institute)
- Agrarallianz (Agricultural Alliance)
- Eidg. Forschungsanstalt für Wald, Schnee und Landschaft WSL (Swiss Federal Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape Research)
- Forschungsinstitut für biologischen Landbau FiBL (Research Institute of Organic Agriculture)
- Aqua Viva
- Kaleidos Fachhochschule (Kalaidos University of Applied Science)
- Future3
- Verein sauberes Wasser für alle (Association for Clean Water for all)



2. PROGRESS AND ACTIVITIES

Engaging in political, legal, and technical work, as well as in active communications, we were able to bring together existing groups of stakeholders in sustainable agriculture, and to support and encourage the emergence of others. Specialist scientific studies helped us to shape the political debate, and campaign work together with dissemination of relevant information, energised public debate around agricultural impacts and sustainability.

By obtaining the right for environmental associations to appeal against pesticide use approvals, we secured the withdrawal of problematic substances from the market. In addition, by campaigning for the addition of the concepts of locally-adapted and resource-saving production to the Federal Constitution, we laid the basis for a consistent direction for Swiss agricultural policy. And now, locally-adapted agriculture can and should be strengthened, and trade in agricultural products made sustainable.

STRATEGY 1: GENERATE KNOWLEDGE ABOUT ALTERNATIVES

We examined in great detail how to reform the agricultural and food system in an environmentally-friendly way. Research institutes and specialists undertook studies that were published by environmental organizations and submitted to the Swiss government. These included studies on:

- measures and indicators for target attainment;
- defining the objective of 'locally-adapted agriculture';
- harmful subsidies;
- implementing ammonia reduction in Swiss cantons.

STRATEGY 2: COMMUNICATIONS AND CAMPAIGNS

Communications work was important for raising awareness amongst the electorate and influencing relevant stakeholders. We supported two referendum campaigns and a large-scale communications campaign calling for a significant commitment to a future-oriented agricultural policy. Our activities included:

- the 'Stop agrobusiness' campaign for AP22+ (Agricultural policy from 2022 onwards);
- two YES campaigns on pesticide initiatives, and support for the initiative against factory farming via Sentience Politics;
- forging new alliances for the reduction of pesticide use;
- ongoing media work.

STRATEGY 3: POLITICAL WORK

In line with our expertise and mandate, much of SNL's time, energy, and resources went into our political work. This entailed engaging and mobilising parliamentarians, as well as making various procedural requests and conducting intensive advocacy with the government. Our activities included:

- producing fact sheets on specific topics;
- Information for and exchange with parliamentarians;
- supporting decisions concerning pollutant reduction paths.

STRATEGY 4: IMPLEMENTATION (VISION 3-SEEN-LAND)

In the Three-Lakes Region (Drei-Seen-Land), our specialists developed a vision of how this marshy wetland region could be used sustainably in the future. We then communicated this widely, and implemented it together with stakeholders on the ground. This involved:

- conducting participatory processes with stakeholders;
- conducting fundamental research on biodiversity, land use, and hydrology;
- producing a synthesis report on the vision.

STRATEGY 5: APPROVAL OF PESTICIDES

Through a Federal Court ruling, we won the right for environmental associations to appeal against authorization of active substances in pesticides, and then used this right. Going down the legal route was pivotal to effectively reducing the risks stemming from pesticide use. Our work included:

- evaluating the pesticide approval process and communicating results;
- lodging a complaint regarding chlorothalonil;
- lodging a complaint regarding tefluthrin and engaging in legal follow-up;
- reviewing the approval process for all active substances, and, when necessary, inspecting files and written submissions.

