EUROMONTANA

Extensive livestock farming in the mountains

Sustaining landscapes, sustaining livelihoods

POSITION PAPER | May 2026

Euromontana's position on the EU Livestock Strategy

Euromontana position paper on the EU Strategy for Livestock

Extensive livestock farming in the mountains

Introduction

Euromontana welcomes the Commission's steps towards addressing the challenges of the livestock sector. Livestock is highlighted in the **Vision for Agriculture and Food**, and a **Strategy for Livestock** was announced for the second quarter of 2026 in this year's Commission Work Programme. In February 2026, the Commission highlighted its intention to structure the Livestock Strategy around 4 main pillars: **Fitting Territorial Diversity, Competitive, Sustainable, and Resilient to Crisis.** This position paper addresses these four key themes, with an additional section addressing the links between the Livestock strategy and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Euromontana believes the Livestock Strategy must consider all dimensions, notably the economic, social, environmental, cultural and territorial aspects of livestock, with digital inclusion and social innovation as enabling frameworks, as well as the diversity of livestock systems across Europe, including mountain agriculture.

Mountain farming plays a key role in Europe's agricultural production. It accounts for **18% of farms, 15% of the utilised agricultural area and 15% of the agricultural workforce** in the European Union.[1] Mountain products are renowned for their high quality and farming practices for their extensive approach, with low inputs and limited yields. However, due to the geographical constraints of mountain areas, agricultural productivity is **40% lower and farmers' incomes 20.4% lower** than in other areas. Farms struggle with labour shortages and generational renewal, whilst mountain areas are also among the most vulnerable to climate change and land abandonment: around **11% of EU agricultural land could be abandoned by 2030**, whilst almost a quarter (1.38 million ha) of all agricultural abandonment in the EU will likely occur in mountain areas.[2] In addition, mountain farming practices provide essential ecosystem services, such as preserving fragile habitats, storing carbon in permanent grasslands and maintaining unique, recognised and protected cultural practices such as transhumance. Furthermore, the latest data from Eurostat on extensive systems paints a picture of a sector in an alarming state of decline and transformation.[3] The main trends observed are declining numbers of smallholdings and the consolidation of animals and permanent grasslands.

For Euromontana, the strategic question is not whether livestock should remain in mountain areas, but under what conditions extensive and grassland-based systems can remain economically viable while continuing to deliver food production, biodiversity, landscape management and territorial cohesion. In this vision, extensive livestock farming in mountain areas is part of an integrated territorial framework, embedded within local ecosystems of services, governance, and innovation.
To achieve this, the EU Livestock Strategy should set a clear political framework: recognising the diversity of livestock systems across Europe, identifying the systems that are strategically important for food production, territorial cohesion and ecosystem management, and defining how EU policies, notably the post-2027 CAP, research, promotion, animal health and trade, should support these systems in a coherent way. In mountain areas, this means a specific focus on extensive, grassland-based and pastoral systems.

[1] Eurostat (2009).
[2] Perpiña Castillo C., Kavalov B., Diogo V., Jacobs-Crisioni C., Batista e Silva F., Lavalle C, JRC113718, European Commission 2018.
[3] European Commission (2025) Grassland and livestock dynamics: How grazing management sustains and shapes European Grasslands, Analytical Brief No 13, November 2025.

Territorial diversity

Recognising the specificities of mountain agriculture

Mountain areas face unique challenges. In the 20th century, approximately **90% of semi-natural grasslands disappeared due to intensification or abandonment**, and populations of many of their species decreased or became extinct in most European countries.

Moreover, mountain agriculture plays a crucial role in providing cultural services. Livestock farming and pastoralism in particular shape the iconic landscapes of Europe's mountains, underpinning their cultural identity and supporting rural tourism. In many remote and mountainous territories, extensive and low-density livestock systems are the only viable farming option, and often the last economic activity preventing land abandonment. Their terrain and ecology make a shift to intensive grazing systems impossible, reducing the choice not between other farming methods but between well supported extensive pastoral management and uncontrolled abandonment and forest encroachment.

A loss of agricultural activity in mountain areas risks eroding landscapes and diminishing the aesthetic and cultural value of the territories. **Treating territorial diversity as a strength** is therefore central to ensuring the long-term viability of livestock farming across Europe. A key priority for Euromontana is to ensure territorial and production diversity as a foundation for resilient livestock systems.

