



Agricoltura e alimentazione nel 2050

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Enhancing pastures management for biodiversity conservation: the LIFE ShepForBio project

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Introduction

In many environments, reduction of animal grazing and abandonment of pastures lead to encroachment by woody species and reduction of herbaceous open areas. Hence, conservative management of these threatened habitats is the core challenge of several European directives and Agricultural policies. To address these issues, the LIFE project “Shepherds for Biodiversity in Mountain Marginal Areas” (ShepForBio, LIFE 20NAT/IT/001076, 2021-2027), co-funded by the EU LIFE ENV programme and involving different partners aims at enhancing open grassland habitats (listed in Natura 2000 Directive) located in the Northern Apennines, applying feasible and sustainable strategies for their recovery and conservation.



Materials and Methods

The habitats interested by the project are the following:

- 6210: Semi-natural dry grasslands and scrubland facies on calcareous substrates (Festuco-Brometalia);
- 6230: Species-rich *Nardus* grasslands, on siliceous substrates in mountain areas;
- 5130: *Juniperus communis* formations on heaths or calcareous grasslands.

In these areas, a monitoring protocol has been implemented to evaluate *ex ante* and *ex post* benefits from management interventions concerning the conservation status of vegetation and associated ecosystem services.

After recovery, these areas will be used for grazing under specific management plans which will be developed along the project, to ensure the long-term maintenance of the restored habitats.



Expected results

The expected results of the project concern the recovery of specific areas and the improvement of the ecological value of habitats 6210, 6230 and 5130 (in some cases of priority importance) through restoration interventions and long-term management. For each site, specific pastoral plans will be developed so as to promote rational management methods based on potential stocking rate and proper grazing techniques, eventual mowing in specific sectors, to be adopted by the managers of the lands.

Moreover, specific interventions will be applied to encourage pastoral management: building of infrastructures for pastoral activities (fences, systems to prevent predator damage, watering points) will be implemented to accelerate the return of pastoral and grazing activities.

Other actions to promote and replicate pasture management and its effectiveness for conservation purposes are envisaged within and outside the project area. In particular, several actions will be devoted to education, like the organization of a School for shepherds and breeders scheduled in several training cycles. Different activities are also planned for the dissemination of results, both at Italian and international level, and for the promotion of pastoralism as a tool for the conservation of biodiversity in the European context.

Conclusions

The LIFE project ShepForBio represents a good opportunity to promote the importance of recovering endangered grasslands for biodiversity conservation by means of abandoned areas recovering, infrastructure creation for their management, optimal grazing systems identification and application for their long-term sustainability. Concurrently, the project will increase capacity building and awareness on the importance of these ecosystems and their recovery for biodiversity conservation.