



ShepForBio Pastoral Schools Newsletter #1

LIFE SHEP
FOR BIO

Welcome to the first edition of the ShepForBio Newsletter dedicated to pastoral schools!

This newsletter will be released twice. In this first edition, you can find more information regarding ShepForBio, the importance of creating a network of European Shepherds schools... and many other interesting topics!

If you want to stay updated with our activities, you can subscribe to our [newsletter](#) and follow the project on our [website](#) and [facebook page](#).



About Shep4Bio

The LIFE ShepForBio Project aims to improve the conservation status of three grassland habitats. These habitats have a high naturalistic value, and they fall into the Habitats Directive (codes 5130, 6210*, and 6230*). To ensure sustainable and lasting management of these environments, the development of pastoral activities in marginal upland areas should be enhanced. The Project aims to restore more than 340 hectares of land and improve the conservation status of an additional 147 hectares. These areas will be grazed following management plans developed during the project. Those plans aim to maintain the efficiency restored by the planned recovery actions. The Project's intervention areas fall in two Italian Apennine regions, Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna, mainly within the Casentino Forest National Park.

In addition, the project will establish a School for Shepherds and Breeders to help people potentially interested in undertaking project-related activities.

Actions are also planned to disseminate the results, both in Italy and internationally, and to promote pastoralism as a tool for biodiversity conservation. In this context, a series of online meetings (Discussion forum) and three international conferences will be organised. The aim is to connect pastoral schools and relevant actors/networks promoting pastoral practices across Europe. The international events are designed to exchange knowledge, best practices, and challenges among the attendants. The final aim is to encourage the dialogue between European pastoral schools that can build on each other's successes and difficulties and set up future collaborations.



Appia and SNAP: challenging generational renewal in Italian pastoralism

In large parts of Italy, pastoralism is a significant element of the territory as well as of socio-cultural traditions of different regions. The wool economy has shaped landscapes and economies throughout centuries, cheese and meat products are significant components of local diets, tourism packages as well as export baskets. Pastoralism is also increasingly appreciated for the socio-ecosystem services it provides, such as fire prevention, biodiversity preservation, soil and water management. These are particularly appreciated in the inland, mountains (Alps as well as Apennines) and islands that cover large parts of the country territory. Pastoralism contributes significantly to maintaining these territories alive and productive through sustainable use of local natural resources.

The large diversity of these agro-ecological settings has though made it difficult for pastoralists to coordinate their claims and organise their collective action. As elsewhere in Europe, herders and shepherds are therefore poorly represented in policy for and often marginalised in decision making. In this contest the [Rete Appia \(Italian pastoral network\)](#) was established in 2017, with a view to represents pastoralists interests in different institutional and technical domains.

A main endeavour of the Rete so far has been coordinating efforts with other organizations, actors and institutions with a view to set a process that aims at establishing shepherd schools throughout the country, based on the examples of experiences in Spain and France. Despite the growing appreciation for this practice at all levels, pastoralism in Italy suffers in fact from a major problem of generational turnover with negative consequences on the whole environment t and society. The low profitability of the sector, combined with the problems of access to land and credit, hinders the maintenance of family-based production as well as the start-up of self-entrepreneurship projects by the younger generations, who seem poorly attracted by this important farming system.

Through the [Scuola Nazionale di Pastorizia \(SNAP\)](#) this process has been set, with a view to address the many challenges stemming from the changes and challenges pastoralists are tackling in these times – from technological advances, to organizational innovations, from cohabiting with predators to making sense of policy measures, from dairy processing to the governance of value chains. The term 'school' might though be misleading, as it embodies and static structure, rather than a dynamic process, and might indicate that pastoralists are not adequately skilled in their professions. These are neither true, and the real objective of shepherd schools is to promote a societal dialogue between pastoralist and other territorial agents and societal actors, with a view to recognise its consistency and appreciate its contributions.

