



**European Committee  
of the Regions**

**PASTORALISM: A CRUCIAL WAY TO TACKLE SUSTAINABILITY CHALLENGES IN  
THE EU AND BEYOND**

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FOR NATURAL RESOURCES**

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Honourable Members of the European Parliament, Dear Ministers, Dear Commissioner, Representative of the European Commission, Dear Colleagues, Dear Participants, Dear Pastoralists of Europe,

I am very pleased to welcome you to the European Committee of the Regions — the Home of the Regions — for this webinar on pastoralism, organised with the great support of the Yolda Initiative, Euromontana and the Regional IYRP (International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists) Support Group for Europe.

## **WHY IS IT ESSENTIAL TO MAINTAIN AGROPASTORALISM IN EUROPE?**

For the European Committee of the Regions, maintaining pastoralism is vital for keeping rural areas alive and for contributing to territorial cohesion, which is a fundamental value of the EU. It brings two immediate positive results: it strengthens economic productivity (of low-value land) and increases demography (in very sparsely populated areas).

I hope today we can take stock of these two dimensions of pastoralism and elaborate on the different aspects of these positive effects. I want to bring pastoralism out of the limited circle of experts and practitioners. I want pastoralism to become part of a larger concept of a new Deal for more sustainable development, on which we all have to work.

The development of pastoralism will help the EU to speed up the much-needed transition towards sustainable agriculture, high-quality food and improved animal well-being. There is a close link between pastoralism and high-quality products, boosting the added value of local agricultural production. The scientific community agrees that global warming means that the quantity of industrially-produced livestock must be reduced and livestock farming practices made more extensive in order to meet our environmental and climate objectives. Pastoral systems are also better-placed to withstand the effects of climate change and to adapt to it. In addition, pastoralism meets animal well-being objectives and the European public's expectations in this area.

Pastoralism is also an asset for developing tourism in rural areas. Pastoral practices are closely tied in with the development of products with official quality labels that make these areas more attractive to tourism, using short marketing circuits. Trekking in the mountains in the summer, and all year round in Mediterranean pastoral regions, is a significant tourist activity for these areas. Pastoral landscapes can even be covered by the UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage, as communities, practices and know-how help to shape landscapes.

The lands and migration routes pastoralists have managed over millennia, protecting threatened species and habitats, ensuring ecological integrity of landscapes and supporting ecological processes, maintain areas of importance for ecological connectivity and provide critical ecosystem services such as carbon storage.

Last but not least, pastoralism also offers the significant advantage of keeping landscapes open, maintaining undergrowth and preventing natural disasters. Pastoralism is crucial with regard to maintaining "open" environments which would otherwise be subject to scrub encroachment. In dry areas, flocks help to stop fires spreading by keeping scrub under control. It should be borne in mind that reducing the risk of forest fires is also a public safety policy, as forest fires cause dozens of deaths each year in the European Union. Moreover, ongoing global warming is set to dramatically increase the level of fire risk across increasingly large areas.

## **NEW CHALLENGES TO MAINTAINING PASTORALISM**

The survival of pastoralism is under threat from a range of difficulties: those arising from the economic context, the spread of industrial agriculture, competition for land, difficulties in handing know-how, environmental constraints on the organisation of grazing, competition with other users of pasture, in particular for leisure purposes, and lastly the threat to livestock posed by large carnivores.

The situation is worrying for pastoralism in many European countries where populations of large carnivores are growing. The losses caused by large predators are very significant and rising. Many livestock farmers, faced with a threat that is beyond their control in spite of the protective measures in place, are completely overwhelmed and are abandoning pasture zones and sometimes giving up farming altogether.

As mentioned previously, pastoral regions are often highly attractive to tourism, which has a powerful impact on land prices and the fragmentation of land holdings. This leads to the loss of plots of land available to livestock farmers and makes it increasingly difficult for new farmers to set up in these areas.

## **COR PROPOSALS**

We want the new Common Agriculture Policy to support pastoralism and extensive, sustainable grazing, taking better account of their beneficial role in balanced territorial development to help meet our environmental and climate objectives. I also want to set up an Action Plan with the European Commission which includes the promotion of pastoralism. This webinar should help us design such an action plan at EU level.

Of course, we also need to think globally. That is why it is a great pleasure for me to say that we have with us here today Mr Zagdjav Mendsaikhan, the Mongolian Government's Minister of Food, Agriculture and Light Industry. We very much welcome the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists initiative supported by an international coalition of players and led by the Government of Mongolia. In this context, it is of the utmost importance that the EU and EU Member States, as a bloc, support the proposal to establish observance under the United Nations system of an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP) in 2026.

Today we are going to address these pastoralism issues in four round tables, on: the contribution of pastoralism to biodiversity and to tackling climate change; food security and resilient rural communities; pastoralism's role at international level; and, lastly, ways to develop an EU action plan for pastoralism and to support the IYRP in concrete terms. I wish you all fruitful discussions and, for the first round table, I am giving the floor to Pablo Manzano from the Helsinki Institute of Sustainability Science.

Thank you for your attention.