

# Livestock farming in the European Union:

*supporting an ambitious  
transition to peasant farming*



[www.eurovia.org](http://www.eurovia.org)

February 2023





The hens at Tamarisk Farm, Dorset, UK lead a rich, healthy and stress-free life in the open air on a natural and varied diet of feed and seed. The small flock is moved to fresh pasture each week in their egg-mobile. © Joya Berrow



## Livestock farming in the European Union: supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

The European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC) is a grassroots organisation. It is currently made up of 31 national and regional peasant, farmworker and rural worker organisations based in 21 European countries. Food Sovereignty is at the heart of our main goal: to defend the rights of peasants and farmworkers and to promote diversified and family-based peasant farming. To do this, we need legitimate, just, solidarity-based and sustainable food and agricultural policies. These are necessary to ensure food security and safety, public health, jobs in rural areas and to respond to the challenges of the global food crisis and climate change.

February 2023  
[www.eurovia.org](http://www.eurovia.org)

European Coordination Via Campesina (ECVC)  
Rue Grisar 38,  
Anderlecht, 1070 – Brussels, Belgium  
Contact: [info@eurovia.org](mailto:info@eurovia.org)

This document was written jointly by ECVC members

**Citation:** European Coordination Via Campesina, 2023, Livestock in Europe: Supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming. Brussels.

**Cover:** Shepherdess and her Limousin sheep on the millevaches plateau, Limousin - France © Nathan Morsel

**Layout:** Ines Hirata

**Translation:** Lucy Findlay

## Table of acronyms:

AECM: Agri-environment-climate Measures

CAP: Common Agricultural Policy

CO2: Carbon dioxide

ECVC: European Coordination Via Campesina

EEC: European Economic Community

EU: European Union

F2F: European Farm to Fork Strategy

FAO: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

GHG: Greenhouse gases

GMO: Genetically modified organism

PDO: Protected Designation of Origin

PGI: Protected Geographical Indication

UTPs: Unfair Trading Practices

WTO: World Trade Organisation

# Livestock farming in the European Union:

## supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

## TABLE OF CONTENTS:

INTRODUCTION.....	7
-------------------	---

I. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF LIVESTOCK FARMING IN EUROPE:	
GO BIG OR GO HOME .....	9

II. CURRENT CHALLENGES TO LIVESTOCK FARMING IN THE EU .....	15
1. Some figures.....	15
2. International market rules: the first levers to be activated .....	15
3. Livestock and climate change .....	18
4. Rural vitality starts with people who work with animals. ....	21
5. Institutional solutions to health challenges miss the mark .....	22
6. Anti-livestock farming and anti-meat consumption movements.....	24
7. Health and meat consumption.....	26
8. Loss of meaning in farming: genuine distress .....	27

III. POLITICAL SOLUTIONS FOR POLITICAL PROBLEMS – OUR POSITIONS .....	29
1. European public agricultural policies that enable transition.....	30
2. The inevitable change in trade policies .....	35

IV. OUR CONCLUSION.....	39
-------------------------	----



1. The youngest child of the farm's couple is with the young goats that graze in the mountains around Lofoten Gårdsysteri Farm, Norway, between milkings. © Lofoten Gårdsysteri

## Introduction

The European Union (EU) is at a crossroads. As part of the Green Deal, the EU's Farm to Fork Strategy (F2F) goals are, overall, ambitious. However, the tools proposed to achieve these objectives are disappointing. It is worth questioning whether they really will reduce the EU's impact on climate change.<sup>1</sup>

ECVC has always advocated for a change of agrarian policies to make livestock farming more sustainable, substantially less harmful to the climate and more adapted to the current climate and environmental crises. Farmers have been directly experiencing these crises for a long time and so have been among the first to sound the alarm. They have not ceased to remind us that these environmental challenges reflect the urgent need for genuine global climate justice, as well as dignified farming practices for humans and animals.

In this context, the structural and political solutions provided so far by the European institutions seem to be not only ineffective, but also to further aggravate the situation. They are always focused on technical, ad hoc and superficial solutions and strengthening the market economy. Although ECVC has made many demands for solutions and has supported the F2F goals, it cannot endorse the current proposals.

Livestock farming is of particular relevance in this respect. There are widespread allegations as to its responsibility for global warming. And yet authorisations for factory farms continue to be granted and there is still major confusion about the different types of livestock farming. This confusion, added to the call for people to eat "less but better meat", has not had the desired effect. It has, rather, weakened peasant farming without impacting the more industrialised farming models. In recent years, peasant livestock farming has lacked real support and so has continued to be undermined, while the destructive industrialised approach grows in strength.

If we want better livestock farming, we need to choose labour-intensive peasant farming. Strengthening peasant farming will in fact lead to a decline in the most industrialised types of livestock farming: primarily factory farms. Peasant livestock farming is more self-sufficient and resilient; it enriches the environment rather than destroying it; and is more adaptable to climate change. It is more dignified for humans and animals, and more rooted in traditional rural systems.

**There is an urgent need for Europe to transition to genuine social, economic and environmental sustainability. It is time to think about how we can viably move away from industrialised livestock farming models and ensure that in Europe, the number of animals reared does not exceed what each given territory is capable of sustaining, starting by how much animal feed that can produce. At the same time, farmers must also be duly remunerated for the fruits their labour. This is what we refer to as the re-territorialisation of livestock farming.**

In this paper, ECVC will provide a brief history of livestock farming in Europe in order to explain the structural root causes of our present-day situation. The current challenges will then be examined in order to understand the whys and wherefores of the current systemic crisis in livestock farming. The last section lays out ECVC's stance and its key demands for the inevitable transition of our European livestock systems as soon as possible.

<sup>1</sup> See ECVC's proposal for an agricultural transition that responds to systemic climate crises: <https://www.eurovia.org/publications/manifesto-for-agricultural-transition-to-address-systemic-climate-crises/>





## HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF LIVESTOCK FARMING IN EUROPE: GO BIG OR GO HOME

Since the Second World War, European agricultural policies have driven Europe's livestock farming towards an intensive, industrial model in which the animals have no contact with the land. This model depends on imported plant proteins for animal feed and external inputs.

Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was established in **1962**. It was subject to conditions due to an agreement signed between the European Economic Community (EEC) and the United States, which set in stone the absence of customs protection for protein feed (such as soybean and peanut meal). The free access granted to soybeans during the Dillon Round (1960-1962) was consolidated during the Kennedy Round (1964-1967). At this time there was high growth in the production of cereals, which benefited from guaranteed prices, as well as milk and beef.

Intensive pig and poultry farming became prevalent in the regions close to ports where the imported animal feed was docked (Brittany, Flanders, the Netherlands, Denmark, the Po Valley, etc.). This was made possible by the development of specialised infrastructure, such as slaughterhouses and facilities for animal feed supply, breeding and selection. There was intense specialisation in these regions and animal concentration increased. Cyclical price variations became more commonplace and prices began to fall regularly. The most fragile pig farms disappeared as they were bought over by neighbouring large farms.

In **1992**, following its first reform, the CAP took an important turn. The Blair House Accord meant that European agricultural products now had to compete with international markets, thus marking the end of the Community preference principle. This Accord limited Europe's protein crop production capacity, perpetuating its dependence on soybean imports and increasing the concentration of animal production in specialised basins.

**1995** marked another major turning point with the signing of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) agreements, which include agriculture. From then on, foodstuffs have been treated as commodities, and multinationals have monopolised the profits to be made from them. The CAP had to continuously ensure that it complied with these new rules. Dairy farming was less dependent on imported feed. This meant that for a long time, its production was still the domain of many farms, including small ones. Outsized production caused a milk glut, leading to the introduction of quotas in **1984**, which to a certain extent stabilised prices and production structures. However, this stability was undermined when dairy production was included in the direct subsidy system. It was also affected by the inevitable crises caused by competition from the international market. The EU's policy of deregulating milk production culminated in 2015, when milk quotas were abolished.



2. In a low-input system, these ruby red Devon cows from Tamarisk Farm, Dorset, UK, grow slowly on a 100% grass diet: grazing most of the year, and fed with hay in winter. © Joya Berrow

As markets became even more competitive, farmers had no choice but to change their methods. This led to a structural and widespread concentration of pig and poultry farms in Europe. This was bolstered by farm subsidy policies as well as financing and credit arrangements. In Germany, a motto was coined: « *wachsen oder weichen* » (grow or disappear).

Trade in food of animal origin with third countries increased considerably in this period. Farm were pressurised to intensify their production, which meant increasing the volume produced per unit of capital or labour, while reducing costs. There were two main ways in which this was done: intensifying production on the land and, if there was no land to expand further, intensification by animal. To intensify production per animal, the breeds producing the highest yield were selected. However, this led directly to the disappearance of local breeds and the genetic standardisation of herds. These productive breeds were fed on increasingly rich fodder, which causes metabolic diseases. They became less resistant to disease and unable to cope with variations to their habitats. This model brought in the following changes: animals cooped up in buildings; larger machinery; increased use of pesticides and fertilisers to boost the yield of fodder crops (maize); rising animal feed costs; and higher vet fees due to the lack of genetic diversity and unsuitable feed. The livestock sector – and by consequence the entire European agricultural sector – became increasingly vulnerable. It is bound hand and foot to the increase in costs and investments as well as the risks involved with the standardisation of this production.

