

MANIFESTO

more extensive livestock farming
more biodiversity
for Europe



#UnitedLIFEpeople


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The importance of extensive livestock farming

Agricultural and livestock practices have shaped Europe's landscape and biodiversity. Pastoralism supports biodiversity by generating ecosystems of high natural value and mosaic landscapes of great diversity in species and habitats. As a result of the abandonment of extensive livestock farming and the industrialisation of the agricultural sector, these ecosystems and all associated natural and social diversity are being lost.

The decline of pastoral activity has resulted in changes in the vegetation structure, with the development of scrub and the accumulation of combustible plant biomass. These conditions have translated into an increase in the frequency and intensity of wildfires, as well as a loss of biological and landscape diversity, as well as the social destructuring of rural territories.



The abandonment of traditional livestock farming and its progressive industrialisation, combined with the adverse effects of climate change, urges the implementation of a Strategic Action Plan for the adaptation of extensive livestock farming to climate change, that allows us to **maintain functional, biodiverse and resilient ecosystems** as well as a **vibrant rural world**.

Extensive livestock farming, one of the oldest agrarian practices of humanity, is based on the exploitation of local natural resources and a low use of external inputs, constituting an important form of food production with a low carbon footprint.

It is also a tool for landscape management and conservation, with the capacity to use the resources of areas with low agricultural productivity to generate high-quality products and services. Pastoralism is therefore an activity that should be maintained, improved and supported for its social, economic, cultural and environmental benefits.

In this sense, and as part of the celebrations of 30 years of the LIFE¹ programme, 10 projects funded by this programme, which have contributed to the recognition of extensive livestock farming in Europe and to the valorisation of its contribution to the conservation of biodiversity, have come together to launch this Manifesto.



<https://www.lifeis30.eu/>

¹ The LIFE programme is the EU's funding instrument for the environment and climate action. Running since 1992, it has co-financed more than 5,500 projects inside and outside the EU. With a budget of around €5 billion, it has supported nature protection and conservation and climate action projects across Europe, paving the way to a more sustainable future.

Extensive livestock farming and the environment

Extensive livestock production systems contribute to the sustainability and environmental quality of many habitats in Europe, promoting biodiversity, respecting animal welfare, conserving the landscape and rural cultural heritage.

Extensive livestock farming practices are diverse and adapted to the territory, and therefore different management models occur. The selection of native breeds and grazing techniques adapted to the different geographic and climatic realities make extensive grazing not only a cultural legacy to

be preserved, but also an activity with a **great capacity to adapt to the effects of climate change**.

Furthermore, extensive livestock farming contributes to climate change mitigation through the important role that **pastures and silvopastoral systems play in carbon sequestration**, both in vegetation and soil, when grazing is properly planned.

Well-managed grazing improves soil fertility, prevents erosion and is compatible with tree regeneration. On the other hand, the presence of animals helps on seed dispersal, promotes the nutrient cycle on a landscape scale and reduces the accumulation of plant biomass, thus minimising the impact of wildfires.



Benefits of extensive livestock farming

+ biodiversity

Maintains and increases biological and landscape diversity

+ food safety and sovereignty

Promotes food security and sovereignty

+ ecosystem services

Provides diverse and relevant ecosystem services

+ animal welfare

Improves animal welfare

+ climate change adaptation and mitigation

It is a fundamental tool for adaptation and mitigation

+ biodiversity

The most biologically diverse landscapes are subject to diverse periodic disturbances of low intensity, such as grazing and fire (which imply the cyclical and partial destruction of biomass). Therefore, the presence of extensive ruminant herbivores **promotes an increase in biological diversity, both of habitats and of fauna and flora.**

In extensively grazed landscapes, areas of tree, shrub and herbaceous vegetation are combined in a mosaic, in which agricultural crops and other humanised spaces often coexist. **Discontinuity zones** are fundamental for feeding granivorous and insectivorous birds and are hunting grounds for countless predators. The bushes, in turn, are important refuge areas for insects, small mammals and birds, reptiles or amphibians, as well as for seeds, ensuring adequate regeneration of trees.