KEY LESSONS

1. Working together as SNL strengthened cooperation among agricultural experts from the four environmental organizations in the partnership.
2. The 'Stop the agricultural lobby!' campaign showed that it is worthwhile daring to challenge political opponents.
3. Thanks to a foundation provided by widely-supported scientific evidence, there is a broad and growing consensus around the need to reform agricultural policy.
4. Cooperation between different stakeholders enables synergy and generates additional ideas.
5. Credible studies conducted by scientific institutions have an impact and their results are not questioned by political opponents.
6. SNL's financial resources made it possible to think bigger, open up new possibilities, and deliver unconventional projects.
7. Despite extensive resources, there are limits to what it is possible to achieve through politics, and to what can be done to respond to external factors.
8. The support of new stakeholders can trigger a valuable increase in impetus and boost political clout.
9. Despite extensive resources, it is difficult to be active in all thematic areas or to pursue them with the same degree of intensity.
10. It is not possible to quantifiably measure the impact of political projects.

3. ACHIEVEMENTS AND IMPACTS

We have only partially achieved SNL's goals. There is still a lot to be done. While it is now generally accepted that agriculture must be transformed, views differ when it comes to the timescale and parameters for that transformation. But with input from new actors, such as Landwirtschaft mit Zukunft (Agriculture with a Future), the breadth and depth of the debate have grown.

We have seen partial improvement in the Agriculture Act, securing reference to the need for locally-adapted agriculture in AP22+. And despite the suspension of AP22+ as a result of opposition from the agricultural lobby, two pollutant reduction paths on pesticides and nutrients were agreed through a parliamentary initiative, and are being implemented at the ordinance level.

We also funded studies showing which measures are necessary for sustainable agriculture. These have been widely accepted, are used in political debate, and guide the work of the organizations involved in SNL.

Notably, various measures have been taken to reduce the use of toxic pesticides and their negative impact on biodiversity. The right for environmental associations to appeal the approval of pesticide has been used with parcimony and focused on impacts, and through political procedural requests and discussions with the government and parliamentarians we have been able to achieve some significant results. Use of various highly toxic substances is no longer permitted; amateur users must choose from a smaller selection of products; and responsibility for approval of pesticides has been passed from the Federal Office for Agriculture (BLW) to the Federal Food Safety and Veterinary Office (BLV).

Thanks to active communications and political work, we put the spotlight on excessive nutrient and high livestock levels in Switzerland. In addition, there is less support for paying lump sum subsidies to farmers that are not linked to defined services. AP 22+ delivers improvements in both areas - lump sum payments will be reduced and nutrient management for farms will become more restrictive.

Specialists developed a vision on how to make sustainable agriculture a tangible reality in the Three-Lakes region with its marshland between the Orbe Plain (Vaud) and the Grenchenwiti (Solothurn). And five additional visions address water, biodiversity, soil, agriculture, landscape and spatial development.

CASE STUDY 1: STOPPING THE AGRICULTURAL LOBBY

We ran the ‘Stop the agricultural lobby!’ campaign to influence the development of Switzerland’s AP22+ (Agricultural policy from 2022 onwards). This called for a future-oriented agricultural policy and was designed to counter influence exerted by the agricultural lobby.

Following years of advocacy agricultural lobby, the myth of agriculture already being sustainable in Switzerland is deeply rooted. A single campaign can hardly dispel this myth. Yet while the overall impact of our campaign was limited, our framing of a regressive agricultural lobby worked well in the media and reached parliamentarians. As a result, we managed to counter the previously unchallenged influence of the agricultural lobby in parliament as evidenced by the adoption of a parliamentary initiative on pollutant reduction paths for pesticides and nutrients.

Overall, our ‘muscle-flexing’ through a highly visible campaign forced agricultural lobby respond and struck a chord with the public, and the term ‘agricultural lobby’ has been successfully mainstreamed, both socially and politically.



