



**LIFE
SHEP FOR BIO**

ShepForBio Pastoral School Newsletter #2

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Welcome to the second edition of the LIFE ShepForBio Newsletter dedicated to pastoral schools!

About LIFE ShepForBio

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 discussion forums 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.



Editorial

Pastoral schools are a useful tool to counter the dramatic phenomenon of the lack of generational turnover that plagues pastoral activities in virtually all mountainous areas, and not only in Europe.

Actually, this is not the only crucial role they are invested in. These schools **boost innovation, fostering cultural exchange and promoting good pastoral practices** with positive impacts on biodiversity. Plus, they raise awareness among the wider society as well as the individual shepherds, about the importance of pastoralism as a provider of fundamental ecosystem services.

One of the objectives of the project LIFE ShepForBio is to promote these two last functions, also by building a **network that brings together pastoral schools**, research centers, protected areas and other subjects involved in the training and enhancement of pastoralism at the European level. It is in this very spirit that we organized the meeting "*The role of pastoral schools in the management of natural habitats*" in May 2023, in collaboration with Institut Agro Montpellier. One of the topics discussed during this event in Florac (FR), of which the report can be read below, was precisely to evaluate the opportunity to establish a European network, and it is right from here that we want to pick up the discussion.

We have prepared a [short questionnaire](#) to collect your ideas and proposals in view of the next online discussion forum, during which we would like to further explore the topic. The discussion forum is organized by the LIFE ShepForBio project and scheduled in February: in the survey, you will be able to express your preference about the possible date.

Please share your views with us and enjoy the read,

Tommaso Campedelli

D.R.E.A.M. Italia, Leading the consortium of LIFE ShepForBio



Introducing Eu4shepherds project: Innovative Training for Sustainable Shepherds

The [Eu4shepherds](https://www.eu4shepherds.eu/partners) project has been the start of developing an innovative and non-formal model for shepherds, and has been carried out by 9 organisations from 7 partner countries within the project "EU4shepherds - INNOVATIVE TRAINING FOR SUSTAINABLE SHEPHERDS", co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The countries participating in the project represent some of the most important territories in Europe for extensive livestock farming models. Spain and Portugal in the West, Scotland in the North, Romania and Bulgaria in the East or Austria (the Alps) together with Germany in the center of Europe: <https://www.eu4shepherds.eu/partners>

Extensive livestock management systems are crucial for the sustainable maintenance of important rural areas in Europe. These models form the basis of ecological, social and economic sustainability:

- They help to halt depopulation of rural areas and have a positive impact on animal wellbeing and human health when compared to other non-extensive models.
- These models supply consumers with quality food and material products in many European territories and promote the sustainable development of our society.

The future of such livestock exploitation models, currently under threat due to the effects of climate change, economic and administrative barriers, depends on the availability and capacity of extensive shepherds. The problem is that it is increasingly difficult to find well-trained shepherds who have the knowledge, experience and flexibility to face all the aspects involved in extensive livestock shepherding. Shepherds are generally an aging social group in Europe. It can be difficult for young people to access proper training, education and experience, and nowadays there is often less motivation to become a shepherd due to the low economic returns and rural working conditions.

The objectives of the project were as follows:

- To improve and update the training offer for shepherds, taking into account administrative barriers, the new climate scenario and opportunities in organic production trends and agro-tourism. The aim was to provide them with tools and knowledge to ensure sustainable maintenance of extensive sheep farms and became resilient.
- To adapt training methods for both trainers and trainees, promoting a work-based learning approach. This was done in order to ensure the sustainability of the profession and of extensive sheep farms in rural areas.
- To provide an easy and wide access to training, and to promote the use of digital tools for the training shepherds.
- To lay the foundations for the recognition of the values that shepherds bring to society in social, ecological, animal welfare-related aspects, and their importance in the fight against depopulation of rural areas, forest fires and climate change.



The project has achieved the following results:

- Common assessment of the situation of shepherds in Europe: A comprehensive analysis of the needs of shepherds at EU level has been carried out, leading to a common assessment of their current situation.
- Strengthening the employability of shepherds: Updated technical knowledge, new management competencies and ICT skills have been added to the traditional knowledge and experience of herders, with the aim of improving their employability.
- Development of adapted training methodologies and ICT tools to facilitate access to appropriate training for shepherds.
- Promotion of shepherding and rural development: The project has promoted and strengthened the practice of pastoralism and contributed to rural development in the areas involved.
- Involvement of key stakeholders: more than 250 key stakeholders have been involved in the promotion and implementation of the project results in other areas, ensuring continuity of its effects.
- In addition, new training material has been developed for a comprehensive and updated course for shepherds, as well as a trainer's manual and an adapted training platform:
<https://www.eu4shepherds.eu/content/results> <https://www.eu4shepherds.eu/content/training-platform>

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More info:

<https://www.eu4shepherds.eu/>

<https://www.facebook.com/eu4shepherds/>

<https://twitter.com/eu4shepherds>



SNAP, National School of Pastoralism, comes together with Life ShepForBio

Pastoralism, the extensive grazing of domesticated livestock, is the most widespread land use worldwide. Its adaptation to different climates, and to variations within them, and its capacity to produce in the absence of significant fossil fuel inputs, make it an important livelihood and food system option for a decarbonized world. In many Italian regions, especially in inland, mountainous, and island areas, pastoralism plays a role as custodian of land, countering the increasing phenomena of abandonment in marginal rural areas. Pastoralism helps keep these territories alive and productive. The sector also offers significant room for development and expansion, by introducing and weaving together innovative approaches into tradition.

