XIV European Mountain CONVENTION

30 June - 2 July 2026 | Sallanches

EUROMONTANA

Suaci Montagn'Alpes

Grassland and Livestock Dynamics

How grazing management sustains and shapes European grasslands + excurse on mountains

Sabrina Kogler

European Commission Directorate for Agriculture and Rural Development

sabrina.kogler@ec.europa.eu

01/ July/2026

European Commission

Outline

- Grassland- livestock brief: Key messages
  - Trends / Pressures / Drivers
- Which lessons can we learn for mountain farming?
  - ANC analytical brief: Mountain farming under ANC in the CAP
  - Sustainability analysis on mountain farming
- In the end, what can the CAP provide



Why do grazing ruminant systems on grasslands matter?

Play a major role for agricultural policy (1/3 of UAA)

Provide key ecosystem services:

- Maintain **biodiversity** (High Nature Value Farmland)
- Grazing livestock systems **manage biomass and provide wildfire prevention**
- Manage **water regulation** and **carbon storage**
- Landscape preservation
- **Cultural value** of management
- Conservation of **livestock genetic resources**



What is the role of grazing in European grassland systems?

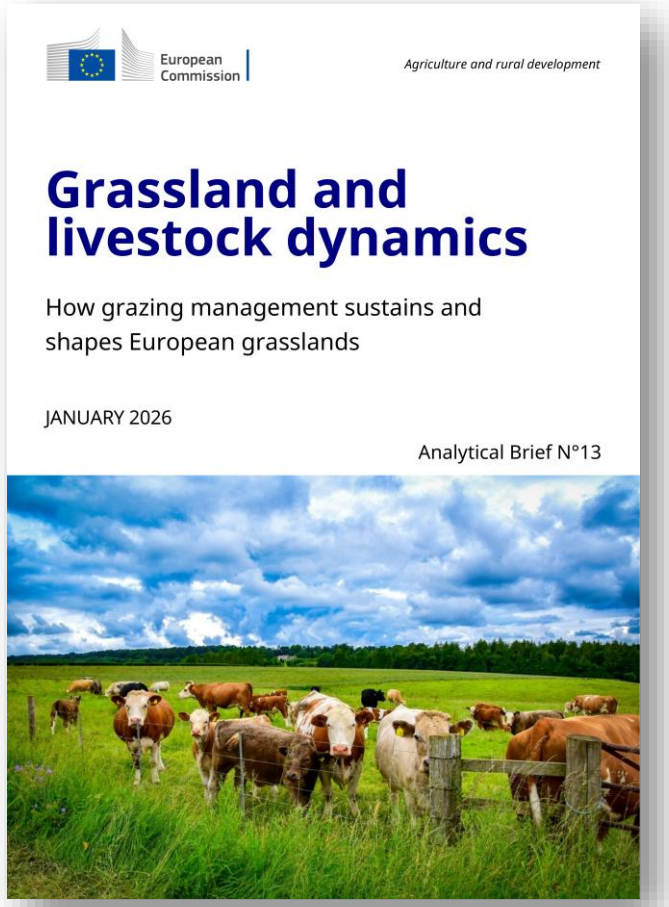
- AIM : How livestock farming (focus on ruminants) with grassland protection can deliver on environmental and rural benefits while maintaining economic viability and what is the role of the CAP?

- Overview on current trends of agriculturally managed grassland systems and ruminant systems in the EU and on territorial level

- Pressures grazing managed grassland systems are facing

- Overview how grazing management impacts ecosystem services

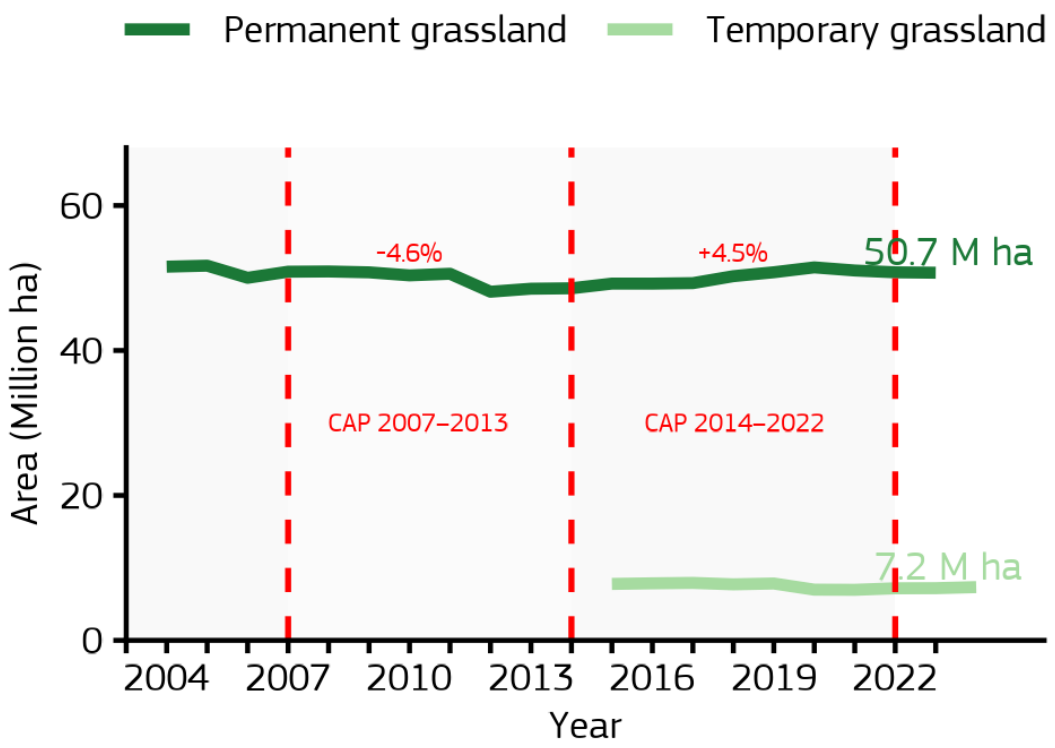
- Examine current CAP and future proposal on grassland-livestock interventions