In this sense the school aspires to provide elements of training, information, innovation and dialogue and it is proposed through **modular, itinerant and interactive modalities**. Modular as it is made up of sectoral thematic modules, organised according to the profile of the course recipients, and the interest of local actors. It is itinerant as it adapts to the specificities of the local territories, taking



advantage of available host structures, and to allow for the direct involvement of local farms. It is highly interactive as it is based on sharing information and enhancing dialogue with other territorial actors (veterinarians, park rangers, market agents, public authorities, forest officers, tourism agencies, etc...).

The training modules are conceived as residential workshops articulated in seasonal sessions and include theoretical, practical and farm internships. They are aimed at women and men interested in undertaking this activity, who may be workers in other sectors, unemployed, immigrants or students. Complementary services, assistance and broader support for setting up a livestock farm on its own are as well envisaged. Through complementary initiatives aiming to animate the territory and engaging a societal dialogues, the Schools represent an opportunity to convey knowledge, awareness and value regarding this type of profession, and to strengthen the skills, rights and resources for those who practice it.



Credit: Elena Dacome



Credit: PASTRES.org



Towards a European Network of Shepherd Schools

Shepherd schools face two key problems for the survival of extensive livestock:

- Lack of training to compensate for the shortage of qualified professionals.
- Difficulties with the installation of young livestock farmers

Over the years, several projects have engaged with organisations involved in the management of shepherd's schools training models. Despite their involvement, there has not been an initiative that allows the constant sharing of experiences, results and evaluations, as well as the sharing of different training and learning methodologies in sustainable management.

Because of this, the company "Edintra" (whose manager director participated in the start-up of the Andalusian Shepherd School and collaborates in Alvão Shepherd School in Portugal) considered the need to revitalize a network of European Shepherd Schools. During the closing event of the 1st edition of the Alvão Shepherd School celebrated in Braga (Agro Fair on March 26, 2022), a project led by the National Federation of Autochthones Breeds of Portugal (FERA) discussed the different models of training in their respective countries, their main objectives and challenges, and the relevance of the creation of an European Shepherd Schools network ¹.

During the event, the interest in promoting the creation of a "European Network of Shepherd Schools" became clear, for number of reasons:

- Exchanging experiences between School's training models: sharing strengths and weaknesses.
- Designing a common learning methodology (a basic program of minimum contents) that helps improve the day-to-day running of shepherd schools or at the beginning of other new initiatives in other territories.
- Creating a digital platform that helps to share existing information (schools, programmes, topics, etc.) and with all that is generated (meetings, common projects, proposals of farms internships etc.).
- Designing and implement an exchange program both for students and graduates, teachers, farmers, etc.
- Analysing and sharing good innovative practices that promote and improve pastoralism and extensive livestock farming.
- Developing and sharing social communication mechanisms that help make our practices and all the positive effects of extensive livestock and pastoralism more visible.

This network would aim to

¹ This was done in collaboration with Aguiarfloresta association and financed by the "La Caixa" Foundation (BPI Rural program), representatives of Shepherd Schools from Portugal (Alvão), Italy (RETE APPIA), France (Provence-Alpes and Pyrenees regions), Canary Islands, Andalusia and Catalonia from Spain (also from Extremadura region and Basque country agreed with this initiative).



- Help improving the management and financing of European Shepherd schools and encourage our active participation in the reforms of the CAP and European regulations in general.
- Improving the sustainable management of grazing resources and our farms.

A number of short-term goals were also set during this event:

- Creating a network of schools at European level that allows carrying out training activities, promoting contact between organizations that manage the different models. The aim is to help other territories (European and non-European) to undertake similar education and training initiatives.
- Creating a program to exchange experiences to improve the training methodology and learning program in each territory.
- Creating an exchange program for students and teachers from the different shepherd schools or training centers in pastoralism (as in France).

Currently, Edintra is continuing to promote the creation of this network, by contacting other European entities and searching funding to carry out all the activities described previously.