**In their endless quest for profits, the market players, with political support, thus orchestrated hyper-concentrated production. They believed that in order for the system to be more 'efficient' - or rather profitable – it must be optimised, standardised and concentrated in restricted spaces; and that feed, care and slaughtering must also be standardised. It is very difficult to continue peasant livestock farming in such a context.**

**Strategies were adopted to increase the sizes of livestock farms and do away with the less productive holdings, thus making the trade less attractive. Some of these strategies were as follows:**

- **Obliging farmers to be profit-motivated and make investments.** Once farmers enter the vicious circle of a major investment, it is difficult to get out again. At the outset, this investment was portrayed as something attractive that did not bind the farmers in anyway. Then they were encouraged to keep expanding so they could sell more and more produce to pay off their investments – or else go to the wall. A further incentive was that at the beginning of this industrialisation process, energy was relatively cheap. Livestock farmers were encouraged to import and adopt energy-intensive techniques, which made them more dependent. The circle became even more vicious when production costs sky-rocketed while product purchasing prices remained the same or even dropped. Farmer indebtedness was perpetuated even more.
- **Systematic cultural belittlement of small- and medium-scale livestock farming.** Market and political players played a huge part in spreading the negative idea that smallholdings produce bad quality food, are weaker and lack ambition (for example, higher costs of milk collection from small farms). On the other hand, they sang the praises of the largest and most productive farms. And there began the connection between farm size and production, and social prestige. Thus, the larger the farmer (in terms of animal headcount, machinery size, acreage, etc.), the more they were defended and supported by the public authorities as helping society. This attitude, in many countries and especially in the West of Europe, contributed to eroding the identity of peasant farmers. It also ignored the other social and economic values of livestock farming in the life and vitality of rural areas.
- **Technicist and anti-democratic rhetoric.** For a long time, cracks have been appearing in the economy of scale models. And yet the solutions being proposed today are still overly reliant on digital and other technologies. These

## Livestock farming in the European Union: supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

technicist solutions are imposed underhandedly by the likes of banks, the media, majority trade unions and the EU institutions. Although their success is yet to be proven, these solutions are presented as the silver bullet and can be particularly alluring to farmers in precarious situations. The technologies proposed are very expensive and ever more complicated and impossible to adapt. This means that farmers are increasingly dependent on industry and consultancy or "expert" mechanisms from outside their farms or local areas. It further weakens peasant farming and makes in situ decision-making even harder, preventing small- and medium-sized farms from being profitable. Digital technologies make farmers even more dependent on the costs of energy and supply of the necessary materials.

- **Subsidies favouring large farms.** The main CAP mechanisms subsidise farms based on livestock unit or per hectare, rather than work undertaken. This continues to encourage farmers to enlarge their farms. This is compounded by the excessive red tape involved in these subsidy mechanisms and the auditing institutions. It is very difficult for small farms to deal with all the paperwork, and is complicated for medium-sized farms, but for the large farms it is a mere formality.
- **Reducing the number of slaughterhouses and dairies.** Local slaughterhouses and dairies were shut down and agglomerated into large structures under the guise of unjustifiable health constraints. This is another key factor in the disappearance of small farms. This is particularly the case with slaughterhouses because farms were obliged to standardise and intensify production to reorganise slaughtering operations. They have had to slaughter many animals at the same time to avoid frequent journeys to slaughterhouses that are ever further away from their farms. This quest for optimisation is at the expense of both farmworkers' and animals' dignity.



3. Ardèche - France, goatherd with one of his chamoised Alpine goats. © Véronique Léon

**The main consequences of farm enlargement and the disappearance of small livestock farms:**

- **Unfulfilling work:** The employment of these strategies means that farmers have been gradually absorbed into the aforementioned industrial and technicist mechanisms. They have lost their self-sufficiency – especially in the so-called “integrated” systems – to the point of becoming like employees carrying out instructions that have been digitally calculated outside of their farms. They cannot choose their animals, feed, healthcare or land use. Everything is organised and calibrated for them. Many farmers are now only there to carry out orders.
- **Environmental and territorial costs:** As mentioned earlier, the regions close to major trade ports have specialised in intensive industrial livestock farming, while other regions have stopped livestock farming altogether to focus on arable or specialised crops. Now more than ever, factory farms are criticised for their harmful environmental (especially in relation to the likes of effluents and nitrates), economic and social effects. Farm intensification and specialisation in given areas has gone hand in hand with a sharp decrease in permanent grasslands and leguminous crops, which have given way to annual crops (especially cereals). The organic matter of soils in these regions that have specialised in cereals is now depleted. It is no wonder that there has been a succession of animal health crises, including mad cow disease, bird flu, foot and mouth disease and African swine fever.
- **Vulnerability of food systems to crises:** Intense climatic periods and conflicts and wars around the world have not only buffeted production, but also the markets on which many food systems depend. Territorialised livestock farming is necessary so that small- and medium-sized farming systems can be independent, as they are key to ensuring the resilience of food systems in times of crisis.
- **Impacts outside Europe:** Considerable damages and costs caused by this intensification have not only affected Europe, but also third countries. This is especially true in the global south, scourged by deforestation for the purposes of producing animal feed. Dumping is also a problem: European animal products are sold to poorer countries at derisory costs, thus competing unfairly with local produce. This practice destroys local production and markets.

**We have painted a somewhat disturbing picture**, but it is worth noting that some livestock farmers have resisted the push from above and have kept up traditional methods. This is most prevalent in regions known for their high-quality produce (e.g., mountain areas or those where geographical indications are prevalent) such as extensive sheep or cattle farming in pastoral areas. Other forms of small-scale livestock farming are proof that peasant farmers have decided to swim against the tide of profit. Examples of these included mixed crops, agropastoral farms, organic farming, dairy sheep and goat herds and free-range poultry or pig farms, and are often accompanied by on-farm processing and direct sales.

**It is thus necessary to be particularly vigilant about data on livestock farming. Too often, little distinction is made between the different models and their functions and impacts. These models should not, therefore, be treated in a standardised manner. If the diversity of small- and medium-sized livestock farms is, on the other hand accepted, Europe will be able to find a balance in terms of livestock farming, and consequently farming in general.** Industrial models must be called into question and a process of de-intensification needs to be organised. Small- and medium-scale livestock farming models that have resisted the push towards industrialisation and maintained practices that are good for the social, food and economic fabric, for animals and the environment, must be supported and safeguarded.

## Differentiating between industrialised and peasant farming models

This may be complicated, but it is important to try and distinguish the two models: industrialised farming and peasant farming. Below we have free-range aimed to describe industrialised agriculture in general and not just industrialised livestock farming. The list is not exhaustive but rather includes a number of criteria for this model. Industrialised farms may be characterised by all or some of them.

Industrialisation is characterised by a race for the lowest prices and competitiveness without social objectives. It is generally directed towards the internationalisation of trade based on market deregulation and the segmentation of sectors, and often downstream integration. This model seeks financial optimisation which leads to over-investment and the absence of caps.

Its methods are generally disconnected from the local area. Labour tends to be outsourced and there is downward pressure on social rights. The concept of “progress” (agro-industrial model of the past) is praised; GMOs are used; and genetic selection is monopolised. There is also widespread use of synthetic inputs and antibiotics and growth hormones. Animal feed is imported while natural areas are artificialized. It involves the uprooting of hedges, simplification of rotations, large-scale irrigation, alienating technologies and excessive automation, as well as the use of cheap fossil fuels.

It involves the financialisation of land, the imposition of standards that are adapted only to the industrialised model, standardisation and devaluation of produce and concentrated processing and distribution systems.

Peasant farming, on the other hand, is a model in which the farmers aim to be autonomous and add value to their produce. Their farms are of a reasonable size so that there is room for everyone. These producers work in such a way as they can be proud of their produce. They develop relationships with their consumers and other rural stakeholders. They come up with innovative methods to conserve nature and to enable them to transfer their farms to future generations.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Peasants and Other Rural Workers: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/1650694?n=fr>  
The French Charter of Peasant Agriculture: [https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/sites/default/files/fadear\\_1998\\_charte\\_paysanne\\_eng.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/sites/default/files/fadear_1998_charte_paysanne_eng.pdf)





4. Norwegian goats, the herd also contains some Alpine goats to improve the quality of the cheese, Lofoten, Norway. © Lofoten Gårdssystem

## II CURRENT CHALLENGES TO LIVESTOCK FARMING IN THE EU

While industrialised livestock farming in the European Union is rightly being singled out for criticism, it is sometimes difficult for the various stakeholders to identify the problems to be solved in the sector. We therefore propose a structured clarification of these challenges. This section is more a support for analysis than an exhaustive list.

### 1 Some figures

According to Eurostat data, in 2019 Europe had some 77 million cows, 143 million pigs, 62 million sheep and only just over 12 million goats.<sup>3</sup>

The size of the herds varies between countries, giving an uneven picture. **Cattle** is most common in France – where about a quarter of the total is concentrated – Germany and the Netherlands. **Pig** farming is dominated by Germany and Spain. These two countries hold approximately a third of all pigs reared in the EU, but herds are also distributed in large numbers in other countries.

**Sheep** are distributed in large numbers in many countries, but flocks of over 5 million head in Spain and Romania account for just over 40% of the total number of head. The majority of the farms are therefore significantly smaller.