To ensure territorial diversity, **the Strategy should**:

- Include **territorial differentiation as a core delivery principle**, recognising that there is **no one size fits all approach**, and that livestock systems in mountain areas and other areas with natural constraints require tailored policy approaches, rather than uniform targets or instruments.

- Actively **support the continuation of extensive and grassland-based livestock farming** in mountain areas and other areas at risk of land abandonment, recognising its role in food production, ecosystem management and rural prosperity. This requires leveraging the future CAP to enhance support Areas of Natural Constraints, generational renewal, income support, and in recognising the role and contribution of mountain farming to thriving rural areas.

- **Address land abandonment through a dedicated territorial approach** combining better land-use intelligence, support for reactivation of abandoned or underused grasslands. Where relevant, the Strategy should encourage Member States and regions to facilitate access to land for extensive livestock farmers, notably through the exchange of good practices and better knowledge of land-use dynamics, with the support of the EU Land Observatory.

- **Improve the territorial evidence base for livestock policy**, including through better data collection on land use, grassland management and abandonment trends in mountain areas.

Economic viability

Securing a bright economic future for mountain farmers

Euromontana supports the Commission's aim to provide targeted, territorial solutions for the sector's competitiveness and sustainability. This means improving farm viability through fairer value distribution, stronger product valorisation, targeted support in constrained territories, and innovation adapted to extensive systems. A key challenge is to make extensive livestock farming and pastoralism

economically viable, technologically equipped and professionally attractive, including for the next generation.

The competitiveness of mountain livestock systems depends not only on public support, but also on fairer value distribution along the entire food chain, stronger producer organisation and cooperation, more stable and transparent contractual approaches to secure prices over the long term, effective enforcement of unfair trading rules and better recognition of quality and origin. Extensive livestock farming, and particularly pastoralism, is impacted by declining livestock numbers[4], which affect a diversity of ruminant systems in different ways. There are also acute difficulties in attracting and retaining workers, due to low and unstable incomes demanding working conditions, and limited access to modern tools compared to other livestock sectors.

To valorise the production of extensive livestock farming in mountain areas, **the Strategy should**:

- Recognise that the **economic viability of extensive livestock systems** depends on a combination of fairer value distribution in the food chain, targeted support in constrained territories, better access to innovation and labour, and real prospects for succession.

- Improve the economic valorisation of extensive livestock production by **strengthening farmers' position in the value chain**, through collective organisation, cooperation between producers, more balanced contractual approaches, fairer pricing, transparency and better long-term economic viability.

- **Address the decline in ruminants in extensive systems on small mountain farms,** proportionate to the level of decline reported by recent data, via dedicated socioeconomic support in the CAP (see section further below), given the role of the animals in grassland management, biodiversity, wildfire prevention, high-quality products and the socio-economic cohesion of remote mountain areas.

- Ensure the continuation of a **strong EU agricultural promotion policy**, to increase the visibility, recognition and market reach of high-quality mountain livestock products.

- **Ensure full coherence between the Livestock Strategy and EU trade policy**, by ensuring that international agreements do not expose extensive livestock farmers in mountain areas to unfair competition from products that do not meet equivalent requirements on health, environmental, social, animal welfare and traceability standards, particularly in sensitive livestock sectors.

- **Recognise and support mountain quality products,** by:
    - Maintaining the regulatory framework for the supply of products under Geographical Indications (GIs)
    - Supporting producer groups linked to mountain livestock value chains, to uphold quality and prices.
    - Facilitating the access of mountain livestock products to public and collective catering markets, including through better coherence with EU public procurement rules and support for territorially anchored supply chains.

4 EU 2026 livestock production trends - Eurostat. Accessed 10 April 2026.

- Promoting certifications that enhance the value of mountain farming products and encourage the visibility and uptake of the **Optional Quality Term "mountain product".**

- **Include measures to better communicate about** the vital traditional role of livestock, its intangible cultural heritage, and the role of transhumance, for example through EU-level communication campaigns and coordinated support and cooperation with pastoral schools and dedicated training programmes.

- **Improve capacity for additional research and innovation** actions for extensive livestock systems in mountain areas, as well as supporting additional research into and implementation of **sustainable and innovative uses for wool.**

- Foster the use of EU and national funding instruments to develop **circular bioeconomy value chains** linked to extensive livestock farming in mountain areas, including sustainable and innovative uses of wool and other by-products, through cooperation, small-scale processing, advisory support and market uptake measures.

