

# Pastoral Schools and Generational Renewal in Europe

DG AGRI Lunchtime debate

3 June 2026

On 3 June 2026, the European Commission's [Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development](#) (DG AGRI) hosted a hybrid lunchtime debate entitled "[Pastoral Schools and Generational Renewal in Europe](#)" at the DG AGRI L130 Auditorium in Brussels and online via Webex.

The event brought together more than 100 participants in total, with both online and in-person attendees, including DG AGRI experts, regional authorities, pastoral schools' delegates and stakeholders, and representatives of various projects, to explore the role of pastoral schools in supporting generational renewal within extensive livestock farming systems. The dialogue highlighted how these training initiatives can contribute not only to attracting new entrants to the sector but also to broader objectives such as biodiversity conservation, climate adaptation, wildfire prevention, sustainable rural development, as well as providing and improving communication on issues related to pastoralism, thereby improving public perception of it and positioning it on the local and territorial agendas.

The programme featured a scene setter foreword from DG AGRI representatives Alba Barrutieta (Policy Officer B3, DG AGRI), and Michele Nori (Policy Officer B2, DG AGRI), followed by a European overview of pastoral schools and their current and potential positive impact on mountain and rural areas by Beatrice Bellavia ([LIFE ShepForBio project](#), [Euromontana](#)).

Then, the conversation focused on the concrete experiences of four pastoral schools across Europe, each focusing on a specific theme closely linked to the features and the needs of its territory. Two of these schools are amongst the several experiences funded by the [LIFE program](#). The recording of the event is available [here](#). All the presentations can be found below:

- [Beatrice Bellavia \(LIFE ShepForBio project, Euromontana\)](#)
- [Tommaso Campedelli \(LIFE ShepForBio project, Dream Italia\)](#)
- [Lauriane Flamand \(EPLEFPA Chambéry-La Motte-Servolex; French National Association of Transhumant Shepherd and Herder Schools - ANEBVT\)](#)

- [Maria Diaz de Quijano Barbero \(Escola de pastors de Catalunya\)](#)
- [Marco Fernandes \(Terra Maronesa\)](#)



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Over the past decade, shepherd schools have emerged in **Italy** to address skills shortages, generational renewal, and the promotion of sustainable pastoralism. As illustrated by **Tommaso Campedelli** ([LIFE ShepForBio project](#), [Dream Italia](#)), the [LIFE ShepForBio Shepherd School](#), launched in 2023, combines theoretical, practical, and on-farm training, and has already trained 23 new shepherds, with most graduates now working in or establishing pastoral activities.

Beyond training, shepherd schools help preserve traditional knowledge, build professional networks, improve the image of pastoralism, and support access to jobs and services. To maximise their impact, stronger policy recognition, stable funding, a European network of pastoral schools, and the development of a common European training framework and professional qualification for shepherds are needed.



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**France** has developed a national certification for transhumant shepherds through a network of five pastoral schools operating across six mountain regions. **Lauriane Flamand** ([EPLEFPA Chambéry-La Motte-Servolex](#); French National Association of Transhumant Shepherd and Herder Schools - ANEBVT) explained that the programme is built around a shared competency framework that prepares shepherds, farmers, and herders to manage changing environmental conditions and adapt their practices to challenges such as climate change.

By placing adaptation at the core of pastoral training, the French model supports generational renewal, strengthens the attractiveness of pastoral professions, and contributes to biodiversity conservation, climate resilience, and the vitality of rural and mountain territories.

The [School of Shepherds of Catalonia](#), in Catalonia, **Spain**, was established to support generational renewal in agriculture and promote agroecological, economically viable, and environmentally sustainable livestock farming. The school combines extensive classroom learning with long on-farm internships, providing over 1,000 hours of training in areas such as animal health, grazing management, silvopasture, fire prevention, mountain pastoralism, livestock handling, and farm business management.