Figure 1: Agreement in of promoting the creation of a “European Network of Shepherd Schools”



The Erasmus+ project PAstorEA



Figure 2: Mountain pasture where we talked about biodiversity conservation with the shepherd.
Photo credit: Mathieu Plagnet

The Erasmus+ project PastorEA (2020–2022) brings together 3 agricultural education structures in France, Galicia and Slovenia (l'Institut Agro - Florac, Federacion de Escuelas Agrarias de Galicia, Biotechnical Centre Naklo). It aims to exchange on the issues, contexts and practices related to the transmission of knowledge on pastoralism, in particular on the topics of adaptation to climate change, predation, preservation of biodiversity and the fight against fire risk. The aim is to encourage and/or develop training in pastoralism to give it its rightful place in agricultural training and in an agro-ecological transition process.

Three-day training sessions were organised in each of the countries for a mixed audience: livestock breeders and shepherds, teachers/trainers, researchers, advisers and technicians from Chambers of agriculture, from pastoral associations and unions, or from organisations managing labels or brands. Each of them brought their own vision of pastoralism, their own context and will be responsible for disseminating the work.

We have seen great differences in the acceptance of the term pastoralism and in practices. For example, in Slovenia most of the livestock farming takes place on family farms with small herds. There are very few large-scale farms and the system is mainly based on rotational grazing on semi-permanent grassland. There are no herding dogs, unlike in France where transhumance is quite common. The transmission of knowledge is essentially generational. In France, several



pastoral systems coexist between transhumant and non-transhumant system, herds guarded by shepherds or on enclosed pastures. Training is quite developed with 5 shepherd schools (ewes/cows) but most of the long training courses in animal husbandry give a rather weak part to pastoralism which can be reduced to a folkloric approach (transhumance for example), or concerning a socially lively issue such as predation. In Galicia, no typical pastoral training is provided and the exchanges, as well as the visits showed, that pastoral practices had largely regressed to the benefit of a more conventional livestock management (milk or meat), with management of grass sward in rotational grazing for example. The problem of forest fires has nevertheless brought back the question of pastoralism as a means of preventing fires in areas abandoned by agriculture.

Beyond the training needs identified in the programme for farmers, shepherds and teachers/trainers, we note the need to train other actors (political, technical, territorial managers, etc.) in pastoralism to enhance the value of the profession and encourage the maintenance or development of this environmentally friendly form of farming and land use.

During the programme, links were established at European level with other structures concerned with training in the field of pastoralism, and the emergence of a network on this subject seems to us to be a relevant response to the current challenges. A second Erasmus+ project "Development of innovation" is currently being considered, and should see this network takes shape by enriching the partnership and developing educational resources linked to common issues.



Good practice from Shepard schools: the “Land Bank”

Having access to grazing land for livestock is naturally fundamental to a sheppard’s work. Despite this, finding secure access to land remains a barrier in several EU Member States. This makes Sheppard’s work conditions unattractive and discourages new generations from entering the sector. This problem is well known among sheppard schools. To solve this problem and help incentivize students not to abandon the activity shortly after completing their studies, pastoral schools such as the Escuela de Ganaderi y Pastoreo (Canary Island, Spain), the Escola de Pastors (Catalunya, Spain) and L' Institut Agro / Domaine et center de formation du Merle (France) created a “Land Bank” platform where students can find information about the available land to use in their area.

The schools that are using the “Land Bank” have noticed that a significant number of students remained in the primary sector. In addition, this good practice makes it easier for them (and for more experienced shepherds) to move animals and to know what infrastructures are available to use. Moreover, having updated knowledge of land availability may help the schools to increase the quality of practical training.

Even though accessibility to land is very important, the collaboration between schools and local and regional authorities should be boosted to increase knowledge on land availability. Actions aimed at improving these aspects are key to making the shepherding profession more attractive for young people and increasing the quality of life for shepherds.



Figure 3: Having access to grazing land for livestock is naturally fundamental to a sheppard’s work. Picture from Oreka Mendian project