Sustainable animal farming

A livestock strategy that supports environmental sustainability

Livestock systems, notably grassland-based systems, can provide climate and environmental benefits by sequestering carbon, regulating water flows and improving water quality, protecting biodiversity, and maintaining diversified and open landscapes, particularly in mountain areas. Yet livestock continues to be a significant source of GHG emissions in Europe, accounting for approximately 65% of the agricultural sector's emissions, and could become the largest source by 2040.[5]

Maintaining livestock farming in mountain areas and areas with natural constraints contributes to environmental sustainability by preventing land abandonment, supporting biodiversity and preserving traditional landscapes. Declining grassland quality and soil degradation directly threaten both ecosystem services and the economic viability of livestock farms. Without livestock, many grasslands would disappear; without healthy grasslands, extensive livestock systems cannot survive.

A livestock strategy must therefore recognise grassland quality as a strategic asset for soil health, biodiversity and climate resilience, and set the framework for Member States to better recognise and remunerate ecosystem services delivered by extensive livestock systems, in particular the maintenance of permanent grasslands, biodiversity conservation, water regulation, landscape management and wildfire prevention.

To support the environmental sustainability of extensive livestock farming in mountain areas, **the Strategy should:**

- **Recognise and invest in grasslands, including permanent grasslands,** as a central pillar of EU soil, biodiversity and climate objectives, while taking into account the diversity of management practices, including where rotations are necessary. The Strategy should also explicitly

[5] Scheid A, Hart K, Pasmino J, Riedel A, Tremblay L-l, Durrant L (2025) Leveraging the Common Agricultural Policy to accelerate livestock emission reductions – examples from five Member States, Ecologic Institute and IEEP.

acknowledge the strategic role of low-productivity grassland areas for pastoral and extensive systems.

- **Increase support for ecosystem services**, by providing Member States with clear guidance and rewarding first movers for environmentally sustainable practices, including the prevention of land abandonment. This could include support for farmers who practice agroecology, agroforestry, animal husbandry and animal welfare plans, to promote genetic diversity and resilience, High Nature Value (HNV) farming, such as transhumance, or in cross-border biosphere reserves, including through pilot schemes.

- **Support actions to restore and improve grassland quality**, where appropriate, including better grazing management to respect carrying capacity of the landscape, reintroduction of high-quality grass species and greater feed autonomy based on local resources.

- **Recognise and support extensive grazing as an enabler of biodiversity conservation**, climate change adaptation and mitigation, the prevention of natural disasters, and integrated landscape management to prevent forest fires.

- **Support EU-level analytical work to improve knowledge of grasslands, permanent grasslands and grazing systems,** based on aggregated data and proportionate scientific methods. This work should help better understand trends in abandonment, underuse, ecological pressure and the resilience of grassland-based systems, without creating a logic of individual farm-level control or automatically conditioning access to support.

- **Clearly distinguish between high-density intensive systems requiring transition and grassland-based extensive systems** whose continuation is often necessary to maintain habitats, open landscapes, biodiversity and the sustainable use of mountain resources.

Resilient to crisis

A socially just livestock sector and generational renewal

A credible livestock strategy must strengthen overall resilience in mountain areas. This can include the social resilience of the workforce, the sanitary and climate resilience of extensive livestock systems, and the territorial resilience of grassland-based farming facing depopulation and land abandonment. When seen within an embedded territorial ecosystem, this makes livestock farming an essential part of the socio-economic vitality of mountain areas, where it contributes to maintaining permanent grasslands and peatlands, sustains rural employment, prevents depopulation and preserves cultural heritage. Yet due to structural difficulties in the sector, mountain farmers struggle to attract young people as successors or encourage them to take up farming activities.

In certain mountain areas, an increased presence of large carnivores represents an additional structural constraint for extensive grazing systems. Preventive measures are often difficult to implement in remote and high-altitude environments, meaning that the impacts are unevenly distributed. This underlines the need for territorially adapted policy approaches.

A livestock strategy must address the social dimension of the sector, ensuring improved working conditions and adequate incomes for agricultural workers, as well as the highest standards of safety and animal welfare.

To support social and territorial resilience, **the Strategy should:**

- **Improve the attractiveness and working conditions of pastoral and extensive** livestock farmers by:
    - Supporting access to hired labour and replacement services, including through the aggregation of labour supply via cooperative or network-based models that facilitate matching between workers and farms.
    - Supporting investment in housing and basic infrastructure where required.
    - Improving working and safety conditions for shepherds, including adequate support services, risk-sharing mechanisms, and rapid response systems for multiple crises.
    - Adequately supporting coexistence with large carnivores in high-risk areas.
    - Ensuring that remuneration and risk-sharing tools better reflect the higher labour intensity of extensive systems.

