

**Opinion of the European Committee of the Regions — Pastoralism**

(2020/C 39/14)

**Rapporteur:** Jacques Blanc (FR/EPP), Mayor of La Canourgue**POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS,

1. considers that maintaining pastoralism is vital for farming across the EU in order to keep rural areas alive, and so for meeting the Lisbon Treaty objective of territorial cohesion, not to mention our environmental, climate-related and biodiversity protection objectives;
2. points out that pastoralism is under threat from a range of difficulties. These cannot be ranked in any particular order of gravity and apply differently in different regions, but some of them could suffice in themselves to jeopardise its very survival: difficulties in taking account of its specific characteristics when granting support under the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) (wooded and shrub pastures, mobility, communal pastures, etc.); difficulties arising from the economic context; competition for land; difficulties in handing on know-how; environmental constraints on the organisation of grazing; competition with other users of pasture, in particular for leisure purposes; and lastly the threat posed by large carnivores to livestock;
3. requests that, as part of efforts to reorient CAP support, proper consideration be given to pastoralism and extensive, sustainable grazing, taking more closely into account their beneficial role in balanced territorial development to help meet our environmental and climate objectives, as recommended by the CoR in its opinion on CAP reform;
4. welcomes the proposal by the European Parliament's AGRI Committee on the regulation governing support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States under the Common Agricultural Policy, the aim of which is to amend Article 4 of the regulation with a view to recognising wooded and shrub pasture areas as agricultural production areas eligible for basic payments; nevertheless asks for the definitive version of this article to be revised in order to introduce the concept of pasture areas that may or may not include herbaceous resources (beneath trees, for example). In order to clarify the status of pasture areas and their eligibility for aid, they need to be recognised as an agricultural area distinct from permanent grassland. In order to define pastures areas separately from permanent grasslands, any reference to the need for herbaceous resources to be present should be omitted from the definition; combined areas of permanent grassland and pasture areas could be regrouped under the heading 'permanent pasture';
5. recommends that areas used for pasture be fully recognised as agricultural production areas within a stable and secure regulatory framework which includes an effective CAP support ceiling as in other sectors;
6. notes that pastoral livestock farming, which relies on the natural environment as a spontaneous source of feed for livestock, makes use of flexibility and security margins in order to cope with climate risks. Farmers therefore need designated 'buffer' areas which may not be used every year, or may be grazed with widely varying degrees of intensity, but which are necessary in the event of seasonal drought; these areas generally consist of heathland, water meadows and woods; the ongoing climate change increases the need for such areas; the provisions for recognising pasture areas in the first pillar should also recognise and ensure legal certainty for the use of these areas, a need that will not arise every year and cannot be predicted at the time of submitting the CAP files. Again, pastoralism develops agro-ecological practices of exchange with ecosystem services by making complementary use of areas allocated for other uses, including vineyards and orchards, something that helps reduce inputs and mechanised practices; European policies should recognise, encourage and find legally sound ways of developing practices enabling livestock farmers to make use of areas declared by other farmers. Furthermore, pastoralism also develops practices associated with silviculture, referred to as 'silvopastoralism', of mutual benefit to foresters and farmers alike; European public policies should recognise and encourage mixed use of these areas and practices which, under certain conditions, are particularly useful in protecting forests against fire and adapting livestock farming to climate change, as well as complying with the need for forestry regeneration and products;
7. supports the proposal by the European Parliament's ENVI Committee on the rules governing support for strategic plans to be drawn up by Member States within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy, aimed at establishing farm livestock density limits and limiting payments to farms that exceed such limits;