Pastoral livelihoods are increasingly recognised for their contributions to the inhabited socio-environments. Through livestock rearing, pastoralists create and maintain mosaic landscapes and mini habitats and play an important role for the conservation of biodiversity. They connect ecosystems by transporting seeds; trampling and grazing improve the water-holding capacity of grassland, reduce the risk of forest fires, restore and maintain soil fertility through manure and nutrient cycling. Yet its resilience is at stake due to the erosion suffered by its socio-ecosystem. The ensuing discourse drives to a vision on pastoralism as missing environmental and economic sustainability – the latter affecting livelihood adoption by younger community members and endangering its long-term sustainability.

The profession of the shepherd today is very different from that of the shepherd in the past. It is no coincidence that the number of extensive livestock farms in our territory has almost halved in the last decade. Environmental changes, climate dynamics, depopulation of rural areas, the growing presence of predators, in an increasingly global and uncertain market, as well as institutional and social dynamics with agricultural, environmental, and food policies responding to diversified societal demands, is altogether adding pressure on the pastoral sector. These processes are profoundly altering the agro-ecological and socio-economic landscape in which shepherds operate and are intertwined with demographic processes and technological developments, making the shepherd's profession increasingly complex. Significant changes and new challenges require innovations, both technical and organizational, as well as developments in knowledge, skills, and relationships.

In order to respond to some of these challenges, [Rete Appia](#), together with many partners including [CREA](#), Università di Torino with the departmenteur [DISAFA](#) e [DICPS](#), [EURAC](#), [D.R.E.A.M. Italia](#), [CNR Sassari](#), [Riabitare l'Italia](#), [AgenForm](#), [NEMO soc coop](#), among others, gathered under the larger umbrella of the National School of Pastoralism (hereinafter referred to as SNAP, Italian acronym). SNAP aims to provide elements of 'training, information, innovation, and dialogue', through courses offered across Italy adapted to local specificities. Various experiences in Italy have referred to the ideas promoted by SNAP; like in the Italian Piedmont region with the Scuola Giovani Pastori, in Sardinia with Scuola Sarda di Pastorizia, and in Tuscany with the project Life ShepForBio. The initiative is providing an essential platform for all actors



involved in the SNAP to reflect on the experiences held so far and how to strengthen coordination and cooperation to be most effective in the services offered to the young pastoralists of tomorrow. Within this goal, Rete Appia has organized two online webinars, and a two-days workshop. The first webinar was about the “European processes to build a European net of pastoral schools”, while the second focused on “European experiences of pastoral schools”, with testimonies from the various existing projects across Europe. Both webinars have the intention to come with alliance-building with European movements involved in the pastoral schools.

Finally, Rete Appia in collaboration with NEMO soc coop has organised a two-days workshop which reunited all actors involved in the SNAP. We heard the testimonies and voices of the students of the existing Italian pastoral schools, with the goal to learn from their experiences to meet their true demands and needs. During the two days we discussed the educational content and model of the nascent pastoral schools, the target of students and aspiring shepherds, the relationships with other actors in the territory, and much more, under the goal to define a model that can serve as a reference, respecting needs and diversities of the territories, for the creation and development of schools for the shepherds of the future. The workshop aimed at making the alliance for the safeguard of the future of pastoralism stronger and louder, truly considering the important contribution of the hundreds of pastoralists who across Italy help maintain our culture and territory alive.

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More info:

<https://retepastorizia.it/>



The Report from the first LIFE ShepForBio international conference in Florac is available

During the 10 and 11 May 2023, the first LIFE ShepForBio **International Conference** was held in Florac (France). Investigating the **role of pastoral schools in the management of natural habitats**, two days of presentations, interactive discussions and field visits were attended by around 30 participants, including pastoral schools, shepherds, natural park managers, and various public and private stakeholders involved in pastoralism and habitat management. The full **report** is available [here](#).

The Pedagogical Farm at Agricultural Colleges: An Essential Resource for Training Future Shepherds and Extension Professionals to Address Climate Challenges in the Mediterranean Region

One distinctive feature of the French public vocational training system is the inclusion of a pedagogical farm in each agricultural college. How can this resource be used to effectively train students and initiate an ecological transition?

Let's explore the example of [Sartene College in Corsica](#), which specializes in the training of future shepherds and extension service professionals. The college's farm houses a dairy sheep herd managed under a semi-pastoral system (grasslands and cork oak light forest). We are actively engaged in projects aimed at enhancing feeding autonomy and **adapting our livestock practices** to address the **challenges of climate change**. These projects include:

- Enhancing pasture management (forage trials, grass growth measurements and modelling, and rotational grazing).
- Rehabilitating lightly forested areas for multiple purposes, (forestry, cork production, soil improvement, fire protection, and the generation of new forage resources like acorns and grass).

In this context, the pedagogical farm serves as an invaluable tool. Initially, we implement technical changes within our farm's technical management system in collaboration with research institutions and extension services. The farm operates as an **experimental unit**, generating valuable insights and practical resources (deliverables) for both professionals and students/teachers.

Subsequently, we present the outcomes of our experiments to various **stakeholders**, including student classes who visit the farm with their teachers. The pedagogical team has integrated these educational



visits into the curricula. Most importantly, this approach fosters **pedagogical innovation**. Students are not passive observers of these changes but active participants!

This is achieved through project-based learning and, ideally, problem-based learning. In the latter scenario, students, teachers, researchers, and the farm's staff collaboratively define problems and seek innovative solutions. By doing so, we immerse students in a highly realistic setting that mirrors the challenges they will face in their future professional careers. In this way, we fully embrace our role in vocational training.

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