The total number of **goats** is only one fifth of the number of sheep. Goats have the highest concentration in Greece, accounting for about one third of the total number of animals.

### 2 International market rules: the first levers to be activated

#### Prices are still determined by the market and are not remunerative

There are still major consequences to having foodstuffs on the international and speculative markets: not least the fact that purchase prices are far from being remunerative to farmers. This means that in many EU countries, livestock farming would not be able to continue without CAP subsidies.

This is particularly the case for beef and mutton; for milk in Portugal; and for organic milk in France, where the phenomenon of "organic de-conversion" (switching from organic back to conventional farming) is widespread.

<sup>3</sup> Eurostat European service website: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/web/products-eurostat-news/-/ddn-20200923-1> (Data from 26/10/2022)



## Increase in production costs

In recent years, production costs have skyrocketed, especially for feed and inputs, making livestock farming particularly vulnerable.

Energy, fertiliser and food prices rose sharply after the start of the war in Ukraine, adding to the general increase that began in mid-2020 in the context of the Covid-19 epidemic. The price increases between April 2020 and March 2022 were the sharpest for an equivalent 23-month period since 1973 for energy, and since 2008 for fertilisers and food.<sup>4</sup> For example, fertiliser prices rose by 220% between April 2020 and March 2022, and this trend continued in the second half of the year.

Markets deregulation and the loss of food sovereignty make space for fierce speculation from the major powers operating there: investment funds and the financial industry. To date, neither the EU nor national governments have provided for any instruments that can stop or combat this speculation.

Another challenge has compounded the sharp rise in energy costs in 2022: shortages of energy resources, and therefore of chemical inputs, both now and in the future. It is necessary to prepare for energy sobriety and self-sufficiency in the livestock sector. This transition is inevitable.

Finally, the increase in land prices in many European countries is further aggravating the situation. These prices are disconnected from production and are well beyond the means of new generations.

## Food industry requirements inappropriate for viable food systems.

The food industry and distribution sectors are responsible for pushing farmers to expand by their unfair practices, especially their purchasing requirements and criteria. This is supported by legislation, notably the Common Agricultural Policy. The legislators behind it are in fact largely influenced by powerful agribusiness lobbies.<sup>5</sup>

These requirements affect production methods. However, they are also detrimental to product quality and European food diversity is visibly poorer. A glaring example of this can be seen in dairy products: inappropriate regulations have resulted in their standardisation, leading inevitably to industrialisation and the loss of important traditional knowledge and expertise.



5. Pigs in a field of barley, a grain that is rarely found at Norwegian latitudes. ©Lofoten Gårdsysteri

<sup>4</sup> World Bank Group. 2022. Commodity Markets Outlook: The Impact of the War in Ukraine on Commodity Markets, April 2022. World Bank, Washington, DC. License: Creative Commons Attribution CC BY 3.0 IGO.

<sup>5</sup> Corporate Europe Observatory, 2020, CAP vs Farm to Fork: Will we pay billions to destroy, or to support biodiversity, climate, and farmers?

## Livestock farming in the European Union: supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

### The integration – or the issue of subcontracted livestock farming

Integrated livestock farming is an economic, social and environmental situation in which farmers are bound – and therefore subject – to powerful corporations. These companies decide in detail how production is carried out. They provide the necessary inputs and tell farmers how they must run their farms. Farmers must bear the financial cost of these external inputs but have no decision-making power. Their production power has been grabbed.

Often farmers who turn to integrated production have already requirements inappropriate industrialised their farms and are caught up in an economic model that can no longer be sustained; in other words, that is not economically viable. In the integrated model, farmers disappear and become workers for the companies that integrate them. They become mere executors, victims of an industrialised system that does not allow them to improve their income: the cost of inputs and machinery is considerable, production is not sustainable and the debts that may have been accumulated previously still need to be paid off.

This practice further cuts farmers off from their local territories and leads to accelerated environmental destruction. In Spain, Portugal, France and Italy, the livestock sector is highly impacted and threatened by these integrative practices.

It is worth noting that integration not only affects farming, but every link in the food production chain: vertical integration is when a company buys other companies responsible for different but complementary stages of the production chain (such as breeders and multipliers), while horizontal integration is when a company buys other companies responsible for a similar stage of production (e.g., breeder Genus PLC's takeover of Sygen in 2005).<sup>6</sup>

### Loss of livestock farmers

There has been a constant rise in poultry and livestock head, and yet the number of livestock farms has dropped dramatically. Between 20015 and 2016 (the last year on which there is reliable data), the number of total livestock farms fell by 3.4 million.<sup>7</sup> This shows to what extent production has been intensified. It is important to note that whatever claims are made, it is always the smaller livestock farms that disappear first, absorbed by the larger ones.

### Transferring farms made impossible

Due to the sharp increase in land prices and the high level of investment in recent years, it is now extremely difficult to transfer a livestock farms. Even so-called "peasant" farms are too big and so too expensive for younger people to be able to acquire them. What's more, these farms do not have a positive economic outlook and lack sustainability. Younger people do not want to engage in an activity that is still so dependent on market fluctuations.

### Biogas: an energy source that must be approached with caution

Methanisation is sometimes presented as an environmental advance because it helps to meet future energy challenges. Yet in several countries, the development of these plants is a cause for concern. This production of energy from agricultural outputs competes with agricultural production of food.

It is therefore sometimes difficult to find fodder in regions where it is more lucrative to sell crops to biogas plants. This has led to an increase in the price of fodder and land. In addition, there are local environmental disturbances: pollution, noise, odours, etc.

<sup>6</sup> Susanne Gura, 2008, Livestock breeding in the hands of corporations, GRAIN

<sup>7</sup> Fiona Harvey, 2021, Fewer, bigger, more intensive: EU vows to stem drastic loss of small farms, The Guardian. <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2021/may/24/fewer-bigger-more-intensive-eu-vows-to-stem-drastic-loss-of-small-farms>

This sector is attractive because it is also generously encouraged by financial incentives. However, the impacts on food production, land, and economic issues should be regulated.

### 3 Livestock and climate change

Copernicus, the European climate change service, reports that 2021 was much cooler than most recent years, but still warmer than the average for the reference period (1991-2020). The winter of 2021-2022 was marked by severe drought, particularly on the Iberian Peninsula where there were water shortages. February 2022 was 2.4°C warmer than the average for the period 1991-2020.<sup>8</sup> In September 2022, almost half of Europe is in an alarming state of drought, or alert.<sup>9</sup> If temperatures continue to rise, more heatwaves or other extreme weather events can be expected.

#### Climate change is affecting agricultural production

Climate pressure is changing local production and this poses challenges for animal feed. This is particularly the case in southern Europe, where harvests are poorer due to weather conditions and production costs are higher. In many regions, ruminant herds have not been able to graze on pasturelands in the summer because they are too dry. Farmers have had to compensate by feeding them the fodder set aside for winter. This has had an impact on the price, quantity and quality of products. With warmer temperatures, Northern Europe could now plant new types of crops, leading some agencies to claim that food security in Europe is assured.<sup>10</sup> This is a cynical conclusion given the territorial and environmental upheaval involved in this scenario.



6. The common herd of the Groupement Pastoral des Mille Sonnaillies kept in a peat bog at the level of the sources of the Vézère throughout the summer. The grazing of peat bogs allows the reactivation of peat bogs abandoned with the intensification of agricultural activities, allowing them to better play their role of sponge and therefore regulate the flow of watercourses. ©Nathan Morse

<sup>8</sup> European Copernicus Service website <https://climate.copernicus.eu/>

<sup>9</sup> Website of the European Drought Observatory (EDO): <https://edo.jrc.ec.europa.eu/edov2/php/index.php?id=1000> (data from 18/10/2022)

<sup>10</sup> European Environment Agency, 2020, Climate change threatens future of farming in Europe. <https://www.eea.europa.eu/highlights/climate-change-threatens-future-of>

### Livestock farming in the European Union: supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

Furthermore, as the breeds used are generally the most productive, they are also the least able to adapt to variations in their environment and thus to ongoing change. Traditional breeds are generally more resilient to variations in areas to which they have adapted over several generations.

#### How industrialised livestock models contribute to climate change

In 2017, the EU-28 agricultural sector generated 10% of the region's total GHG emissions.<sup>11</sup> This was less than other major sectors: industry accounted for 38%, transport, 21% and the residential and tertiary sector, 12%.<sup>12</sup> Almost half of the EU's agricultural emissions come from enteric fermentation (mainly from ruminants) and manure management (from all types of livestock). If we factor in emissions from feed production, transport and processing, including the pesticides and fertilisers used, the livestock sector is responsible for 81-86% of total agricultural GHG emissions.<sup>13</sup>

Differentiating the impacts of the different types of livestock farming is paramount. Intensive industrialised livestock farming, detached from the land, is responsible for the majority of the emissions attributed to the sector. Yet this is often overlooked by the mainstream data and rhetoric. There are studies that question the rigour of conventional systems for measuring greenhouse gas emissions. These systems often seem to be used in research funded by economic actors with an interest in supporting factory farms.<sup>14</sup> However, to get a real idea of the situation, it is not enough to just measure direct and total emissions from the livestock farming sector (which is itself linked to other dynamics). It is also necessary to consider the life cycles of the different GHGs, which differ according to practices; as well as factor in other collateral environmental impacts of emissions; and finally, the baseline levels in relation to naturalised conditions. Therefore, while not all methane emissions can be considered anthropogenic, the use of CO2-emitting fossil fuels required for factory farms is directly so. Action should thus be focused on livestock farming practices that depend on fossil fuels. It is more efficient to reduce carbon dioxide than to reduce methane. In Spain, for example, more than 50% of the greenhouse gas footprint of livestock farming is attributed to CO2 emissions from energy used on the livestock farm itself, energy needed to produce or transport inputs (feed, fertiliser) or energy needed for changes in land use.

