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**LIFE SHEP
FOR BIO**

GOOD PRACTICES INSIGHTS COLLECTION

THEME 1: EXTENSIVE LIVESTOCK & CONSERVATION



LIFE20 NAT/IT/001076

Shepherds for Biodiversity in Mountain Marginal Areas

Introduction

Extensive livestock systems have long shaped protected and high-nature-value landscapes, contributing to the ecological balance and resilience of diverse environments. Rooted in mobility, seasonal rhythms, and close interaction with natural resources, pastoral practices **support habitats and species** that depend on low-intensity land use. This first edition presents a curated selection of good practices that highlight how extensive livestock farming plays a strategic role in the **conservation of ecosystems** while sustaining viable rural livelihoods. By promoting heterogeneous landscapes and supporting ecological processes, extensive grazing contributes to **biodiversity conservation** and the long-term health of protected areas. Conservation, however, extends beyond ecological outcomes.

Landscapes are the result of a dynamic and continuous interaction between natural factors and human activity. **Pastoral communities** have shaped these territories over generations and the **preservation of traditional herding practices, local breeds, and community governance** systems represents an essential dimension of conservation, safeguarding both **tangible and intangible heritage**. This publication aims to inspire practitioners, managers, and policymakers to recognise and support the multiple values of extensive livestock systems. By showcasing practical experiences, it highlights how pastoralism can remain a living, evolving practice that simultaneously conserves biodiversity, protects landscapes, and sustains cultural continuity for future generations.



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SPAIN (COMUNIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE CANARIAS)

Start date: 02/01/2022

End date: 02/01/2028

Gran Canaria Mosaico

Wildfires are one of the main threats affecting the environmental and public safety of Gran Canaria. This landscape-based wildfire prevention strategy, led by the Island Council, restores a mosaic of agriculture, grazing and forest management to reduce fuel loads, strengthen biodiversity and support rural livelihoods through collaboration and payment for ecosystem services.

The project focuses on **grazing** as an effective **economic and ecological tool to prevent wildfires**, in combination with managed forests and cultivated lands. Goats, sheep, cows, and donkeys contribute to the island's fire prevention service through prescribed and controlled grazing in designated strategic areas. Shepherds play a key role, recognised and supported by a **Payment for Ecosystem Services (PES)** scheme which provides compensation for fire prevention, control of invasive exotic species, landscape maintenance and biodiversity conservation. Thanks to this, shepherds diversify their sources of income while contributing to sustainable land management.



In the latest call, **34 farming families** were contracted to graze livestock over 2,269 hectares. Shepherds are remunerated based on the area and strategic value of vegetation cleared, with payments between approx. €40–€180 per hectare. Earlier editions of the programme involved **35–36 shepherds** with around 6,750 sheep and goats across more than 2,000 hectares.



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LATVIA (VIDZEME, LATGALE, KURZEME, ZEMGALE)

Start date: 01/09/2017

End date: 31/03/2023

GrassLIFE Project

This EU-funded grassland restoration project in Latvia aims to restore and manage priority semi-natural grasslands in around 1,320 hectares across 14 Natura2000 sites, using grazing, mowing and community engagement to boost biodiversity and sustainable land use.

GrassLIFE worked to reverse the decline of EU priority grassland habitats by restoring and improving their conservation status and promoting multiple sustainable uses. The initiative successfully intervened on approximately 1,320 hectares by implementing a range of methods including **scrub and bush removal**, **milling** of roots and topsoil, restoration **mowing**, restoration **grazing**, improving species composition, and restoring **wooded meadows**.

By building permanent grazing infrastructure on around 773 hectares and establishing long-term sustainable grazing management on about 610 hectares, the project **integrated ecological restoration into everyday farming** practice.



© GrassLIFE2

A demonstration farm was set up to host events, and 127 restoration plans were developed to guide habitat managers and farmers. The project's successful approach laid the foundation for GrassLIFE2 (2023–2028), which continues these efforts by expanding restoration to another 1,260 hectares.