Analytical Brief N° 13: Grassland and livestock dynamics

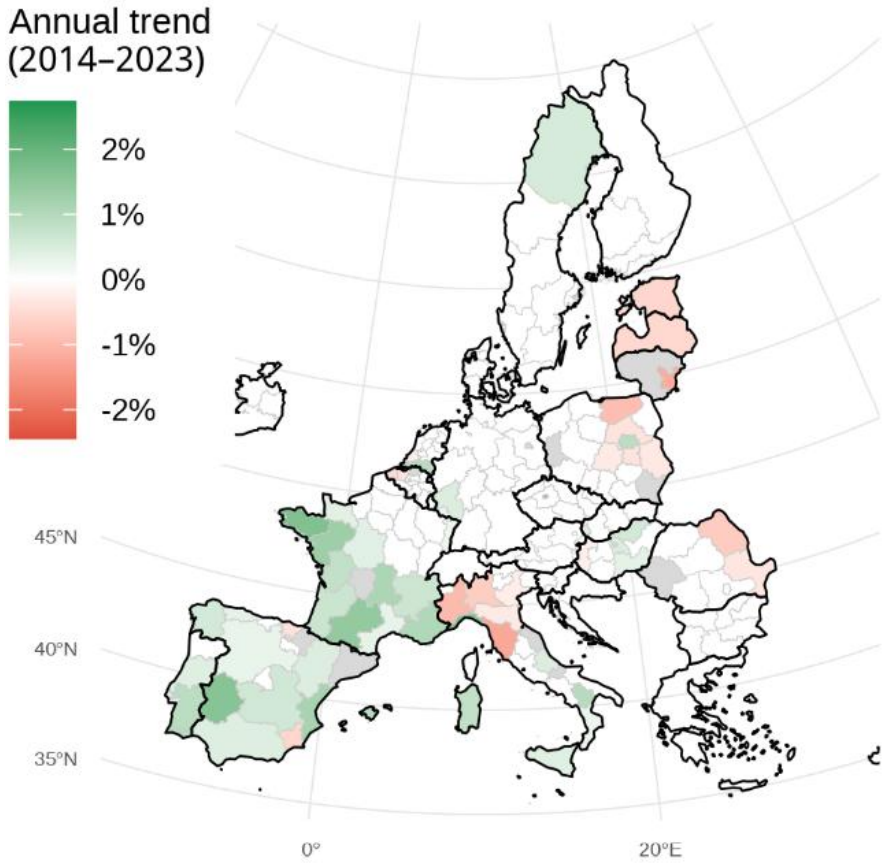
Stabilized permanent grassland areas in the EU, masks high spatial and temporal variations

Permanent grassland area trends in the EU



Source: EC (2026), Grassland and Livestock Dynamics – How grazing management sustains and shapes European grasslands, January 2026. European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, Brussels

Trend in permanent grassland share (% of UAA 2014-2023)



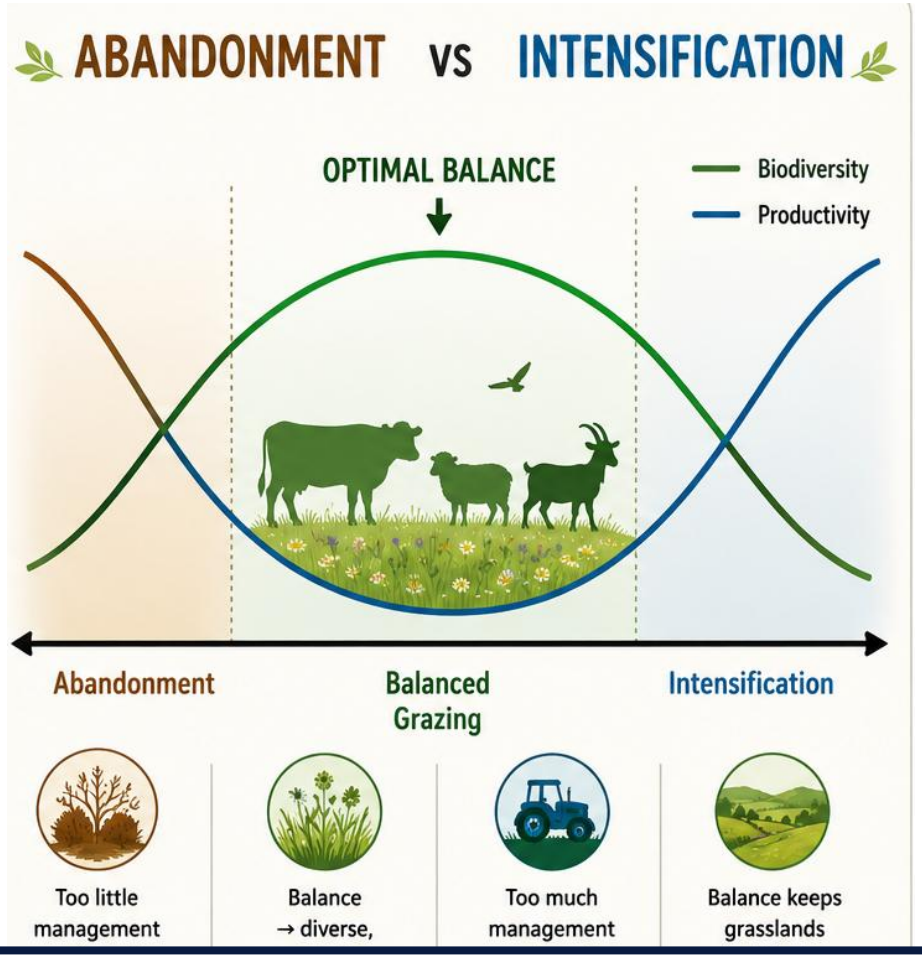
Source: EC (2026), Grassland and Livestock Dynamics – How grazing management sustains and shapes European grasslands, January 2026. European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, Brussels