Finally, carbon emissions are mainly linked to the most intensive agri-food industries: Together, twenty European meat and dairy production, processing and distribution companies produce the equivalent of more than half the emissions of the UK, France and Italy. The combined emissions of 35 of Europe's largest beef, pork, poultry and dairy companies are equivalent to almost 7% of total EU28 emissions in 2018.<sup>15</sup>

#### Peasant livestock farming enables a transition away from chemical fertilisers and pesticides

Producing and applying chemical fertilisers – and the pesticides often associated with them – contributes significantly to greenhouse gas emissions.

One of the essential agronomic characteristics of livestock is that animals are sources of natural fertiliser for crops. We have proposed adjusting livestock numbers to the land's 'carrying capacity'. This means the farmland's capacity

<sup>11</sup> European Environment Agency, 2019, Annual European Union greenhouse gas inventory 1990-2017 and the inventory report of 2019. Submission under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol, 27 May 2019, EEA/PUBL/2019/051, 962 p.

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Peyraud, J., MacLeod, M., Future of EU livestock: How to contribute to a sustainable agricultural sector?: final report, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2762/3440>

<sup>13</sup> Leip A., Weiss F., Wassenaar T., Pérez I., Fellmann T., Loudjani P., Tubiello F., Grandgirard D., Monni S., Biala K. 2010. Evaluation of the livestock sector's contribution to the EU greenhouse gas emissions (GGELS) final report: European Commission, Joint Research Centre p. 323 <http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/analysis/external/livestock-gas/>

<sup>14</sup> Andrés Muñoz Rico et al., 2020, la Ganadería y su contribución al cambio climático, Friends of the Earth.

<sup>15</sup> Shafeli Sharma, 2021, Emissions Impossible Europe: How Europe's Big Meat and Dairy are heating up the planet, IATP.



to produce enough feed for the animals on the farm. At the same time, the animals' manure will supply local organic fertiliser for the crops. This avoids the risk of local over-pollution, which is caused by many factory farms. This approach has the advantage of being cost-effective as there are no expenses from buying chemical fertilisers.

## Maintaining pastoralism

Pastoral livestock farming is the most efficient livestock system in terms of natural resource use and land management. It is well able to adapt to climate change but can also play a crucial role in climate change mitigation. On the one hand, the potential of grazed ecosystems to store carbon in the soil is very high, as illustrated by the IPCC 2000 report on Land Use, Land-Use Change, and Forestry. On the other hand, it is crucial for forest maintenance and thus for forest fire control. Moreover, because grazing is self-sustaining, which is directly linked to the land carrying capacity, it ensures that animal products can be produced with very low greenhouse gas emissions. It also plays a crucial role in conserving the environment and enriching biodiversity, while often allowing important social, cultural and economic exchanges to be maintained in the area.<sup>16</sup>

Shepherds safeguard these practices, the benefits of which have been duly recognised. And yet their working conditions for shepherding are extremely hard. It requires a level of diligence and dedication that is exemplified by those who practice it, who in return for almost no recognition or social support. In this respect, there is much room to improve the conditions in which shepherds work.



7. Shepherd and his flock of Tarascona ewes on the Port de Montescourbas mountain pasture in the Ariège Pyrenees © Nathan Morsel

<sup>16</sup> P. Manzano-Baena, C. Salguero-Herrera, 2018, Mobile pastoralism in the Mediterranean: Arguments and evidence for policy reform and its role in combating climate change, Mediterranean Consortium for Nature and Culture (pp18-19)

## Livestock farming in the European Union: supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

### 4 Rural vitality starts with people who work with animals

**Livestock farmers play a unique role in rural areas** and contribute to their identity. They are among those who actively shape the landscape and cultivate the biodiversity of flora and fauna. The nature of their work requires them to take care of their animals on a daily basis. By living and working there consistently, they are key social, economic and cultural figures in rural areas. In every European country, if livestock farming were to be further weakened, it would have considerable political, social, economic and environmental consequences, not least the worsening of the agricultural and rural decline.

### Do not allow the urban-rural divide to widen

We also need to be aware of the increasing gap between rural and urban areas and the widespread ignorance about livestock farming and rural areas. If there were more livestock farmers dispersed throughout the territories, farms and peasant farming practices would become more geographically and socially accessible, thus rendering farm to fork food systems easier to understand.

### Institutions make no efforts to ensure good livestock-wildlife cohabitation

The presence of large wild carnivores in Europe has increased in recent years, to such an extent and over so much territory that it has become difficult for many farmers to continue their pastoral practices. If the daily life of farmers and shepherds becomes untenable,<sup>17</sup> the very practice of pastoralism is thus called into question. However, without it, we would lose all its environmental, economic and social benefits: biodiversity preservation in pastoral environments; protection against forest fires; quality products (lamb, cheeses, etc.); and its key contribution to knitting the social fabric together in rural areas.

In the areas inhabited by these predators, the European Union must ensure it has the



8. Salt, rich in minerals, is essential for the health and metabolism of animals. It is also sometimes used to "give the bias", i.e. placed on rocks by shepherds and shepherdesses to lead the animals in a specific direction, especially towards the place where the herd will spend the night  
© Yeva Swart

<sup>17</sup> Testimonies can be found in: Confédération paysanne, 2016, Loups et pastoralisme, l'impossible cohabitation. Available here: [https://www.confederationpaysanne.fr/sites/1/mots\\_cles/documents/4pages\\_Loups.pdf](https://www.confederationpaysanne.fr/sites/1/mots_cles/documents/4pages_Loups.pdf)

Confédération paysanne, 2017, Les loups et nous. Video available here: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6e8L6i1DWVY&ab\\_channel=Conf%C3%A9d%C3%A9rationpaysanne](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6e8L6i1DWVY&ab_channel=Conf%C3%A9d%C3%A9rationpaysanne)

means to prevent any disruption to livestock activities and to the lives of shepherds. This includes setting up an anticipation and planning system to monitor the movement of this fauna across the European continent. The EU must ensure that existing regulations are effectively enforced.

Poor management of big game is also a problem in terms of animal disease transmission. A new approach is needed for this, as well as simplified compensation procedures for smaller farms.

## 5 Institutional solutions to health challenges miss the mark

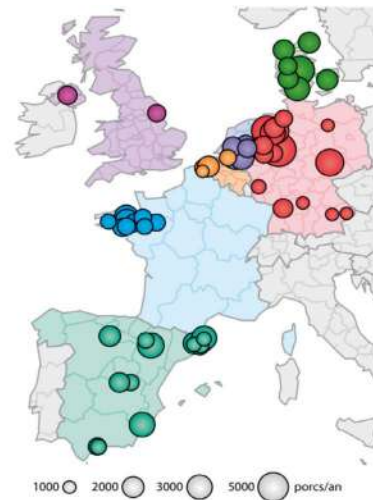
### The loss of slaughterhouses

As mentioned in the previous section, slaughterhouses are a key element in the production chain of animal products. Their presence or lack thereof, and whether they are mobile or not, have immediate consequences on the types of production possible.

The map below shows the large pig slaughterhouses in Europe. The geographical concentration of large abattoirs is a reflection of where the most industrialised livestock farms in Europe are concentrated. It highlights how problematic this is and the pressing need to de-concentrate these farms.

It is difficult to find data on the number of slaughterhouses in Europe. Data on this subject is expressed in terms of the number of heads slaughtered rather than in terms of facilities. However, there is some regional data: in 1985, Wallonia had 60 slaughterhouses, but by 2015, there were only 32. In France, in 2016 there were a total of 960 slaughterhouses. This included 697 poultry and rabbit slaughterhouses, and 263 slaughterhouses for cows, pigs, sheep, goats and horses. This number seems derisory for the size of the country. France lost 34 cow and pig slaughterhouses between 2010 and 2019. In Italy, there were a total of 1,946 facilities in 2018.

The reduced number of slaughterhouses has not enabled a reduction in livestock farming. On the contrary, it has



Source: Ifip

Figure 1. Slaughterhouses handling more than one million pigs per year (2016)



9. Haute Provence. On-farm slaughtering of poultry for direct sale - manual finishing of plumage. © Caroline Souteyrand

## Livestock farming in the European Union: supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

led to a sharp increase in the industrialisation of livestock farming, which in turn means increasingly inhumane treatment of both animals and humans.

Social abuses (violations of labour law but also human rights) against workers in industrial slaughterhouses have been widely documented in recent years. Not only have these workers not been trained to work with animals, but the facilities do not allow them to work properly.

Health and safety regulations are normally put forward publicly as justifications for closing down local abattoirs. However, the larger the abattoirs, the more likely it is that they will provide a suitable environment for contamination to spread. During the Covid-19 outbreak, the largest slaughterhouses became major centres of contagion.