**Maria Diaz de Quijano Barbero** (Escola de pastors de Catalunya) explained that beyond training, the initiative addresses broader structural challenges facing European agriculture, including ageing farming population and barriers for young entrants. It complements education with services such as a job bank, farm incubator, and support for farm succession. Since its creation, the school has trained hundreds of students, with the vast majority of graduates remaining linked to the agricultural sector and many working directly in primary production, demonstrating its effectiveness in attracting and retaining new pastoralists.



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The Shepherd School of Alvão, Portugal, in the wider framework of the Terra Maronesa initiative, combines an integrated approach to wildfire prevention, rural regeneration, and sustainable livestock farming. The initiative responds to the growing wildfire crisis in Mediterranean mountain regions, where rural abandonment has led to the loss of traditional shepherding, fuel accumulation, and increasingly severe fires. Its core strategy combines extensive grazing by native Maronesa cattle with prescribed burning (“pyric herbivory”) to actively manage vegetation, reduce fuel loads, restore pasture productivity, and create more fire-resilient landscapes.

**Marco Fernandes** (Terra Maronesa) explained that the model is implemented through the Terra Maronesa Association, a community of breeders, technicians, and local

stakeholders that has operated since 2018 as a living laboratory for balancing people, animals, and nature. To scale this approach, the initiative established the Shepherd School of Alvão, which trains shepherds as landscape managers through practical, farm-based learning. The curriculum includes prescribed fire management, pasture management, predator coexistence, and carbon and ecosystem stewardship. The project has gained international recognition, including the selection of the [LIFE Maronesa Project](#) as a good practice by the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, demonstrating its potential as a replicable model for wildfire prevention and sustainable land management across Mediterranean Europe.



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All in all, the case studies from France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy showcased the diversity of innovative pastoral training models that combine vocational education with territorial development and environmental stewardship.

The event concluded with an interactive question-and-answer session involving both in-person and online participants, providing an opportunity to exchange experiences and discuss future perspectives for pastoral education and generational renewal across Europe. Among the points raised:

## Student profiles and diversity

- What is the background of students attending shepherd schools in terms of gender, nationality, and origin?
- Do students come from different countries, and are migrants represented among participants?

### Reaction: Tommaso Campedelli (LIFE ShepForBio Shepherd School, Italy)

- *Some students come from abroad, but most are from Italy, especially from the regions of Tuscany and Emilia Romagna.*

## Recognition of shepherds' skills and qualifications

- Shepherds are not only livestock keepers but also landscape managers. How is this broader role recognised in training programmes?
- In France, shepherd training is linked to a national certification. How does this fit within the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and could it facilitate recognition across other European countries?

### Reaction: Tommaso Campedelli (LIFE ShepForBio Shepherd School, Italy)

- *Shepherd is indeed about landscape conservation, and reiterates the importance of achieving official recognition at the EU level;*

## Attractiveness of the profession

- Shepherding is often perceived as a difficult profession, characterised by low salaries, demanding working conditions, and limited social recognition. What can be done to improve the image of the profession and make it more attractive, valued, and respected, particularly among young people?
- Have schools observed changes in attitudes towards pastoralism among younger generations compared to older ones?

### Reaction: Marco Fernandes (Shepherd School of Alvão, Portugal)

- *There is a need to reconnect society with the value of pastoral landscapes and rural areas. The option of working in such scenarios is already contributing to making the job highly attractive. Portugal is getting more urbanised and rural areas are left behind and are often considered only in relation to wildfires. Shepherd schools contribute by increasing the visibility and social recognition of shepherding.*

### Reaction: Tommaso Campedelli (LIFE ShepForBio Shepherd School, Italy)

- *Cautioned against excessive romanticisation of the shepherd profession, stressing the importance of acknowledging both its value and its challenges.*

### **Diversification of income**

- In regions such as Bavaria, many young farmers combine farming with secondary occupations. Is this trend also visible among students and graduates of pastoral schools?

#### **Reaction: Tommaso Campedelli (LIFE ShepForBio Shepherd School, Italy)**

- *In Italy, sometimes, taking care of the animals is already the secondary profession.*

### **Market opportunities and economic viability**

- Do pastoral schools provide training on the marketing of small ruminant products, including carcass classification/management and meat valorisation?
- Is wool valorisation addressed in training programmes, particularly in contexts where wool is often considered a low-value by-product?
- How are schools preparing shepherds to improve the economic sustainability of their activities?