Dual pressures on grasslands: Abandonment versus intensification

Abandonment in marginal/upland areas: shrub encroachment, biodiversity loss, landscape change, risk of wildfire



Picture 1: Abandonment of grasslands



Intensification/conversion in higher-productive zones: reseeding, fertilization, higher stocking rates, conversion to crops; risks for soil carbon and biodiversity



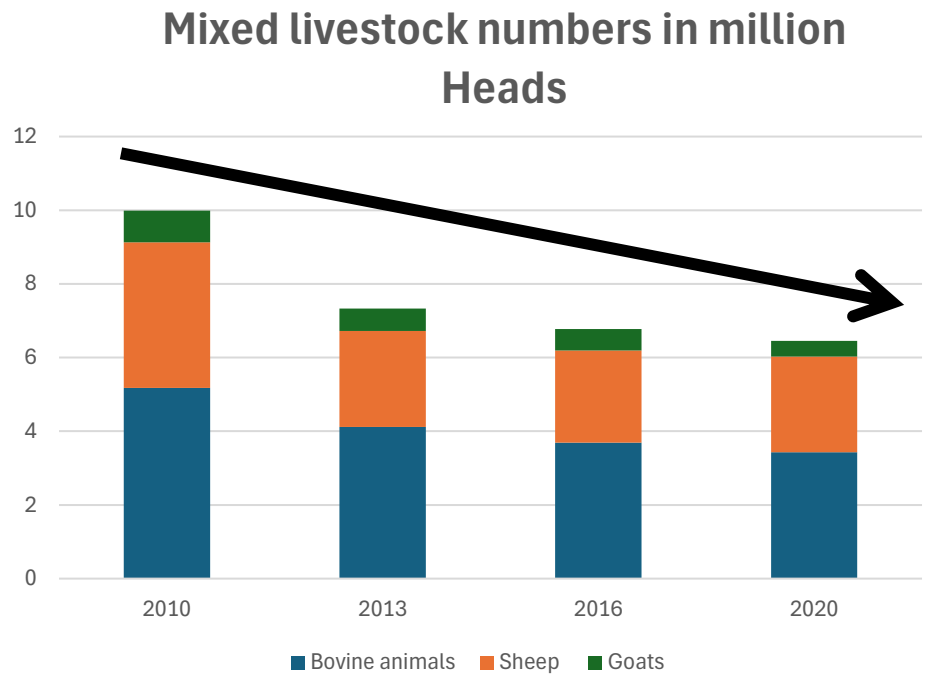
Picture 3: Intensification of grasslands

Contrasting socio-economic dynamics: Decline in extensive grazing systems in marginal areas vs. increase in high-intensity systems in productive areas

Extensive grazing systems face lower profitability, decreasing ruminant numbers and decrease in farms

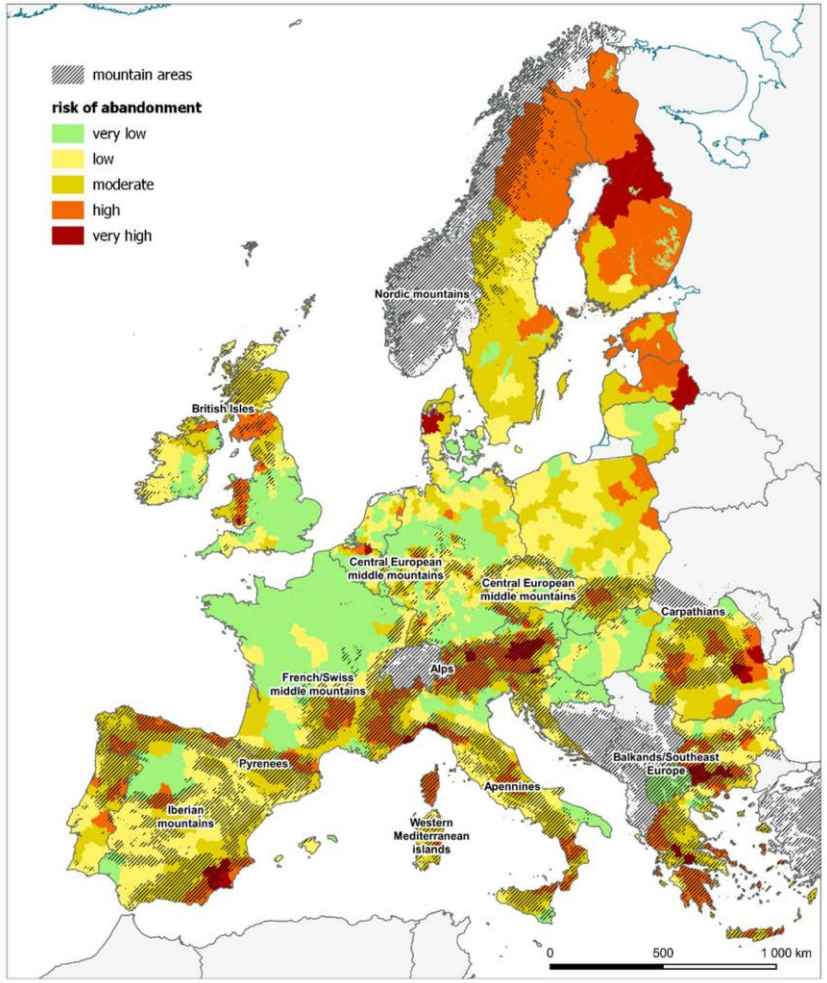
Drivers:

- Ruminant farms with grazable area are less **profitable with decreasing management intensity** (regionality, herd size and farm type matter)
- Between 2010 and 2020, **ruminant numbers in extensive mixed livestock systems declined by about 40%**
- EU **farm numbers in extensive mixed livestock systems** fell by more than 70% between 2010 and 2020
- **Consolidation**: fewer, larger operations; in some places, less grazing on grasslands and more reliance on imported feed.



Source: EC (2026), Grassland and Livestock Dynamics – How grazing management sustains and shapes European grasslands, January 2026. European Commission, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, Brussels

What does this mean for the most vulnerable systems?



- extensive grazing livestock systems in mountains **shape landscapes,** feature **regional identities,** while **maintaining biodiversity**

- Mountainous areas face **a 3 times higher risk of land abandonment** than non-mountain areas

- Strong decline of extensive grazing habitats due to dual pressures of land abandonment and intensification

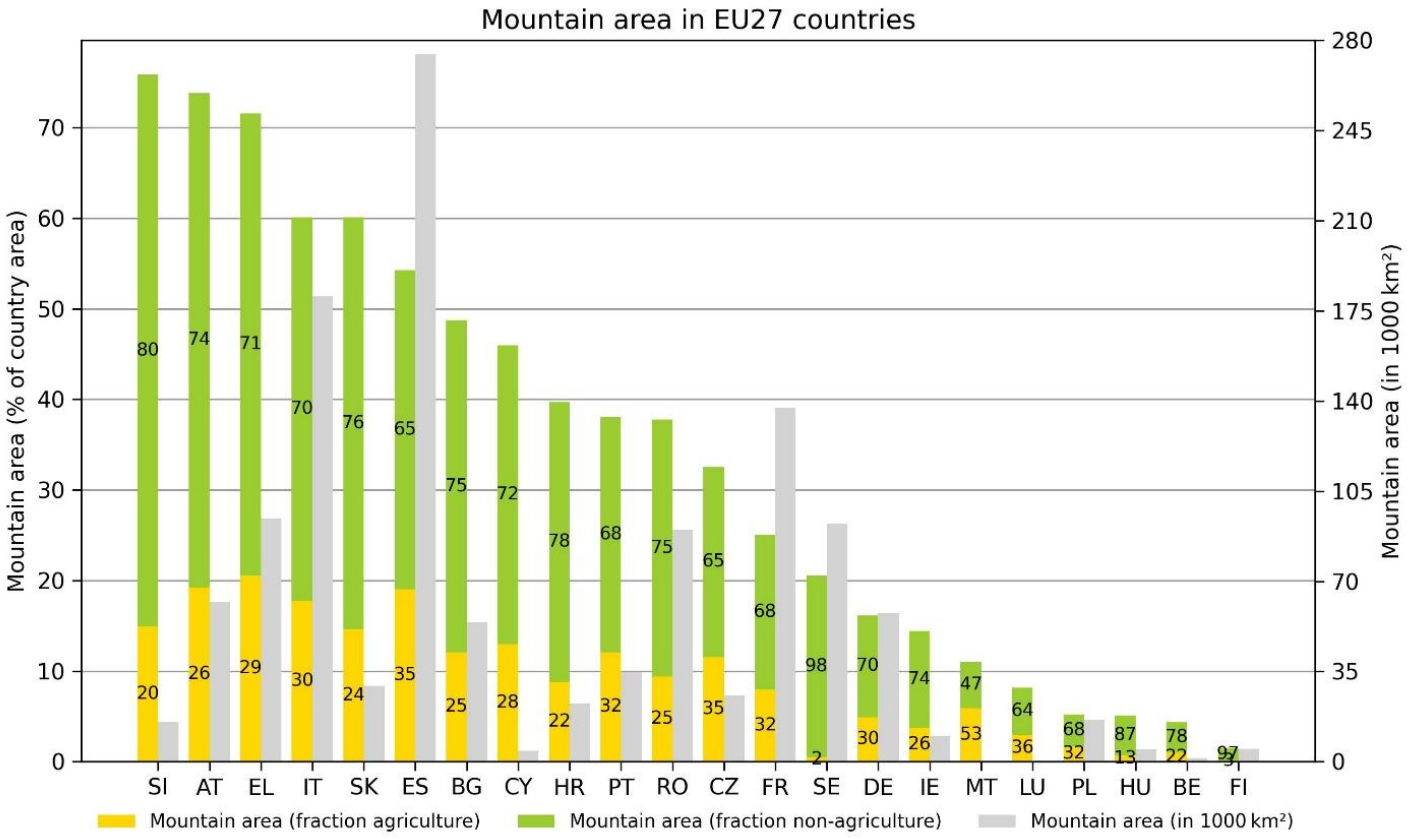
Driven by:

- Decrease in number of farms and animals in remote and mountainous areas
- Aging farming population
- Difficult environmental farming conditions (e.g increased soil erosion risk, climate change, presence or large carnivores)