Some initiatives to support the development of small on-farm slaughterhouses and mobile slaughterhouses are in place, for example in Sweden. France, Spain and other countries are also trialling the practice. The results are promising and have so far been recognised by national and European administrations.

Several scientific studies have demonstrated the importance of mobile and proximity slaughterhouses for animals and humans. They reinforce the coherence of the farming practice itself, allowing a healthier relationship with death and killing.<sup>18</sup>

### Ineffective management of epidemics

One of the main vectors of epidemics is high animal density in enclosed, off-land areas. Several European countries are currently experiencing epidemic crises of avian flu and swine fever. The institutional responses are radical and incomprehensible: although health authorities have criticised enclosures, it is in the free-range farms that livestock



10. Dairy cows with 4-way crosses (Prim Holstein, Jersey, Montbéliarde and Swedish Red) to balance milk production, feed efficiency, udder health, hardiness and conformation. In order to reduce the annual workload, the farmers carry out once-in-a-day milking techniques and group calving in spring. © Nathan Morsel

<sup>18</sup> Works by Jocelyne Porcher. Porcher, 2002, *Éleveurs et animaux, réinventer le lien*. Paris : Presses universitaires de France.



farmers have been ordered to slaughter their animals. In Italy, for example, many domestic and farmed pigs were slaughtered immediately. In some municipalities in the Italian regions of Piedmont, Liguria and in the municipality of Rome,<sup>19</sup> entire pig herds were slaughtered. In France, between 4 and 4.5 million poultry were recently slaughtered.

These drastic measures particularly punish small holdings, while larger farms keep expanding, perpetuating the cycle of creating environments conducive to contamination.

Epidemics are spread through live animals, and so wildlife also plays a key role in this. Yet contamination between livestock and wildlife has not been addressed, and there are no solutions envisaged in this sense. Environmental science has shown that building walls between the most anthropic areas and other areas is not the way to achieve a sustainable solution to environmental challenges. The two must be able to coexist.

In this context, antibiotics and antiparasitics are often used abusively on livestock. The purpose of these systematic uses of mass-produced drugs is to control disease, but they actually aggravate the growing immediate and long-term problems. It would be worth reviewing legislation on herbal medicine and aromatherapy, which is currently very restrictive.

### Loss of livestock breed diversity

In 2010, the European Environment Agency produced a study report on the genetic diversity of livestock breeds.<sup>20</sup> In several countries, native breeds, although generally better adapted to local circumstances and resources, remain critically low in number and are being replaced by a few more productive introduced breeds. This trend is prevalent all over the world, resulting in a real loss of biodiversity. In 2007, the FAO confirmed that since 2001, approximately one breed is lost per month. It also classified 20% of livestock species as being at risk.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, within breeds, genetic diversity is being impoverished. This is deliberately orchestrated by a small number of animal breeding and multiplication companies.<sup>22</sup> All this leads to increased vulnerability to diseases and climate change. Cattle and sheep are particularly at risk. In recent years, there has been a growing tendency that will not be curbed by current mainstream approaches: the quest for antiparasitic improved animal performance and yields through the centralisation of genetic selection is still promoted in European projections, as for example in the report on the Future of Livestock in Europe.<sup>23</sup>

## 6 Anti-livestock farming and anti-meat consumption movements

Livestock farming is under attack from anti-farming movements, which unfortunately do not properly distinguish between the different types of farming.

Where there is animal abuse; where the natural needs of animals are not respected; this needs to be stopped. However, those who denounce the abusive practices of industrialised livestock farming overlook the existence

<sup>19</sup> Sometimes considered the largest agricultural community in Europe.

<sup>20</sup> The indicator developed by the European Environment Agency is now considered expired: <https://www.eea.europa.eu/data-and-maps/indicators/livestock-genetic-diversity>

<sup>21</sup> FAO. 2007. The State of the World's Animal Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture – in brief, edited by Dafydd Pilling & Barbara Rischkowsky. Rome. <https://www.fao.org/3/a1260e/a1260e.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Susanne Gura describes and analyses the workings of these multinationals in her research, summarised in: Susanne Gura, 2008, Livestock breeding in the hands of corporations, GRAIN

<sup>23</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Agriculture and Rural Development, Peyraud, J., MacLeod, M., Future of EU livestock: How to contribute to a sustainable agricultural sector?: final report, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2762/3440>

### Livestock farming in the European Union: supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

of a humane, social and sustainable type of farming: the peasant model. As the anti-farming discourse gains strength without making this necessary distinction, we at ECVC defend livestock farming as a harmonious balance: a symbiosis between humans, animals and the natural environment. Peasant livestock farming remains closely linked to the soil, preserves animal biodiversity, adapts to the animal and to the conditions of the land, rather than adapting the animal to the conditions of life that we want to impose on it, as is the case in the most industrialised models.

This distinction is important, especially given the challenges of understanding between urban and rural areas. It is imperative that we keep dialogue open, including so we can explain to people from urban zones what life is really like in rural areas, and what opportunities there are.

Nationally, we see attempts to criminalise livestock farms by organisations claiming to defend animal rights. While these actions originate in the conflation of factory farms and peasant farms, it is worth noting that the initial stakeholders to promote anti-livestock farming rhetoric have close ties to the economic players dominating the global market. These actors know how to profit from these types of allegations and the weakening of peasant models, as mapped by the Aleph research collective (2020).<sup>24</sup> This has a huge impact on the perception of livestock farming and the consumption of animal products.

### Lab-grown imitation meat is a threat to food sovereignty

ECVC warns against so-called food products produced in laboratories. Above and beyond the uncertainties of these products, they already constitute a threat to food sovereignty.<sup>25</sup>



11. In the barn before evening milking, as the goats return from the pastures, Lofoten, Norway. © Lofoten Gårdsysteri

<sup>24</sup> This information can be found on this page of the Aleph2020 website: <https://aleph-2020.blogspot.com/2020/08/ideologies-and-vested-interests.html>

<sup>25</sup> ECVC, 2022, Lab-grown proteins: Three lies and one big liar. Available here: <https://www.eurovia.org/ecvc-launches-video-on-the-dangers-of-lab-grown-protein/>

## 7 Health and meat consumption

The quality of animal products from peasant farms is superior to those from factory farms. Animal products from ruminants that have grown on pasture for part of the year have much higher micronutrient contents than those that have not. It is therefore necessary to differentiate between quantitative and qualitative issues in this public health matter. Abolishing factory farms and the de-concentration of livestock farming are essential. However, it is by no means a criticism of moderate meat consumption as part of our diet.

Perhaps some people are concerned about eating animal products for health reasons. If so, it is important to distinguish between the impact of animal products on our essential nutrition and its impact on chronic illnesses. Regarding essential nutrition, the scientific world and the World Health Organisation agree that eating animal products is healthy and necessary.<sup>26</sup>

However, the consequences of eating animal products for chronic illnesses (e.g., cancer or diabetes) are less certain. Conflicts and conflicts of interest have recently arisen in the scientific sphere on this subject.<sup>27</sup> Collectives of researchers have, for example, questioned the risks associated with meat consumption, which have changed radically from one year to the next in the prestigious *Global Burden of Disease* report, funded by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Considerable pressure has been put on newspapers and scientists to explain these sporadic changes.<sup>28</sup>

That said, the WHO does concur that there is excessive meat consumption in several European countries. It has issued recommendations on meat consumption to be followed. However, we should avoid jumping to conclusions about the impact of consuming animal products.

### Animal welfare

Concern for animal welfare has gained traction worldwide and the EU is no exception: improving animal welfare is one of the CAP objectives, as well as of the Farm to Fork Strategy of the European Green Deal. The European Commission is reviewing its legislation on animal welfare, including on the slaughter and transport of live animals.

The issue has become increasingly important in the European debate on agriculture. Animal welfare organisations have gained strength, and the "End the Cage Era" citizens' initiative had gathered more than 1.4 million signatures by 2021.

But though animal welfare is an important issue, the debates in the European institutions focus on the competitiveness of European farmers on the world agricultural market if these animal welfare rules were to be applied. This monetary and competitive approach leads all too often to finding products on the market from other continents even though the same foodstuffs are being produced locally in sufficient quantities. The institutions' approach is therefore far from the human-animal-environment balance mentioned on the previous page.

As a final thought, the technical and scientific elements of this matter should be discussed with farmers. They should be explained and adapted to the different areas, so that they are not mere exogenous impositions. They need to be challenged, because they must not be used to foster exports and increasing industrialisation, framed by abusive regulations and certificates.

<sup>26</sup> Website of the WHO: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/behealthy/healthy-diet> (Webpage consulted on 23/01/2023) ; and Kim Fleischer Michaelsen, [et al.], (2000) Feeding and nutrition of infants and young children: Guidelines for the WHO European Region, with emphasis on the former Soviet countries (WHO regional publications. European series ; No. 87) p 194

<sup>27</sup> Rubin, R. (2020). Backlash Over Meat Dietary Recommendations Raises Questions About Corporate Ties to Nutrition Scientists. JAMA. doi:10.1001/jama.2019.21441

<sup>28</sup> Teicholz N. (2022) Why are We Basing Food Policy on Black Box Data? Unsettled Science <https://unsettledscience.substack.com/p/why-are-we-basing-food-policy-on-ts#w>

## Livestock farming in the European Union: supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

### Transport of animals, including over long distances

These movements are policy-driven and take place within the EU as well as from and to third countries. The disappearance of small-scale livestock production in an ever-growing proportion of the EU is leading to an increase in the transport of live animals or carcasses within the EU. The transport of large quantities of frozen meat by road has serious repercussions for animal welfare and/or pollution. In some regions, imports are made directly from third countries, which dispose of large quantities of frozen meat, delivered in ports that have much better transport connections than small farms.