In terms of soil diversity, it is important to highlight the contribution of extensive grazing to the conservation of coprophagous fauna populations, i.e. species that feed on waste and thus contribute to the **regulation of the nutrient cycle.**



Transhumance and biodiversity hotspots

Transhumance allows the coupling of grazing practices with the available forage supply. This ancient practice optimises the use of forage resources and mitigates the effect of the most critical periods: summer droughts in the lowlands and winter snow and cold in the mountains.



In a scenario of greater aridity, as it occurs in the Mediterranean basin, transhumance is a sustainable and highly adaptable alternative to climate change. The effect is especially marked in landscapes with an agricultural or forestry matrix, where livestock routes function as biodiversity hotspots with ruminant animals playing a **fundamental role in seed dispersal and soil fertilisation.**

+ ecosystem services

Ecosystems that depend on extensive livestock farming provide numerous services, namely **food provisioning services** (meat, milk, dairy products, animal fats), **fibre and materials** (wool, hides, leather) and **labour** (transport, riding, hunting).



The improvement of pastures and their adequate management, through rotational grazing, allows a better and more adequate development of the herbaceous vegetation and promotes various **regulating services**:

- floristic diversity;
- the establishment of a whole diverse trophic chain, providing feeding and shelter conditions for a range of animals;
- the control of soil erosion;
- the retention of water in the soil;
- better regulation of natural disturbances;
- redistribution and nutrient cycle.

In areas of livestock production, the creation of water accumulation points (ponds / reservoirs) are important watering areas, of vital importance to numerous species.

Extensive livestock farming is also a factor in local cultural identity, either through the breeds that have adapted to the local soil and climate conditions, or through the traditions associated with pastoral practice. Finally, the enjoyment of an agropastoral mosaic also represents a **cultural and recreational service**.

+ food safety and sovereignty

Extensive livestock farming promotes the use of food resources that cannot be used directly for human consumption. On the other hand, it allows the creation of food nutritionally complete and rich in protein. Extensive livestock farming is therefore key to food sovereignty, particularly in areas not suitable for agriculture.

In addition, it is a productive activity linked to the resources of the territory and, therefore, has less dependence on external inputs, especially fossil energy, which translates into a greater autonomy.

Reducing the use of veterinary drugs

In rotational or transhumant grazing systems, it is possible to break the infestation cycles of pasture parasites, thereby reducing the consumption of veterinary drugs.

+ climate change adaptation and mitigation

Climate change effects comprise an increase in the average temperature, a reduction and greater variability of rainfall, and an increased incidence of extreme weather events. Extensive livestock farming will be strongly affected by this global threat, however, being the livestock production model best adapted to the local conditions, it has greater capacity to adjust to new environmental and economical scenarios.

It can also be a tool for climate change adaptation, by **reducing ecosystem vulnerability**. The improvement of pastures and the management of water and grazing methods are practical examples that can positively contribute to adaptation. This last aspect allows managing the accumulation of biomass and the creation of discontinuity zones that avoid the propagation and intensification of wildfires.

In the case of mitigation, this production system captures large amounts of carbon in the soil, offsetting the greenhouse gas emissions from the animals digestion. At the same time, it can reduce carbon dioxide emissions through a lower consumption of animal feed, therefore with more grazing, and with the use of renewable energy sources on farms.



+ animal welfare

Extensive livestock systems have a stocking density appropriate to local conditions (ratio of number of animals to grazed area over a given period of time).

Extensive systems maximise animal welfare, as animals have diets similar to those of their ancestors, live outdoors without space constraints, and can spontaneously express innate behaviours. These conditions greatly improve the quality of life compared to animals in other production systems.

Extensive livestock producers tend to prefer breeds that are well adapted to the environment, valuing and preserving indigenous breeds.