Source: Dax, T., Schroll, K., Machold, I., Derszniak-Noirjean, M., Schuh, B., & Gaupp-Berghausen, M. (2021). Land Abandonment in Mountain Areas of the EU: An Inevitable Side Effect of Farming Modernization and Neglected Threat to Sustainable Land Use. *Land*, *10*(6)

Farming in mountains: up to 1/3 of mountain area is used for agriculture

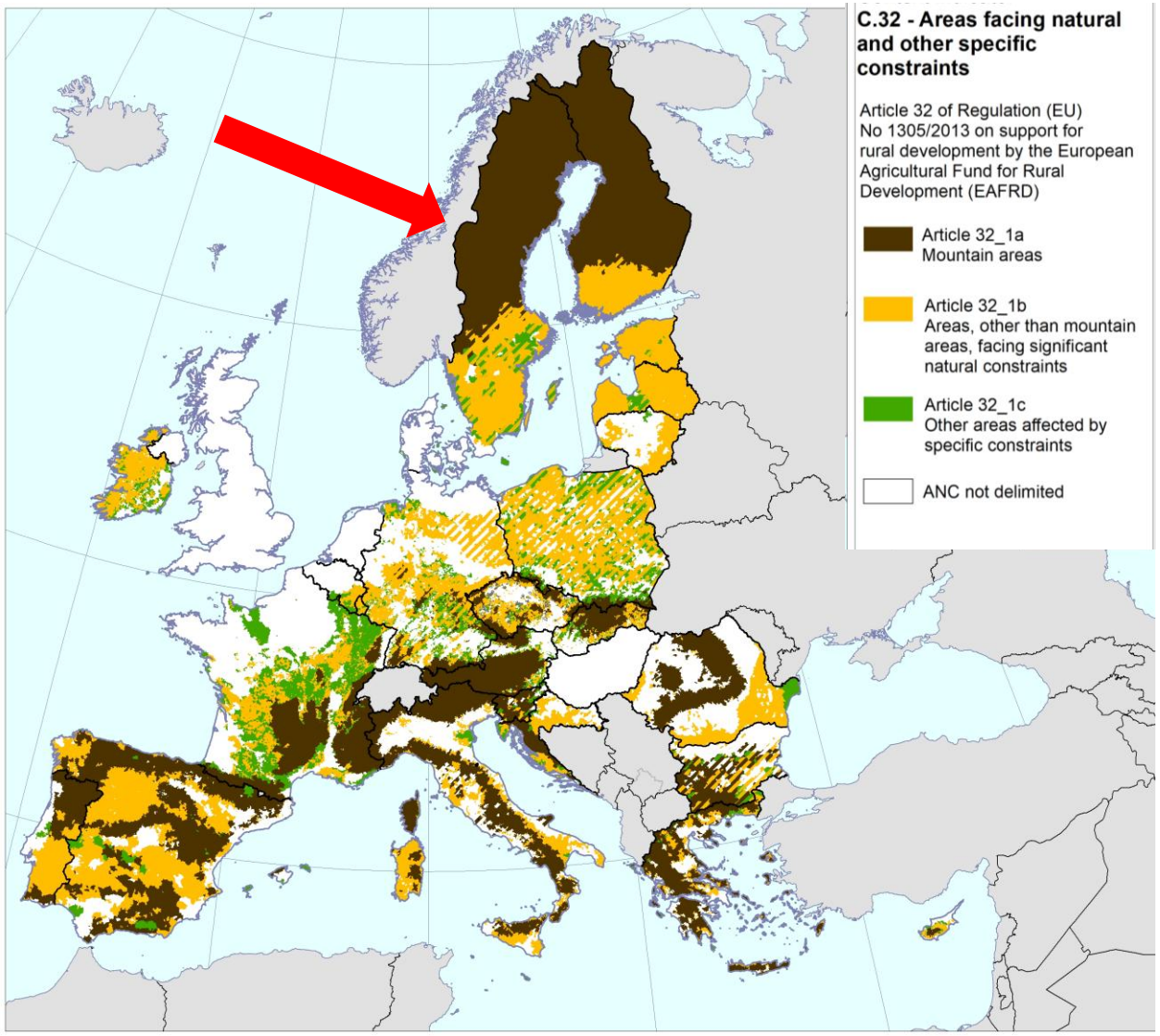
Share of UAA on EEA mountain delineation by MS (2018)



Source: JRC own elaborations, 2026 (not published), based on EEA (2010) Europe's ecological backbone: recognising the true value of our mountains. EEA Report No 6/2010, ISSN 1725-9177

- Highest proportion of mountains is occuring in Austria, Greece and Slovenia
- Heterogenous picture of agricultural farming in mountain areas across MS
- Northern countries have low agricultural share on mountain areas
- Livestock systems are key to manage agriculture in mountaineous areas