## 8 Loss of meaning in farming: genuine distress

Although not documented in all European countries, there have been higher rates of suicide among farmers since the 1960s. In France, a parliamentary enquiry was conducted on the issue in 2020, leading to a better understanding of the problem. The report showed that farmers are one of the socio-professional categories with the highest suicide rates.

According to the scientific studies carried out on this subject, it is possible to identify two main, and intrinsically linked, factors: economic difficulties linked to the low and fluctuating prices of agricultural products, and social isolation. These difficulties and isolation often result in a loss of sense of commitment to the work in a context where it is difficult to remain structurally independent, but where the burden of responsibility is particularly heavy. Keeping a farm afloat is currently only possible at the cost of a permanent race for economic survival. One study emphasises that "mental wear and tear, disgust with work, suicidal thoughts and even voluntary death are particularly acute among individuals who are highly committed to their work".<sup>29</sup> A gendered approach to this issue would be particularly useful given the nature of the factors and symptoms of this distress, which are often linked to approaches that are considered more masculine in our patriarchal society.

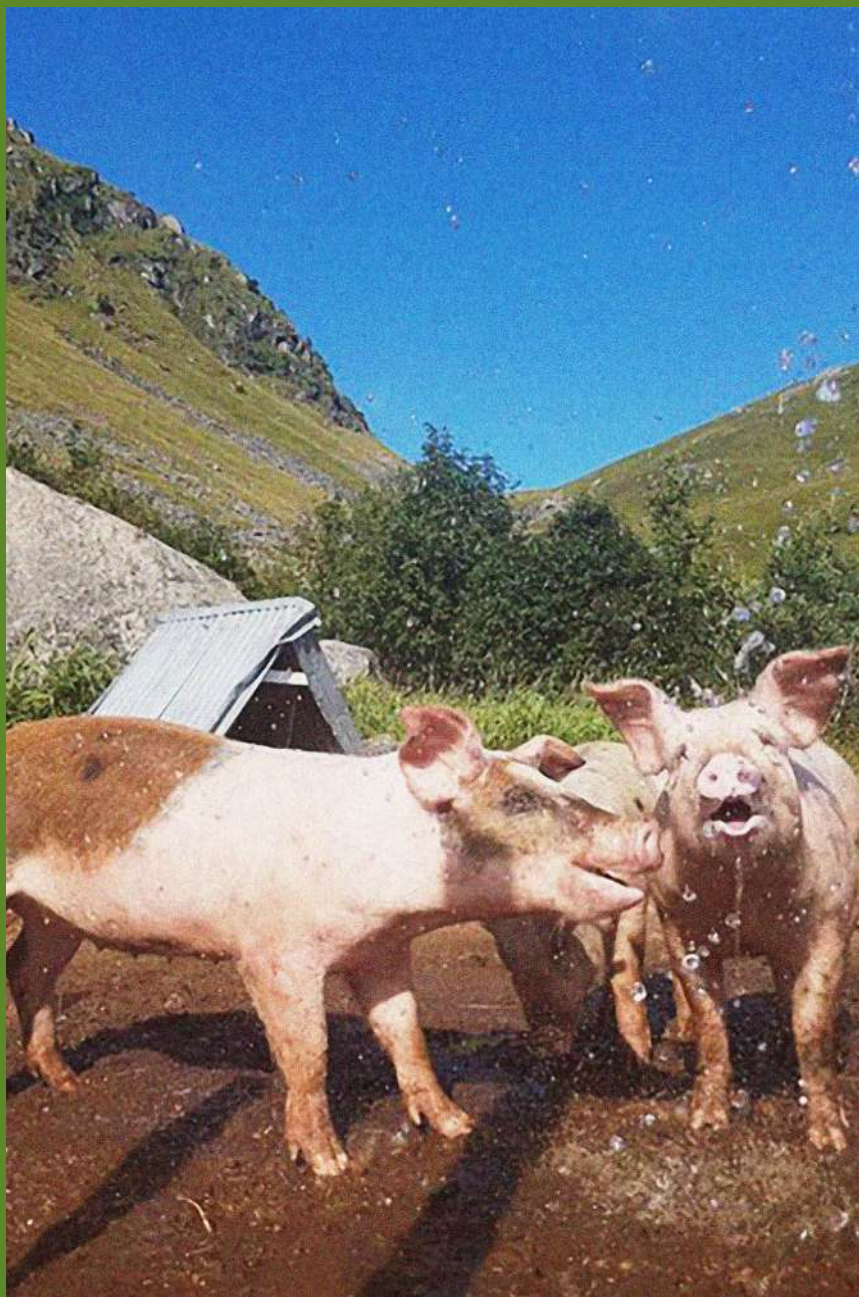
Given the nature of farmers' work and the aforementioned major mechanisms that cause loss of self-sufficiency, it is possible to imagine that they are particularly affected by job-related depression.



12. Hens and rooster that supply the farm and the farm café with fresh eggs. © Lofoten Gårdssystem

<sup>29</sup> Nicolas Deffontaines, « Le suicide d'un éleveur bio. Quand le travail perd de son sens », La nouvelle revue du travail, 18 | 2021, mis en ligne le 01 mai 2021, consulté le 02 décembre 2022. DOI : <https://doi.org/10.4000/nrt.8184>





## III POLITICAL SOLUTIONS FOR POLITICAL PROBLEMS – OUR POSITIONS

**Our collective analysis of the challenges facing the livestock sector suggests that there is hope for the future.**

It is crucial to consider a viable transition for all types of farmers: those who are already working in a way that respects their own rights, the welfare of their animals and cultivates biodiversity and enriches their surrounding areas; and those who have been obliged to expand but who can still change their model and adopt more sustainable practices. This process must be supported by public food and agricultural policies.

**In this section we will present the main structural demands of the ECVC peasant farmers' movement.** This is not an exhaustive list and many details still need to be fine-tuned. However, these are the first steps, which need to be understood in a systemic way.

**Political support for peasant livestock farming is the pillar of a viable transition to re-territorialise livestock farming.**

**We urgently need to transition to social, economic and environmental sustainability and to fair and viable agroecology for all farmers. It must start with the closure of factory farms. This will lead to a significant decrease in the number of animals reared in Europe. It will enable peasant farms to consolidate and offer markets better quality animal products. The second step is a redistribution of production to more small- and medium-sized livestock farms in more regions in Europe. This will involve the re-territorialisation of livestock farming according to the carrying capacity of territories.**

**It also means thinking seriously about how the poorest in society will be able to access good quality food.**

In order to break the current vicious circle of industrialisation, the goals for a viable and just transition can be divided into three areas: environmental, economic and political.



**Environmentally**, peasant farmers work with nature, not against it. They value the synergies between living beings and give priority to traditional agricultural knowledge and participatory, transgenerational and experiential learning processes.



**Economically**, they must base their principles on forms of economy that are truly beneficial to communities: solidarity, circularity, regional grounding, and respect of ecological limits.



**Socially**, they must put food rights high on the political agenda and work for equality and social justice for all people in the world.



14. Goatherd processing milk on her farm to make organic raw milk cheese in the Ardèche. © Biquette Jaubernie

**This transition must be sustainable.** While the term sustainability must be treated with caution, ECVC has recently put together some guidelines on what this should mean in food systems in the context of the debate on the framework law on sustainable food systems. These guidelines can be read here: [www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022-07-20-ECVC-Food-System-Sustainability-Directions.pdf](https://www.eurovia.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/2022-07-20-ECVC-Food-System-Sustainability-Directions.pdf) This definition is broader than livestock farming and encompasses all types of agriculture. It should be noted that precision farming with its costly investment in money and external energy, as well as genetic modification, including of animal feed, cannot be presented as 'sustainable'.

## 1 European public agricultural policies that enable transition

### Relevant policy processes:

We need systemic changes: the European Green Deal goals are the perfect opportunity to make them. Livestock is cross-cutting to many issues and should therefore be considered in all debates related to agriculture and rural areas.

The revision stage of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the legislative framework for sustainable food systems should be the main tools for this transition. Livestock farming should be taken into account in the Environmental Footprint methods, as well as in the revision of the Industrial Emissions Directive. To be effective, climate policies relating to agriculture must promote the re-territorialisation of livestock farming. The long-term vision for rural areas must take into account the importance of livestock farming for the vitality of rural areas..