#### **Reaction: Marco Fernandes (Shepherd School of Alvão, Portugal)**

- *The school also addresses economic challenges in the sheep and goat sectors, including the lack of market demand for wool. Training includes examples of business models that can help maintain the viability of pastoral activities.*

#### **Reaction Barnabé Achard (EPLEFPA Chambéry-La Motte-Servolex, France)**

- *Generational renewal is not only about access to land and economic opportunities; it also depends on the willingness of rural communities to welcome newcomers. Passing on a farm to someone from outside the local community can be difficult, and this social dimension must be considered.*
- *It's important to narrow down the definition of shepherd, too. The profession, in France, encompasses diverse roles, including livestock breeders, farm managers, shepherd-employees, and other workers, whose interests may not always align.*

#### **Reaction: Tommaso Campedelli (LIFE ShepForBio Shepherd School, Italy)**

- *At the school, there are modules on the aspect of wool, but the situation is quite difficult in Italy; this is considered a “special waste”, and the shepherds need to pay for the disposal. A solution is needed.*

## Pastoral schools across Europe

- Countries such as Ireland, Romania, and Greece were not represented in the mapping of pastoral schools, despite their strong pastoral traditions. What is the situation in these countries?

### **Reaction Beatrice Bellavia (LIFE ShepForBio, Euromontana)**

- *The map is a very preliminary overview and is currently a work in progress; yet, the information across countries is highly scattered and fragmented, so any data on schools in those countries is most welcome.*

## Traditional knowledge and intergenerational transmission

- Older shepherds hold extensive knowledge, including animal husbandry practices, landscape management, and traditional healing methods, much of which is not formally recognised. How can this knowledge be better integrated into training programmes and acknowledged within policy frameworks?

### **Reaction: Marco Fernandes (Shepherd School of Alvão, Portugal)**

- *Traditional knowledge is a cornerstone of shepherd training. While our programmes involve veterinarians, animal welfare specialists, and zootechnicians, experienced shepherds remain the primary trainers.*
- *Most practical learning takes place directly alongside older shepherds, often aged 60–75, whose knowledge of animals and pastoral systems is considered invaluable and must be transmitted to future generations.*

### **Reaction: Tommaso Campedelli (LIFE ShepForBio Shepherd School, Italy)**

- *We recognise the importance of engaging older generations of shepherds in the school activities, both with theory and practical lessons. The link with them often continues even after the school programme is over, with a sort of mentoring dynamic that persists in time and has a special human dimension too.*

## Improving working conditions

- While schools help train new generations of shepherds, the profession often remains socially and economically undervalued. What measures are needed to improve working conditions, remuneration, and professional recognition?
- Participants noted that in some countries, such as Turkey, important pastoral traditions have already been significantly weakened or lost.

### **Reaction Barnabé Achard (EPLEFPA Chambéry-La Motte-Servolex, France)**

- *Working conditions are influenced by both economic and environmental pressures. A French law is currently being examined to reduce such constraints. In France, strong agricultural value chains, particularly for quality-labelled dairy products, help keep the price of production high, and improve conditions for young students.*
- *Wolf predation remains a major issue. A significant proportion of shepherd employment is linked to livestock protection measures and subsidies (80% shepherds are paid with funds linked to protection), and reductions in support for predator protection could have major consequences for the sector. If the flocks cannot be protected (also economically), most mountain landscapes could be abandoned in a few years.*

In the concluding remarks, **Michele Nori** (DG AGRI) stressed that from a policy perspective, the ecosystem services provided by pastoralism should be formally recognised and remunerated. The current support mechanisms often focus on reimbursing costs (for example, predator protection measures), whereas policies should increasingly reward the public benefits generated by pastoralism, including biodiversity conservation, landscape management, and wildfire prevention.

A social stigma continues to affect the profession, but pastoral schools have significant potential to change perceptions and strengthen the political and social recognition of shepherds and pastoral systems.