The combination of natural feeding and free range results in **healthier animals with fewer health problems**. Good management of vegetation and grazing is essential to meet all the nutritional needs of the animals. Grazing also promotes the consumption of anthelmintic plants that reduce the need of antiparasitic medication.

Similarly, grazing - rotational, itinerant or transhumant - which characterises this production method, makes use of water points and shading areas at times of greater thermal stress, and provides shelter structures for weakened animals.

How can Extensive Livestock Farming continue to contribute to biodiversity?

The importance and value that extensive livestock farming adds to the biodiversity and resilience of Mediterranean ecosystems cannot be ignored. Over the last 30 years, the European Union has been making an effort to finance LIFE projects with the aim of promoting scientific knowledge and its transfer to improve management decisions, enhance the value of extensive livestock farming products and promote innovation in the sector. **But there is more to be done.**

After a reflection of future scenarios, the ten LIFE projects signatories of this Manifesto have identified an ordered set of priority actions:

1

Recognition and valorisation of ecosystem services generated by extensive livestock farming

Recognition and economic compensation for the environmental services provided by extensive livestock farming, both by society and by public entities, crucial to improve profitability and encourage the application of good practices for ecosystem conservation.

2

Implementation of specific public policies to support pastoralism

Reduction and simplification of the bureaucracy associated with livestock production. Adaptation of public policies to current scientific knowledge and the specific needs of extensive livestock farming in the different regions of the country.

3

Technical support for producers

Improvement of training, information and transfer systems, based on scientific knowledge, with emphasis on improving management.

4

Professional recognition of shepherds

Improve the profitability of the activity by ensuring dignified and profitable ways of exercising the profession.

5

Valorisation of extensive production systems and improvement of the value chain

Raise awareness to identify and recognise the differences between extensive livestock farming and other animal production systems.



6 Education and awareness-raising for the consumption of extensive products

Encourage the consumption of products derived from extensive livestock farming both for their environmental and social benefits, and for their nutritional values.

7 Support for transhumance

Support and encourage transhumance and other animal mobility practices for their cultural values and their potential to adapt to climate change.

8 Increase research, knowledge transfer and capacity building

Promote knowledge transfer, scientific research and capacity building in the livestock sector.

9 Multi-stakeholder participation

Foster the governance and participation of different actors involved in extensive livestock farming, promoting dialogue and capacity building through the creation of networks.

10 Land management

Incorporate extensive livestock farming and its producers in territorial planning and management instruments, including protected areas, Natura 2000 Network and in fire prevention.



Signatory projects of the Manifesto



liveadapt.eu

LIFE LiveAdapt

Adaptation to Climate Change of Extensive Livestock Production Models in Europe



lifemontadoadapt.com

LIFE Montado-Adapt

LIFE Montado & Climate - A need to adapt



lifecanadas.es

LIFE Cañadas

Conservation and restoration of drove roads to enhance biodiversity and connectivity of Natura 2000 sites in Spain



agriadapt.eu

LIFE AgriAdapt

Sustainable adaptation to Climate Change of European Agrarian Systems



regenerate.eu

LIFE Regenerate

Revitalisation of multifunctional Mediterranean agro-silvopastoral systems using dynamic and cost-effective operational practices



desert-adapt.it

LIFE Desert Adapt

Preparing desertification areas for increased climate change



lifescrubsnet.eu

LIFE Scrubsnet

Revitalizing semi-arid extensive farming habitats through the sustainable management of their associated scrubs areas



life.cimvdl.pt

LIFE Landscape Fire Project

New methodologies for forest fire prevention



lifemaronesa.eu

LIFE Maronesa

Market Awareness Raising for Opportunities in Needed Extensification and Soil-friendly Agriculture



lifenadapta.navarra.es

LIFE-IP NAdapta-CC

Towards an integrated, coherent and inclusive implementation of Climate Change Adaptation policy in a region: Navarre



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