## OUR DEMAND: Territorial reorganisation of livestock farming in Europe through a just transition

### Coherent territorial reorganisation

- **The CAP must facilitate the de-intensification and de-concentration of animal production.** It must propose a transition plan to do away with factory farms, and with industrialised farms afterwards. This transition must not come down hard on neither the workers on these farms nor peasant farmers. They must all be given adequate compensation and opportunities, the nature of which should be discussed with them. This transition must include impact assessments, resource allocation, anticipation of changes and social protection to ensure adaptation.
- The **objective of this transition must be to limit the number of livestock to the capacity of the local soil on a given territory to produce their food. This will permit farmers' complete and local self-sufficiency in terms of animal feed, and adapted soil fertility.** Within the framework of the CAP, and in particular the eco-schemes, discussions must first focus on defining the modalities of this soil carrying capacity.
- **The European Union must develop a directive on land tenure that will organise the distribution of livestock between regions. This must be done in close collaboration with national authorities so that livestock farming is no longer concentrated in specific regions,** but rather enables mixed farming to be developed in some areas, livestock farming to return to areas currently under arable farming, animal grazing in between crops. This is necessary for the environment because it fosters more autonomous agricultural practices free of external inputs. It is also contributes socially and economically to building dynamic rural areas, filled with small, people-sized farms that provide numerous jobs.
- **The CAP, in its next reform, must impose ceilings on farmland surface ownership and livestock numbers per farm to limit agricultural concentration.**
- Through the CAP and especially its second pillar, **the regions need to acquire greater decision-making autonomy in order to implement a transition that is adapted to their own territorial challenges.**

In conjunction with this general re-territorialisation at European level, policies supporting this development must be put in place and supported, going a little deeper into the specificities of the different aspects of livestock farming:

- Through the CAP and the legislative framework for sustainable food systems, **financially and administratively adapted support for small processing units must be introduced. These units can be for processing milk, butcheries and other animal production, as well as for milling.** They should be adapted to local needs and enable short supply chains.
- Through the CAP and the legislative framework for sustainable food systems, **appropriate financial and administrative support** must be introduced so more co-operatives can manage the logistics between producers and local grocery shops, thus facilitating short supply chains.



- **The CAP must include a plan for a necessary structural adjustment including generational renewal/setting-up of young farmers, and in particular livestock farmers; access to land; and promotion of agroecological farming and mixed crops** for new entrants. This recommendation is included in the recent EU report on The Future of the European Farming Model.<sup>30</sup>
- **CAP subsidy criteria must be radically changed to include criteria for credible agroecological transitions for livestock farms.** This could be done by reinforcing the High Environmental Value (HEV) and eco-schemes, which are currently not achieving their objectives.
- **Existing relevant CAP subsidies which are along the right lines should be pursued**, including subsidies for more grazing systems, which are less dependent on fodder stocks and concentrated feed.
- A transition of livestock farming systems can only take place within a strict framework of respect for human and workers' rights. The CAP social conditionality must be effectively implemented. Shepherds must not be left behind; their work should be recognised.
- **Financial aid must be allocated to those for whom the transition causes financial losses**, until such time as remunerative prices can be guaranteed and the human-animal-environment balance ensured. The modalities must be discussed with the farmers at local levels, and accompanied by robust social protections.
- **The criteria for the assignment of new Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) labels** and revisions of existing specifications must take into account the environmental impact of livestock production methods and favour sustainable systems and respect for workers' rights.

European data collection and development structures, as well as key policy structures, must support this transition.

- **The European statistics process must be more transparent and relevant.** The statistics presented at institutional meetings today only deal with the economic aspect of the market (e.g., imports, exports, meat prices, animal feed prices, or the ratio between the euro and the dollar). It is time to bring the human aspect back to the forefront of the sector's concerns (e.g., the number of farms, number of slaughterhouses, size of farms per country, number of farmers, number of suckler cattle farm owners, number of employees per farm, etc.) and to base figures on what is really going on in farms.
- **The Civil Dialogue Groups should** actively work towards a balanced and fair distribution of added value, and not just observe the market situation and share information. Public steering in the public interest is needed. The presence of the largest groups must be rebalanced and structural means must be provided to the smaller groups to enable them to intervene.

### Environmental rules for the transition

There is no doubt about the environmental and climatic impact of industrialised models, and the solution lies in a structural change in public policies. The EU cannot be content with catalogues of isolated agronomic solutions (as is often the case, particularly for the recent "Carbon Farming" Initiative, which is also problematic in other ways)<sup>31</sup> but **must adopt a coherent and systemic approach**:

<sup>30</sup> Schuh, B. et al. 2022, Research for AGRI Committee – The Future of the European Farming Model: Socioeconomic and territorial implications of the decline in the number of farms and farmers in the EU, European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, Brussels

<sup>31</sup> See the Real Zero Europe campaign declaration, to which ECVC has actively contributed: <https://www.realsolutions-notnetzero.org/real-zero-europe>

### Livestock farming in the European Union: supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

- **Environmental measures must make a clear distinction between factory farms and small- and medium-sized farms.** From now on, any plans for new factory farms must be banned. Furthermore, public subsidies to the existing factory farms must be stopped immediately. **See BOX 1.** As part of a viable exit plan, including for workers, the first step is to impose fines on factory farms, which are characterised by off-land practices – usually dictated by multinationals –, and by their harmful effects. The Industrial Emissions Directive must differentiate between medium-sized farms and factory farms. Without this it is not credible.
- **On the other hand, peasant livestock farms operating sustainably and respecting the environment and animal welfare must be given more support for their good practices.** This requires remunerative prices, but also public and regulatory financial support for small-scale projects, short supply chains and access to land.
- **Financing access to agroecological practices:** There is considerable public funding for innovation, but it is not well distributed: it is largely directed towards high-tech innovations that are neither sustainable nor empowering. Investing in agroecological practices requires less investment and is more sustainable. It is more about training and advice. This funding should not be reduced to one-off project funding but should be the subject of general public funding.
- **Assessments of the environmental and climate impacts of livestock farms cannot be based on purely technical criteria.** The assessments must be simple, clear and accessible. They must be written up together with the farmers, who best know their local areas. For example, a simple criterion is that livestock farms with the lowest external input requirements and the highest self-sufficiency and resilience should receive the highest ratings. Mechanisms of dependence on external private consultancies should be avoided as soon as possible as their costs are often questionable.



15. Mixed herd of Rove goats and Mourerous sheep on winter transhumance in the Faugérais vineyards. © Nathan Marsel

- **Premiums should be introduced to strengthen the genetic diversity of herds** and or to strengthen the Agro-Environmental-climate Measures (AECM) for threatened species.
- **Public research funds for industrial production must be reallocated to sustainable breeding and the conservation of traditional breeds throughout the production chains.** Research on genetics should not focus solely on genetic engineering. Background work must be done to ensure that publicly funded research is not carried out by the very industry that profits directly from it, as is largely the case today.
- **Methanisation must be controlled** because it leads to factory farms being set up and structurally strengthened. It also brings about the industrialisation of off-land practices, which makes things worse rather than better. We need to rethink peasant methanisation, on a coherent scale, at affordable costs, and with operations that can be managed by autonomous individuals on their own land.
- **The reduction of greenhouse gas emissions must be real and not linked to offsetting processes**, in which big polluters buy their right to continue polluting without limit. Thus the "carbon agriculture" initiative must be redirected towards supporting the exit from factory farms and the reduction of emissions, rather than the offsetting mindset proposed so far. It must be linked to the CAP to ensure a transition to more sustainable and agroecological models.
- **The European Union must work on the implementing the current regulation on large carni-vore species; it must work on preventing attacks and protecting herds, on detecting and/or physical removing predators. It must be targeted and carried out, above all, by the State services, without calling on farmers to pick up the tab. Sufficient and immediate financial resources must be made available to ensure and compensate the victims of attacks fairly and generously (including for direct and consequential damage and missing animals) without any conditions for the implementation of preventive measures by farmers. The coloni-sation of neighbouring territories must be systematically anticipated.**



16. Grazing in the French Pyrenees. © Antonio Onorati

## Consistent hygiene rules that allow small- and medium-sized farms to exist

- **Hygiene rules, including regarding slaughtering, dairy products and all processing and trading units in addition to rules related to animal welfare as defined by the CAP, must be adapted to local animal product processing realities.** They should be less burdensome for small- and medium-sized farms, leaving them viable margins for survival.
- **The hygiene regulations for slaughterhouses should be reasonable enough in terms of rules and the financial burdens they impose to allow more fixed or mobile slaughterhouses to be set up.** This includes slaughter boxes, mobile slaughter units with collection sites and carcass preparation units without cool rooms for hanging. A maximum distance of 30-40 km between the farm and the slaughterhouse should be guaranteed. More could be allowed according to the specific situation in some countries, such as Finland.
- **Any new enforcement of hygiene and animal welfare measures must be carried out in consultation with farmers and accompanied by financial support for the transition.** It must be an economically viable and fair transition for the farms.

## Self-sufficiency requires a definitive end to the consumption of highly processed products

- **The European Union must work to apply a strong and democratic precautionary principle on laboratory cell development and precision fermentation technologies, with their false replacement of meat and other animal products.** These products, often genetically modified, would directly bolster the control multinationals have over food. They need to be banned from Europe.
- While the impact of meat consumption, especially of poor quality and/or processed meat, on chronic diseases is to be considered, moderate meat intake is advised by the WHO in terms of essential human nutrition. **ECVC respects all dietary choices, but maintains that good quality meat is a source of important nutrients and a culturally constitutive element of past and future human history.**

It is worth adding here that, although this paper focuses on livestock production, all farm production, and all the agents influencing it, need to be reorganised to enable this transition. This includes the means of transport, the chemical industry, fertilisers, energy, etc.

