THE FUNCTION OF PERMANENT GRASSLANDS
IN WATER RESOURCES PROTECTION

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Key words: diffuse pollution, grassland, water balance, water quality

Abstract

Permanent grasslands - according to the Water Framework Directive - are typical water related ecosystems so they largely affect water quality, its cycling and balance and therefore deserve protection. They are an element of landscape structure (ecosystem function or service) commonly considered a factor stabilising environmental changes.

Most threats posed to waters in Poland originate from present cropland structure with its definite predominance of arable lands over grasslands. Agriculture should therefore focus on the improvement of land use structure in order to minimise environmental hazards and to guarantee at the same time optimum economic effects. This could be achieved by turning arable lands into grasslands (where justified e.g. on light soils) or at least by maintaining present grassland area (condition in negotiations with the EU) and management that would consider environmental protection.

Increasing the contribution of grasslands to cropland structure or at least maintaining their present status quo would help to achieve compromise between the goals of farmers and environmental protection. Purposeful utilisation of ecosystem services, particularly those of grasslands, allows to maintaining more intensive farming without environmental hazard. Limited should be only such activities whose intensity exceeds regenerative or buffering environmental capacity e.g. on grounds particularly subjected to water pollution or those included into Natura 2000 network.