Campaign poster

CASE STUDY 2: THE RIGHT OF ENVIRONMENTAL ASSOCIATIONS TO APPEAL THE AUTHORIZATION OF PESTICIDES

Through Federal Supreme Court ruling 144 II 2018 of February 2018, environmental associations were granted the right to appeal against the authorization of active substances in pesticides under Article 12 of the Federal Act on the Protection of Nature and Local Heritage. Prior to the court ruling, the approval process was entirely untransparent. To have any kind of impact, it is necessary to lodge a complaint – something that is unique in Europe – and getting to grips with pesticide manufacturers' reports and approval bodies requires a significant amount of expertise. Thanks to SNL, our lawyers were able to apply for party status, put together written submissions, and lodge complaints. By inspecting the files and evaluating the approval process, the associations involved were able to gain an insight into approval methods, exert indirect pressure on approval bodies and manufacturers, and ultimately prevent inappropriate approvals.

Through lodging complaints against the re/approval of active substances, we were able to address shortcomings in the approval process. For example, one complaint focused on a pesticide containing two active substances for which the authorization dossier had failed to account for the combined toxicity of these substances.



© Swiss Federal Court

KEY IMPACTS

Over the course of the last five years, consensus has grown that discussions around the future of the agriculture in Switzerland must also address the sector's relationship with consumption patterns, global trade, and energy consumption. Scientifically proven facts, such as the biodiversity and climate crises, and terms such as the 'agricultural lobby' and 'pesticides' have also become part of mainstream political and social discourse. In parallel, through SNL's activities, nature and environmental organizations are seen as effective advocates for sustainable agriculture. This has sometimes been politically construed as an attack on the agricultural profession itself, and differences between environmentalists and farmers have often been exaggerated by the media and portrayed as ideological divides. In reality, SNL has a positive and constructive dialogue with farmers and agricultural organizations. Despite political opposition to agricultural policy reforms, many farms are engaging in positive change, and consumption patterns also show a more mindful approach to food emerging amongst consumers.

1. Pesticides and nutrients reduction paths have been introduced and implemented.
2. A debate on imported feed and excessive animal stocks has been launched.
3. Biodiversity and climate-friendly agriculture has a positive image.
4. Agriculture with a Future, an organization that emerged from the climate youth movement, has been established.
5. Biodiversity-damaging subsidies have been documented.
6. The concept of locally-adapted agriculture is widely accepted.
7. Sixty-seven active substances in pesticides are no longer permitted.
8. A vision for the protection of organic soils and for the restoration of valuable wetland habitats has been developed.

4. WHAT WILL HAPPEN NEXT

Agriculture should be a natural partner when it comes to the protection of nature and the environment. But the sector's exclusive focus on production puts excessive strain on ecosystems and undermines societal support for a resource-saving approach. And differing or misleading concepts have led to polarization that needs resolving. While the agricultural lobby refers to pesticides euphemistically as 'plant protection products', for example, SNL has mainstreamed use of the more transparent term 'pesticides' in public and political debate.

Conflict is expected to increase as the scarcity of resources has an increasingly negative impact on broad swathes of society and on agriculture. Addressing this will require close cooperation between environmental and agricultural organizations and the government, and we will need new forms of cooperation in the future.

SNL has made valuable contributions to the ongoing debate about the future of agriculture in Switzerland. We have also shown that there is a need for well-established networks, cooperation based on trust and mutual respect, a constructive and solution-oriented, and personal resilience.

There is still a pressing need to reform agricultural practice and policy, and to transform currently unsustainable consumption patterns – not least through true-cost pricing. This means commitments to biodiversity conservation, nutrient reduction, regulating pesticides, political agenda-setting, and shaping agricultural policy discourse will remain constants in SNL's work over the next few years. And the joy of designing and engaging in visionary thinking, and implementing projects will be at the heart of our endeavours.

“Cooperation within the SNL Advisory Board over the last few years has been inspiring and instructive. It has been a lot of fun to think in a visionary way and to implement that vision in tangible ways.”

Marcel Liner, Pro Natura, Friends of the Earth Switzerland

“Financial support for innovative projects and new organizations made it possible to build a broader alliance for sustainable agriculture in Switzerland.”

SNL Advisory Board

