

# The Grassland Butterfly Index should become a Mandatory Indicator as Part of the Implementation of the NRR

A perspective from Josef Settele and Elisabeth Kühn

The grassland butterfly index is one of the three indicators for biodiversity improvement in agricultural ecosystems in accordance with the [EU Nature Restoration Regulation \(NRR\)](#). Member states are required to implement measures leading to positive developments in at least two of these three indicators; each country must select at least two, but can also select all three indicators. We advocate that the grassland butterfly index be a mandatory indicator of the NRR. In Germany, however, there are currently efforts to deselect this indicator. From our perspective, this would represent a step backwards for both nature conservation and sustainable food policy. The selection of this indicator would demonstrate that Germany is taking responsibility in a way that is transparent and comprehensible to the public. Important arguments in favour of the indicator from our perspective are that it already exists for Germany, that it is established (also at European level), that it is the only indicator that measures biodiversity directly, and that it is more effective and tangible for the public than any other indicator due to the involvement of volunteers in data collection.

The EU Nature Restoration Regulation (NRR) is a powerful tool for protecting nature and the environment and for ensuring sustainable agricultural production. The aim of the NRR is to restore habitats that have been damaged or disturbed to a good condition. To this end, each EU member state is now required to draw up a National Recovery Plan by the start of 2026, setting measurable targets, commitments and deadlines for restoring different ecosystems and species. The NRR lists various areas that are specifically addressed. One of these areas is „Agricultural ecosystems“ in Article 11(2), which requires that member states take measures to improve biodiversity in this area. Specifically, the member states must achieve a positive development in at least two of the following three indicators: (1) The grassland butterfly index (indicator for population development of typical grassland butterfly species); (2) The stock of organic carbon in cropland mineral soils (indicator for healthy, fertile soils and climate protection); (3) The share of agricultural land with high-diversity landscape features such as hedges, field margins and copses.

From our perspective, the grassland butterfly index is a highly suitable indicator because it is the only one of these three indicators that directly measures the improvement in biodiversity. For many years now, the data from „[Butterfly Monitoring Germany](#)“ (a monitoring programme run mainly by volunteers) has been included in the calculation of the European Grassland Butterfly Indicator. This same calculation method has now been used to calculate the indicator for Germany. The results were recently published in the scientific journal [Nature Conservation](#). This [calculation method is also internationally established](#) and recognised (and is specified by the EU in the NRR) and data collection is ensured for the coming years through the continuation of the butterfly monitoring programme. Furthermore, butterflies are generally highly popular and the determination of this indicator is certainly widely accepted by the public. In addition, nature conservation can be experienced by everyone here, as all nature enthusiasts can help with the data collection.



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