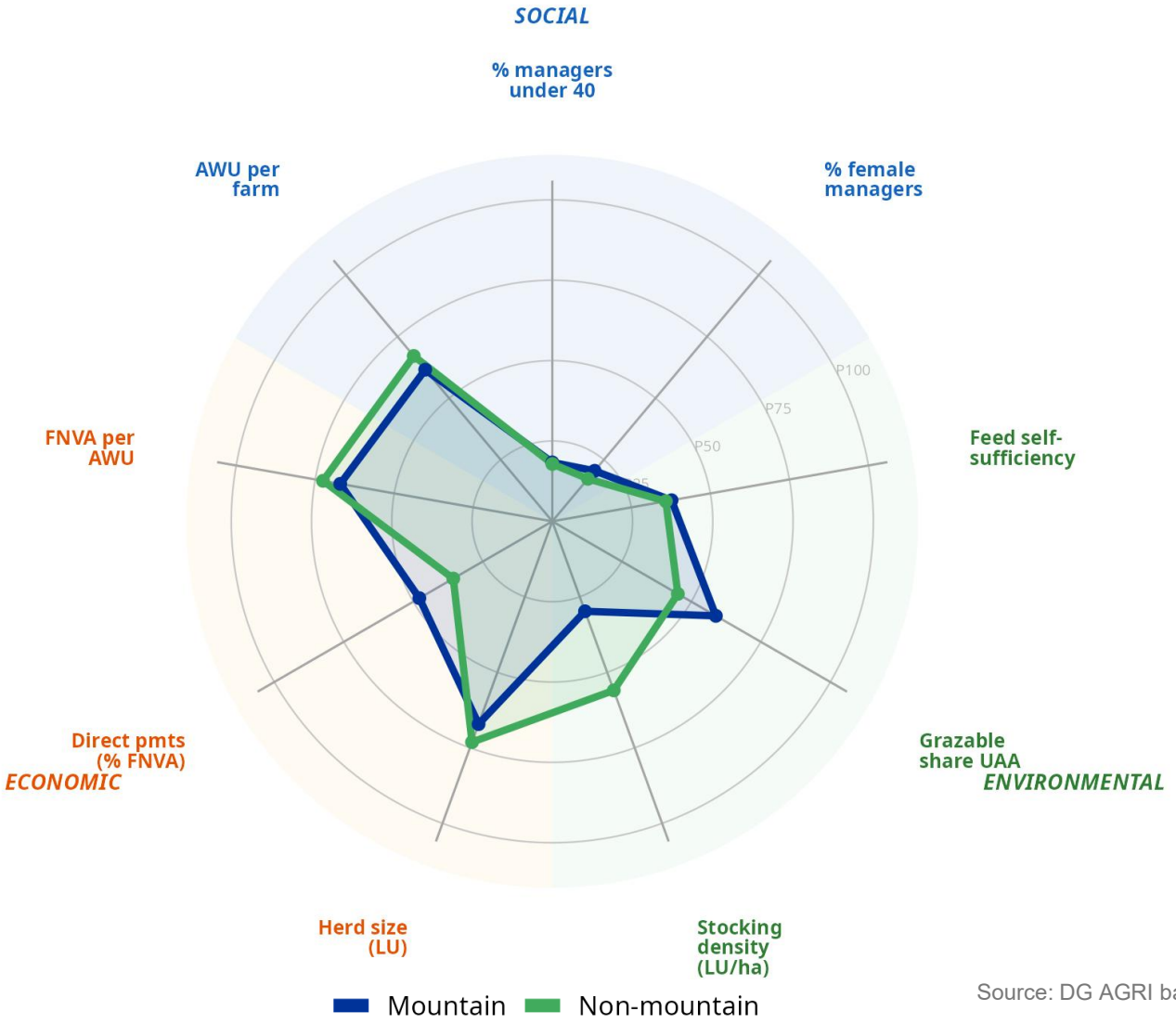
Under the CAP: Areas facing natural and other specific constraints (ANC), a payment supporting mountain farms



Spatial designation of Areas facing natural and other specific constraints. Source: Agri food data portal – context indicators dashboards.

- to ensure **fair income** and allow farmers to continue agricultural land management to **prevent land abandonment** for mountains, areas other than mountains, other areas facing constraints
- Support also from CAP Eco-schemes and Agri-Climate -Environmental Commitments
- ANC analytical brief reveals ANC mountain areas represent 10% of EU UAA and 17% of designated ANC areas
- Highest shares in Slovenia, Finland, Austria, Greece, Italy and Spain
- On economic terms, mountain areas under ANC delineation have **lower stocking density, lower economic size, lower UAA**

Sustainability analysis: mountain ruminant farms are more extensive, and more supported



- **More extensive**

Stocking density 0.9 vs 1.7 LU per ha, and grazable land is 73% of the area vs 52% in the lowlands.

- **Smaller and more supported**

Herds of 42 vs 53 LU; direct payments are 38% of income vs 29%.

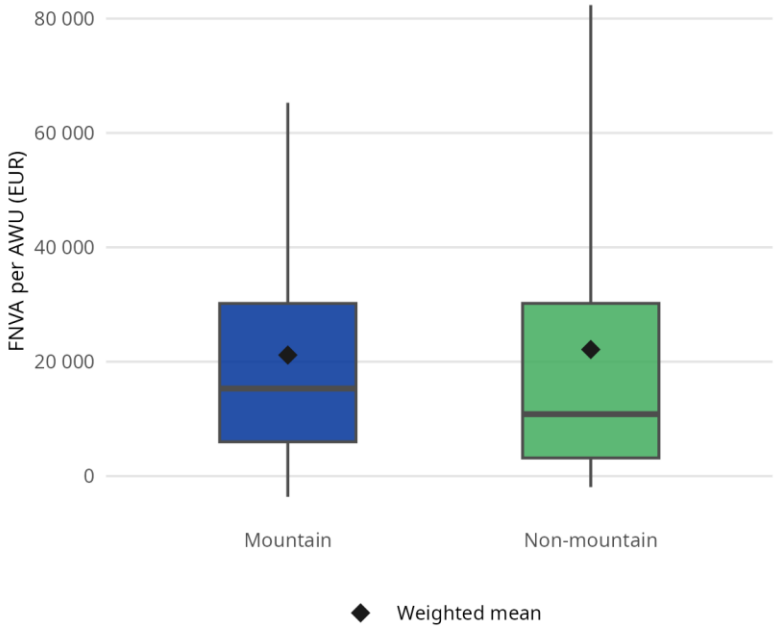
- **Lower average income**

Around 22 700 vs 27 600 EUR per worker, though feed self-sufficiency is similar (34% vs 31%).