8. welcomes the proposal by Parliament's AGRI Committee to amend Article 68 of the same regulation so that the EAFRD can continue to support the purchase of dogs for the protection of livestock from large predators protected by the Habitat Directive;
9. asks that it be made compulsory for Member States with mountain areas to implement an integrated mountain policy making targeted use of a substantial part of the tools available (payments for natural constraints, support for second-pillar disadvantaged areas, a specific sub-programme for mountain areas), endowing it with a budget for these purposes that is commensurate with the importance of such areas;
10. calls on the EU to recognise the ecosystem services provided by farmers and owners of mountain forest and of Mediterranean areas in their capacity as local knowledge holders as understood by the IPBES (Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services), and to grant fair compensation in the light of these services which contribute to the well-being of the entire population;
11. hopes that each Member State will have the option of applying certain measures under the first pillar (eco-schemes) and the second pillar to the entire pasture area, and not only to the area eligible for support. It should be possible to extend some measures, such as localised agri-environment-climate measures (AECMs) including the Forest Fire Defence Network (DFCI), to cover the entire geographical area;
12. suggests, to support the continuation of farming in less favoured areas and areas with handicaps, that the compensatory allowance for natural handicaps (CANH) should be mandatory in those Member States where it may be applicable;
13. encourages the Member States and local and regional authorities to finance investments in pastoral areas, as they often lack mechanised access. Providing infrastructure (shepherds' accommodation, containment pens, fences, water point arrangements, and so forth) and carrying out maintenance work or clearing are essential for the sustainable management of these areas;
14. takes the view that the integrated management of agricultural and pastoral land must be supported at local level. Where land is divided between multiple owners, the establishment of a suitable land organisation is vital for healthy pastoralism;
15. encourages Member States and local and regional authorities to facilitate access to land for pastoral farmers, in particular through specific multiannual agreements guaranteeing exclusive use as pasture for livestock farmers or user collectives;
16. encourages Member States and local and regional authorities to set up support systems suitable for collective management practices. In order to equip them with the infrastructure and human resources needed to make use of pasture areas, pastoral farmers have been required to develop, at a very early stage, original forms of collective organisation involving types of use that do not cause damage to the property. These authorise private property and communal land to be grouped together for use as pasture, within the same perimeter and under a single management body. They make for a secure relationship with the administration and the different types of partners or users;
17. asks the EU to continue to stimulate the development of agricultural products bearing quality labels and to create added value by protecting high-quality agri-food products from pastoral livestock farming. The Member States must in particular be encouraged to use the 'mountain product' optional quality term, which is not always used in most countries despite having been adopted in 2014;
18. calls for the term 'milk, cheese and meat from grazing' to be reserved for products that guarantee that more than 80 % of animal feed comes from pasture used during the grazing season;
19. notes that farmers are affected by unfair competition from low-cost imports which are threatening the survival of pastoralism in Europe. This means that the EU has to provide compensation in the form of support for pastoral livestock farming, as for other sectors; calls on the EU to use its influence as the world's largest food importer and exporter to change the international agricultural trade rules (WTO, 1994) so as to encourage greater fairness and solidarity in trade relations, as argued in the Committee's opinion on the post-2020 CAP;
20. welcomes the pilot project launched and supported by the European Parliament to set up regional platforms on wolves, bears, wolverines and lynxes in order to deal with conflict situations; calls for full recognition of the consequences of predation and of the need for protection of livestock and for appropriate management plans to be set up to handle them, and for all the relevant legal measures to be discussed, including those authorising selective culling, to make them more dissuasive; and notes that some regions have also taken the initiative of creating platforms for discussion;
21. requests that cross-border cooperation on pastoralism be put in place to avoid instability caused by contradictory measures unsuited to Europe as a whole;

22. calls for the biodiversity strategy to be based on a new specific fund for species conservation. The fund should cover compensation for damage caused by large carnivores, the cost of which is rising sharply, and the protection of livestock, something that can take up an increasing proportion of EAFRD funds at a time when the budget is being significantly reduced. If such a new fund is not created, the existing financial instruments at regional (where applicable), national and EU level (including the EAFRD) will have to be used;
23. calls on the Commission to assess the need to revise the Habitat Directive based on the next State of Nature in the EU report in 2020, taking into account the results of the Action Plan for nature, people and the economy and the conservation status of the different species and habitats. A possible revision of the Habitat Directive should explore the opportunity to amend the annexes in the future by means of the comitology procedure in order to react more quickly to changes in specific populations and to either reduce or increase the protection status per country or territorial entity, where this is justified by the positive or negative trends in populations of protected species and by the threat to pastoralism;
24. calls on the Commission to do more to include agronomy and zootechnical science in scientific studies in order to support political decisions. Decisions need to be based on the best available knowledge in the field of natural and social sciences and agronomy, and on experience with a sufficiently broad base and of a sufficient duration to guide public policy. In particular, there is a need for detailed information on the specific case-studies analysed on pastoralism and large carnivores in order to understand local conditions and gauge the extent to which examples of protection of livestock and management of large carnivores are effective and may or may not enhance collective thinking on the subject and guidance for other areas, and help draw the lessons from difficulties and set-backs. This would make it easier to bring EU texts and the necessary measures into line with local realities and consequently manage species, wolves in particular, more effectively;
25. calls on the Commission to promote research on the recognition of the organoleptic properties of pastoral products and those of pastoral livestock;
26. would ask the EU to develop an ambitious policy to safeguard forests against fire by promoting the presence of livestock in woods and heathland, which requires their prior recognition as areas of production, as pointed out above;
27. welcomes the Unesco project on heritage and the EU aimed at using world heritage as a tool to enhance the economic and social sustainability of rural areas in Europe, and encourages the European institutions to support this initiative. Pastoral landscapes are included in the world heritage list, not only as cultural landscapes but also as relict landscapes or depictions in ancient cave sites, providing a boost for local tourism;
28. calls on the EU to promote pastoral occupations. The Member States should give greater recognition to the work of pastoral livestock farmers and paid shepherds, and raise the profile of this occupation within and beyond the farm sector. Better training, in particular on leading animals to pasture and their health management, but also on the protection of livestock and the management of guard dogs, together with the introduction of mentoring schemes with experienced practitioners, would allow for better transfer of knowledge. With regard to shepherds, improving their living and working conditions in mountain pastures and in farming areas, including in Mediterranean areas, investing in infrastructure to provide decent living conditions and proper working conditions, drawing up collective agreements and organising job fairs to recruit seasonal workers are all incentives that should be built upon. In its opinion on innovation and the modernisation of the rural economy, the European Committee of the Regions specifically recommended modernising the vocational training provided in rural regions and adapting it to global competitive conditions and the needs of local businesses, and increasing the ESF funding allocated to vocational training in rural areas, which is currently very low.

Brussels, 9 October 2019.

*The President*  
*of the European Committee of the Regions*  
Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ

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