## 2 The inevitable change in trade policies

As the CAP is directly linked to World Trade Organisation (WTO) regulations and free trade treaties, the paltry prices paid to farmers for their produce are dictated by investment funds and large corporations. This must stop. The report on the Future of the European Farming Model,<sup>32</sup> points to the pernicious effect of these markets on any attempt at structural adjustment.

The European Union must prioritise an internal EU market that is fair to all. Production costs must guarantee a decent income for farmers and workers in the long term.

<sup>32</sup> Schuh, B. *et al.*, 2021, *ibid.*



## OUR POSITION: we demand a profound change in economic and trade policies to allow the territorial re-structuring of livestock farming

### Affordable prices that compensate the work done.

- **As a strategic priority, the implementation of the EU Unfair Trade Practices directive (UTP) must be strengthened to ensure appropriate purchase prices and transparency on how they are set.** Prices should be related to production costs, favouring human-scale livestock farming with grass-fed production practices, guaranteeing a long-term decent wage for workers. In this respect, the Spanish law on supply chains should be taken as an example. A sufficient budget must be earmarked for monitoring this implementation and imposing fines if necessary.
- **The UTP directive must, among other things, put an end to sales below cost. European and national agricultural markets must also be reorganised** so that the price paid to farmers covers the costs of more extensive and better-quality farming.
- This directive could also be an opportunity **to prevent the hyper-standardisation of products imposed in the sectors.** The current requirements are inconsistent with agroecological farming, which is more closely dependent on climate conditions and therefore on the availability of resources.
- **Social policies must be introduced to ensure that good quality animal products are accessible** to all citizens, regardless of the size of their wallet. **We must make use of the opportunities provided by the legislative framework for sustainable food systems to ensure this.**

### Putting an end to animal feed imports

- **A ten-year EU plan must be drawn up to end the EU's dependence on imported products,** including soybeans which are usually genetically modified, and to ensure local supply of fodder and cereals.
- This end to imports to the EU could lead to significant social and economic distortions in third countries. The EU must therefore exert strong pressure against land grabbing and in favour of land reform worldwide. This would free up land in the global south so that local markets are strengthened and more resilient in the event of food crises.

### Curb unfair inter-European competition

- **We need to prevent unfair market competition for animal products and inputs coming from countries of the EU,** the common market organisation, and therefore the CAP.
- **The EU must find the structural levers to allow the multiplication of short supply chains and on-farm processing practices.** This means working on public procurement, but also providing start-up support for short supply chains, local support for these networks, and small grant applications. This must take place in the context of the legislative framework for sustainable food systems.

## Livestock farming in the European Union: supporting an ambitious transition to peasant farming

- **Transporting live animals over distances of more than 200 kilometres for commercial purposes should be prohibited.** Animals are already under stress after 30 minutes of transport. Local livestock farming and animal selection should also be promoted. Means of transport need to be adapted and the staff need to be trained to better meet the animals' needs. This limit could be adjusted according to country and transhumance system.

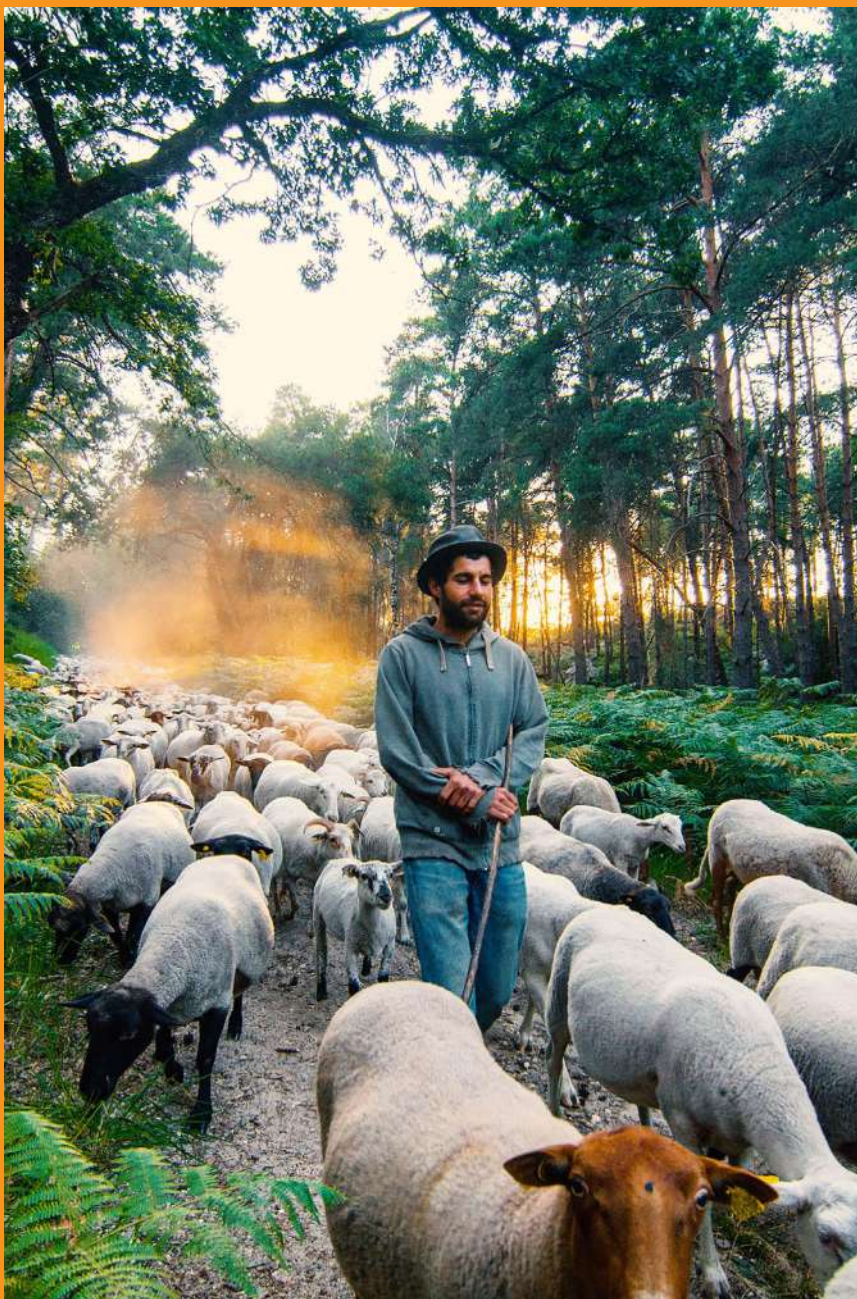
### Curbing unfair competition globally

- **The EU proposals on reciprocity of standards (or mirror clauses) are an opportunity to move towards greater consistency in the global market.** ECVC is particularly concerned about the harmful impact of current agreements on the food systems and markets in the global South. They have direct and negative impacts on normal people. A mirror clause proposal must ensure that there is no negative impact on the food systems of third countries.
- **It is urgent for the European Union to leave the free trade agreements,** taking particular precautions regarding the repercussions that this exit from the treaties will have on people living in countries outside Europe, in a spirit of justice and international solidarity. The re-territorialisation of livestock farming in Europe must not be offset by imports from free trade agreements.
- The European Union must start this process **by banning speculation on food products.** The EU has tools to measure this speculation; it should use them.



17. The goats enjoy the outdoors with the farm's oldest son. After a degree in agricultural studies, he works as an agricultural consultant and manages the family farm. © Lofoten Gårdsysteri





18. Landless shepherd from the Beauce region keeping his herd from the end of autumn to the end of spring on intercrops of organic cereal farmers before going on transhumance in the Fontainebleau forest. © Michaël Biard

## IV OUR CONCLUSION:

The presented recommendations are a complex and coherent package of measures. We encourage European law-makers to implement them as soon as possible. The process of re-territorialising livestock farming in Europe must begin now through a coherent and fair transition.

Wasting time will only make matters more urgent. Climate change is becoming ever more pressing and the erosion of biodiversity is accelerating. The livestock sector is a reflection of how the farming world has been weakened in recent decades, and how food sovereignty has been undermined in Europe and the rest of the world. That said, we maintain that it is also one of the main levers for achieving real changes.

Let us also remember that peasant farming is much richer than our political recommendations would suggest. It responds to the need to take care of social links between cities and the countryside, but also in rural areas themselves, by providing stable and rewarding jobs on and off farms, as well as exchanges of services. It contributes to local identities and cultures, including culinary traditions. Peasant livestock farming is the bedrock of agroecology: it enables natural and consistent biological cycles and respectful, caring and dignified human-animal relationships. It is this agroecology; this form of farming that is more sustainable – more environmentally, economically and socially viable - which is necessary for food sovereignty. For those who still have doubts about our refusal to limit ourselves to the motto "less but better", we insist that "less" can in no way take place without more of the "better" that we all need.

This is not a vain hope. It is possible to change agricultural and trade policies to put an end to intensive industrial farming. At ECVC, we clearly affirm our defence of peasant livestock farming. It has close links to the soil and local areas; it nourishes communities; it is self-sustaining and stands for exceptional quality.



20. Goatherd and his herd of Rove goats on the edge of the wine-growing plain of the Hérault. They are kept all year round in the Languedoc scrubland without any fodder or supplements. Breed chosen for its hardiness and resistance to the summer heat of the region. © Nathan Morsel





[www.eurovia.org](http://www.eurovia.org)