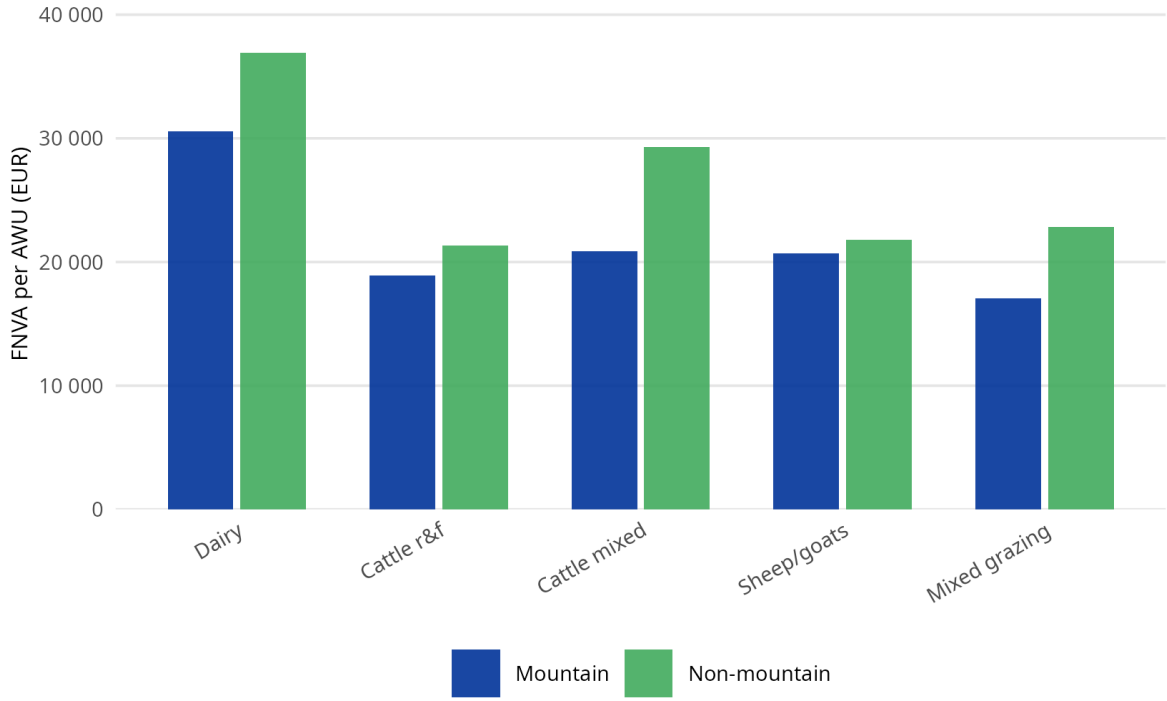
Mountain farming occupies the extensive, larger grazed area, support-reliant corner across all three sustainability dimensions.

Source: DG AGRI based on FSDN data (2019 to 2023)

Farm type and herd size, not necessarily altitude explain income variation



Box: weighted P5/Q1/median/Q3/P95. Diamond: weighted mean.