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PORTUGAL (ALENTEJO, RIBATEJO, BEIRA INTERIOR)

Start date: 01/01/2009

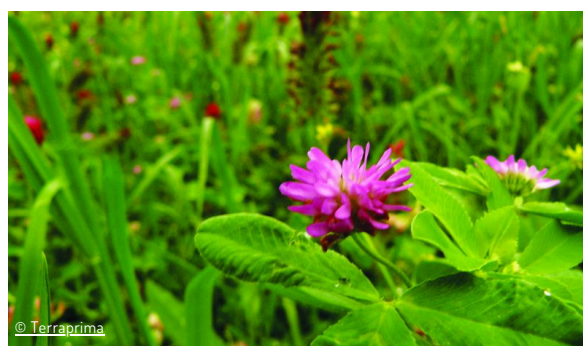
End date: 31/12/2014

Sown Biodiverse Pastures

Launched by the business group Terraprima, this nature-based agricultural initiative promotes sown biodiverse pastures across Portugal to improve soil health, boost productivity, sequester over 1 million tonnes of CO₂, enhance biodiversity and reduce wildfire risk, also through cattle grazing. It involved around 1,000 farmers on 50,000 hectares.

Terraprima promotes **sown biodiverse permanent pastures rich in legumes** to tackle soil degradation, climate change and wildfire risk while supporting rural livelihoods. From 2009 to 2014, the project engaged about 1,000 farmers to sow diversified seed mixtures across approximately 50,000 hectares of degraded Mediterranean soils in southern and central Portugal.

These pastures **increased soil organic matter** up to three times improving fertility, water retention and erosion resistance, and sequestered more than 1 million tonnes of CO₂ in soils.



The mixtures, with up to 20 species or varieties, **increased forage quality** and reduced reliance on synthetic inputs. Farmers received technical support and **payments for carbon sequestration as an ecosystem service**. The approach has been recognized with national and European awards for climate and soil protection innovation and offers a scalable model for integrating biodiversity-rich pastures into climate-smart agriculture.

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 IRELAND (COUNTY GALWAY)

Start date: 01/09/2013

End date: 01/09/2018

AranLIFE

This EU LIFE+ project worked with island farmers to restore and sustainably manage priority grassland and limestone habitats on the Aran Islands, improving conditions over 1,000 hectares, clearing scrub, enhancing grazing infrastructure and supporting biodiversity. It continued through the follow-up initiative Caomhnú Árann (2019/2021).

AranLIFE was a nature conservation project implemented on Inis Mór, Inis Meáin, Inis Oírr Islands off the west coast of County Galway. It brought together **scientific expertise and local farming knowledge** to maintain and improve priority Natura 2000 habitats that support high-nature-value farming and rich biodiversity in a highly fragmented, low-intensity agricultural landscape. The project worked directly with 67 island farmers to devise and implement habitat management plans that reversed habitat degradation trends caused by under-grazing and scrub encroachment.



Actions included clearing, restoring and **implementing optimal grazing plans**, as well as building new water catchments and renovating existing ones to support livestock grazing where rivers are absent. It helped improve the conservation status of ~35 % of priority habitats by developing **best-management practices** tailored to the local context, and produced **scoring-based monitoring tools**, guides and outreach materials to share lessons with farmers, residents, schools and visitors.

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Start date: 01/01/2017

End date: 10/01/2022

Majada de Barcina

This certified organic family business specialises in sheep farming in the Burgos Natural Park. The farm uses extensive grazing supported by scrub clearance and pasture management to restore mosaic landscapes, boost biodiversity and prevent wildfires, while producing high-value ecological products. Thanks to CAP funding, the company manages the land and landscape in a sustainable manner.

La Majada de Barcina is a family-run organic farm combining **extensive sheep grazing** with **land management and artisanal processing**. Founded in 1987, it maintains a flock of around 700 Churra sheep that graze across pastures opened up by targeted scrub clearing under CAP rural development support. The initiative maintains **habitat heterogeneity**, reducing wildfire risk and supporting flora and fauna diversity. Fencing enclosures enable more extensive grazing and protection from predators, while offering **educational farm visits**.



The farm also produces around **5,000 kg of organic cheese** annually from its own sheep's milk and sells around **900 organic lambs** per year, showing how ecological land management links with viable local production.