- **Encourage Member States and regions to improve the conditions for young and new farmers to establish themselves in mountain areas,** notably through succession tools, advisory services, matching between retiring and incoming farmers, and the exchange of experience on land access models already successfully tested.

- **Invest in digital and technological solutions adapted to extensive livestock systems**, with a focus on those solutions that are affordable and provide clear benefits for end users. This could include options of remote monitoring, sensors, GIS, robotics and decision-support tools, management software, and scalable solutions adapted to extensive systems in large, fragmented and mountainous areas.

- **Recognise digital inclusion** as a structural condition for resilience, including investment in rural digital hubs, connectivity and digital skills for farmers and rural communities.

- **Adopting a structural European animal-health policy** adapted to extensive, outdoor and transhumant systems, moving from an approach that is too often reactive towards a genuine culture of prevention. This should combine risk anticipation, biosecurity adapted to extensive systems, vaccination where relevant, proportionate surveillance, rapid compensation and mutualisation tools that reflect the realities of mobile and grassland-based livestock farming.

To support pastoral practices and resilience, **the Strategy should:**

- Call for a **European Action Plan for Pastoralism**, focused on labour, training, land access, mobility, risk management and the recognition of ecosystem services delivered by pastoral systems.

- **Reinforce and modernise existing pastoral schools and training programmes** by providing additional **training opportunities for shepherds** through the investment in existing, and the creation of new, pastoral schools, which are critical actors for generational renewal.

- **Support the transfer of knowledge and skills on pastoralism** including training on digital skills, entrepreneurial and social innovation, data management, and technological operations,

through support for shepherding schools, revaluing pastoral and rural life; and strengthened rural-urban linkages. For example, through the AKIS or other relevant EU programmes.

- **Strengthen research, innovation and pilot projects** focused on **extensive livestock and pastoralism**. This could include the topics of provision and remuneration of ecosystem services, wildlife management, the content of training programmes, and how to overcome market and regulatory barriers.

- **Leverage the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists in 2026** and maintain momentum for further activities.

How can the future CAP support extensive livestock farming in mountain areas?

The CAP remains the backbone of delivery for livestock farming in diverse territories, particularly in areas with natural and geographic constraints where market signals alone are insufficient. The CAP should maintain the capacity to produce – economically, environmentally, socially and sustainably – safe, diverse and high-quality food, via livestock systems that ensure that producers receive a stable and sufficient level of income. It should also recognise and value the provision of public goods and ecosystem services to manage natural resources sustainably and allow for mitigation of climate change. At EU level, the CAP also creates added value through common frameworks for quality and promotion of mountain livestock products, including support for producer organisations, promotion policy, Geographical Indications and the Optional Quality Term 'mountain product'. Finally, it must also ensure balanced territorial development by recognising the role of extensive livestock in contributing to the vitality of rural mountain areas, to maintain and enhance the appeal of those territories and thus prevent the depopulation of those regions, including for future generations.

In the context of the livestock strategy, the post-2027 CAP should deliver these objectives for mountain farmers by:

- Earmarking at least **15% of the future CAP budget for payments for Areas of Natural Constraints (ANC)**, in mountains, remote or rural regions, and in areas at risk of land abandonment.

- **Increasing support for generational renewal in the post-2027 CAP**, by combining installation aid, succession and advisory tools, better access to land, and investment support adapted to livestock systems in mountain areas.

- **Coupled support should be better targeted to grazing livestock systems** that deliver clear territorial and environmental value, including extensive ruminant systems, local breeds, and farms in mountain areas and other Areas of Natural Constraints.

- **Better targeting of coupled income support for mountain farmers,** primarily for small and pluri-active farmers in mountain areas, and for vulnerable extensive livestock sectors which are essential for grassland management.

- **Ensuring stronger coherence** between ANC, coupled support, eco-schemes and agri-environment-climate commitments, so that extensive livestock systems and grassland management are supported through a consistent package rather than disconnected measures.

- **Ensuring policy coherence** between CAP support for livestock systems and broader EU objectives on climate, biodiversity, animal health, water protection and rural vitality, the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas, the 2030 Digital Compass, and post-2027 cohesion policy.