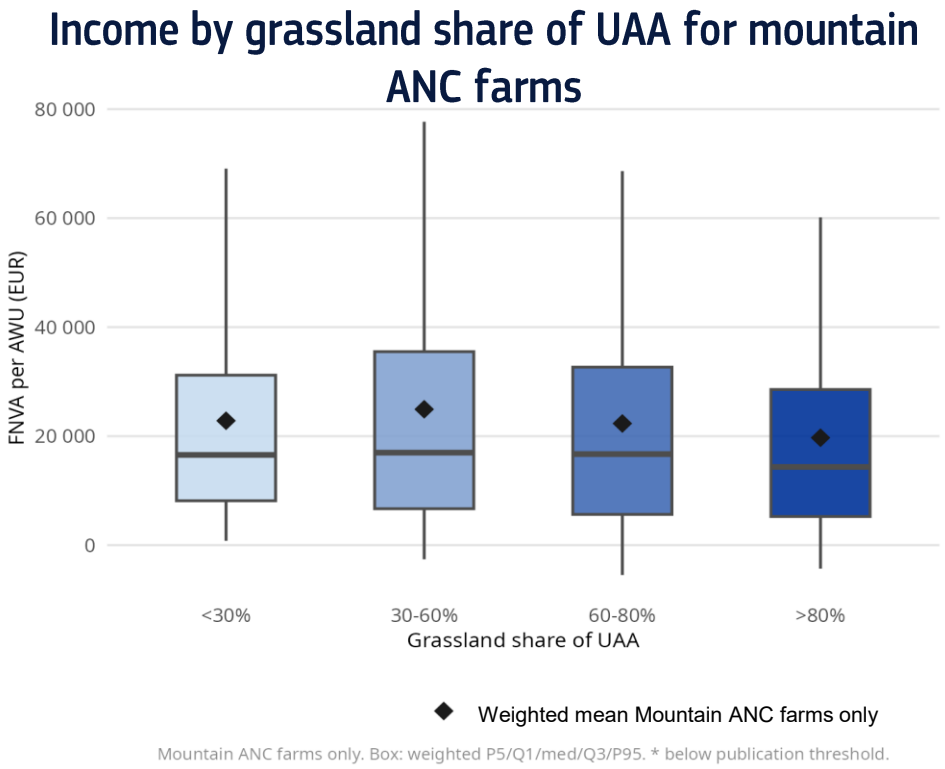


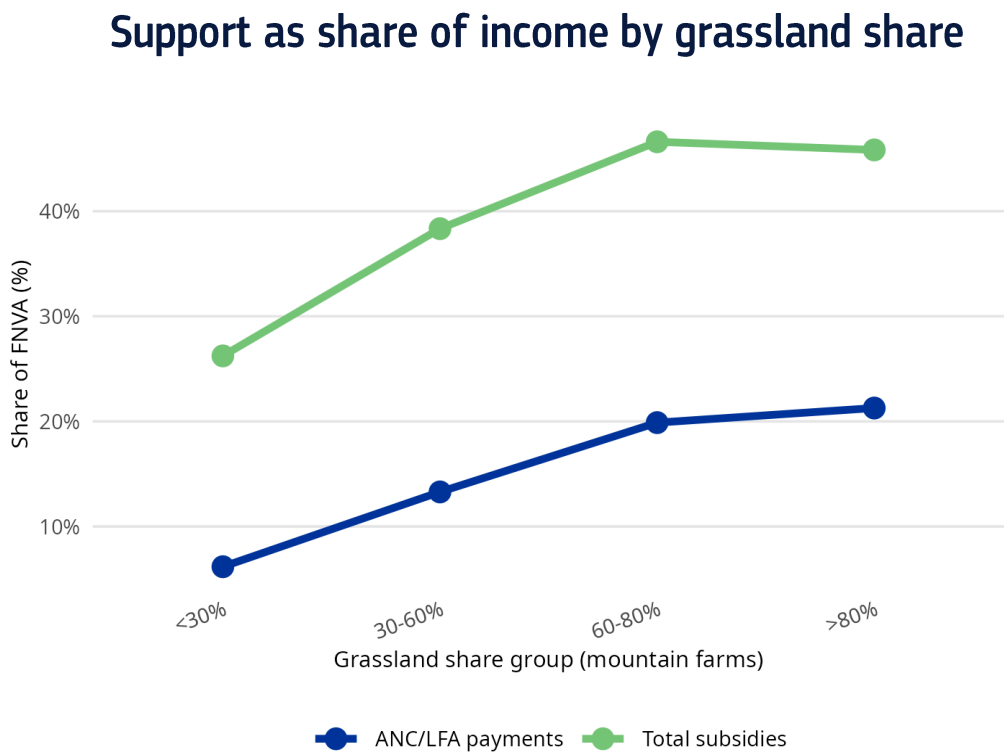
* fewer than 25 obs/yr

Source: DG AGRI based on FSDN data (2019 to 2023)

- **Median higher in mountain livestock farms** (15 400 vs 11 000), **while average income** is **lower** in mountains (22 700 vs 27 600 EUR)
- Without subsidies, market income per worker is 13 400 in mountains vs 19 000 in the lowlands. **The gap is smallest for the extensive types** (about 1 100 EUR for sheep and goats, 2 400 for beef cattle, against 6 400 for dairy).
- Mountain status alone does not explain income variation; **herd size and farm type** matters

Mountain ruminant farms with grassland: more grassland means less income and more ANC support





Source: DG AGRI based on FSDN data (2019 to 2023)

- The **most grass-dominant farms earn least,** about 20 400 EUR per worker on average and 14 400 at the median.
- **ANC support rises** from 6% to 21% of income and total subsidies from 26% to 46% **as grassland share grows**. The most grassland-reliant mountain farms are, the most support-dependent and least market-viable they become.

Given these structural gaps, here is what the CAP toolbox offers:

- For specifically **grassland management**: Role of GAECs (Good Agriculture and Environmental Conditions) as part of the conditionality mechanism safeguard grasslands

- For specifically **grazing systems in mountain areas**: ANC support benefits grassland areas particularly in mountain areas where this land use predominates. 61% of Areas Natural Constraints payments (ANC) support areas of extensive grazing - an estimated amount of € 1.6 billion

- **Coupled income support**: *o*ver 70% of the € 23-billion CIS budget for the 5-year period is directed at ruminants to *both, the meat and milk sectors.*

- Eco-schemes (1/3) and Agri- Environmental-Climate Commitments (1/2) target **ruminants and/or grasslands**, although not necessarily in an integrated way

- The LIFE program supports pilot projects for sustainable management and restoration of grasslands

Take aways and perspectives

EU grasslands face two contrasting pressures: land abandonment in marginal and mountain areas, and agricultural intensification in productive regions—both contributing to grassland degradation.

Extensive mountain grazing systems are essential for maintaining **biodiversity, cultural landscapes, and regional identities**, but they are increasingly at risk.

Mountain livestock farms are particularly **vulnerable: they face three times higher land abandonment risk** and are generally less profitable, more extensive and more reliant on public support

The CAP provides the necessary policy tools, but **greater coherence, better implementation, and more targeted, place-based support** are needed to sustain extensive grazing systems.

Look ahead for action: improving **monitoring of grazing livestock systems** and strengthening **evidence-based, territorial CAP support** will be critical to securing the future of extensive grazing in both mountain and lowland regions.

THANK YOU !

Analytical briefs - Agriculture and rural development - European Commission



© European Union 2026

Unless otherwise noted the reuse of this presentation is authorised under the CC BY 4.0 license. For any use or reproduction of elements that are not owned by the EU, permission may need to be sought directly from the respective right holders.

Sources:
Picture 1: freepik.com
Picture 2: DG AGRI own elaboration, AI generated image
Picture 3: pexels.com by Helena Jankovičová Kováčová

CC BY