By integrating traditional grazing with habitat management, the project contributes to wildfire prevention, biodiversity conservation and the viability of rural agricultural practices.

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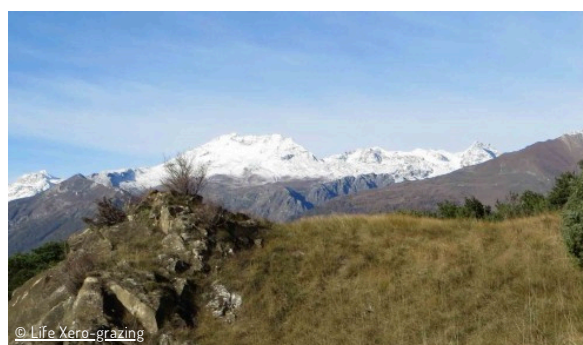
Start date: 01/07/2013

End date: 30/06/2018

LIFE Xero-Grazing

This EU LIFE project restored and conserved priority xerothermic and dry calcareous grasslands in the Valle di Susa (Piedmont) by re-introducing sustainable grazing and habitat restoration over 100 hectares of priority habitat, improving biodiversity and local grazing practices.

The initiative focused on **conserving and restoring priority semi-natural dry grasslands and xerothermic habitats** in the Orrido di Chianocco e Foresto Natura 2000 sites, rich in orchids and rare species. After years of abandonment of traditional grazing and shrub encroachment, the project implemented **conservation grazing** by sheep, paired with mechanical clearing of shrubs and trees. This included establishing grazing infrastructure and reintroducing a "service flock" of around **150 sheep** to manage about **83 hectares** prepared for sustainable grazing, while recovering around 20 hectares of encroached grassland.



More than **1,000 vegetation monitoring surveys** were conducted during the project to track changes in species composition and habitat quality. The work helped **counter habitat loss**, maintain **open grassland mosaics** and produce **management guidelines** and outreach materials directed at local stakeholders, technicians and visitors. As a legacy, **grazing has continued** in parts of the project area, and the approach informs broader habitat conservation and sustainable grazing efforts in similar Mediterranean and Alpine regions.

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 PORTUGAL (REGIÃO DO CENTRO)

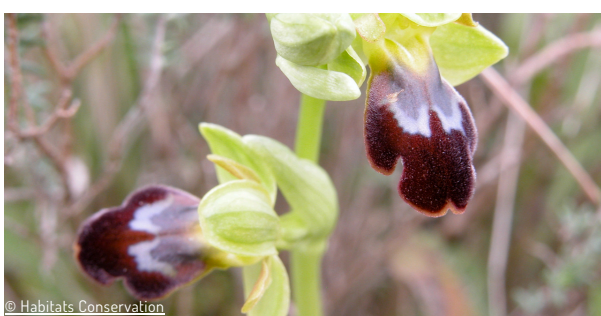
Start date: 01/01/2011

End date: 31/12/2014

Habitat Conservation in Serras de Aire e Candeeiros

This LIFE Nature project in Portugal conserves and restores priority calcareous and grassland habitats across the Serras de Aire e Candeeiros Natura 2000 site through targeted vegetation control, extensive grazing and micro-reserve creation to safeguard biodiversity.

Habitats Conservation was a project designed to protect natural and semi-natural calcareous habitats in the Serra de Aire e Candeeiros Natura 2000 site. It addressed **habitat loss and degradation** caused by land-use change and **abandonment of traditional grazing practices**. The project aimed to conserve and restore around 1,000 hectares of priority habitats including rupicolous calcareous grasslands, semi-natural dry grasslands and pseudo-steppes, which are important for threatened flora and fauna.



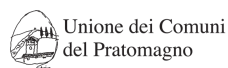
Key actions included **selective vegetation control using mechanical means and extensive grazing** with around 400 goats, creating a mosaic of open habitats to favour biodiversity and prevent shrub encroachment. 10 micro-reserves for endemic plant and rocky habitat protection were established too, and the sustainable use of local products (e.g., lamb, cheese, medicinal herbs) was linked with long-term habitat conservation.

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