

EXTENSIVE FARMING AND PASTORALISM CONTRIBUTING TO THE FIRES PREVENTION IN SPAIN

In Spain it is spreading the practice to make the flocks of sheep and goats grazing in forested areas to avoid fires by contributing to maintain clean the territory.

The rural depopulation and the abandon of farming and cattle breeding in forested areas cause a poor management of woodlands and the accumulation of row inflammable shrubs increasing the risk of devastating wildfires. The use of grass for animal feed allows to make a natural management of the environment and eliminate the excess of undergrowth.

In Catalunya, in the [Municipality of Vallromanes](#) a flock of 300 sheep pastures daily inside 10 rural properties. The animals eat herbaceous pasture, restoring vegetation and reducing the risk of flames diffusion in case of wildfires. The Municipality promotes the association of forestry land owners with the aim to reintroduce the controlled grazing with sheep as a measure to prevent fires. The aim of the Municipality is to extend this practice to the whole territory.

The [Fundación Catalunya - La Pedrera](#) is one of the promoters of practices that demonstrate how cost-efficient and cost-effective are the cattle of cows and goats in preventing fires in the woods together with a low environmental impact. The Foundation Catalunya - La Pedrera underlines that *the use of herbivores in the control of the forestry areas is a 75-80% less expensive than the use of machineries to clean the woodlands.*

Also the [LIFE Montserrat Project](#) in the Barcelona province foresees the use of pastoral systems and the presence of flocks in strategic zones among its main actions against wildfires and for the biodiversity conservancy. The project is ongoing in over 300 hectares of Montserrat, where the wood is prepared and cleaned to receive the flocks of sheep that contribute to maintaining and protecting the habitat and the species of high value. The project wishes to attain



the prevention from fires of 32,000 hectares in 14 Municipalities. The project is co-funded by the European Union and implemented by the province of Barcelona, many partners of the territory and companies of forest management.

In the Municipality of Alcover (Tarragona) the herds of 250 sheep and goats graze in the underbrush forest and in the grasslands surrounding urban areas, keeping the cleanliness of the soil to prevent forest fires. The cattle grazes three times per year in each area, while the work of mechanical cleaning is limited to remove the double and lowers branches or mass of trees of great density. Each village, the Municipality and the provincial government of Tarragona share the costs of this new and more sustainable way of landscape cleaning and fire prevention.

In [Boadilla del Monte](#) (Madrid) a flock of 600 sheep that pastures nearby the firebreak strips eating herbs provides an important aid to prevent fires because prevent the grass to grow and to serve as a fuel. Thanks to this solution Boadilla has registered 26 bouts of fires in 2011 and none in 2015. Sheep eat throughout the whole day covering up to 500 hectares towards the mountain. On the hills of Galicia, wild horses are also contributing to fight against the fires, cleaning the roads from weeds and woody plants. Horses reach places inaccessible to the services of extinction and by favouring their breeding fires are limited at a low cost.

The Regional Government of Andalusia in addition to boost the use of animals to eliminate the bushy vegetation of the areas of firewall, adopts an innovative mechanism to ensure an economic advantage for the shepherds. The Regional Government annually establish conventions with the shepherds to define the limits of working areas and assess the results of grazing in order to establish the corresponding remuneration. This initiative counts with the participation of 228 caregivers and allows the maintenance of 3,252 kilometres of firewall. In the province of Malaga the pilot practice started in 2005 was extended to mobilize now 50 shepherds with 31,000 head of cattle (23.508 sheep, 7.237 goats and 263 cows) that will go grazing around 894 Kilometres of defensive stripes.

Those new solutions that recover ancient practices to deal with the problem of forest fires are framed within the efforts to revitalize the extensive livestock farming and its contribution to rural development.

All the mentioned practices include a whole range of aspects of the extensive breeding strategies as the improvement of shepherds and cattle breeders, the recovery of ancient know-how, the training of young people to gain their interest in related job perspectives assuring the generational relieve, the recovery of autochthon livestock breeds to preserve biodiversity, the implementation of new technologies towards a more modern management of herds, the production



and commercialisation of typical local products, and much more.

The [Platform for extensive livestock breeding and pastoral landscape](#) implemented in Spain involve a wide network of people and organizations committed with the support, the research and the defence of this model of pasture-based livestock farming, for its huge system of services they offer from an economic, social, cultural and landscape configuration perspective.

To know more

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