

PASTORALISM SUPPORTING A BETTER FUTURE

NEW MATERIALS FROM THE FAO-PASTORALIST KNOWLEDGE HUB

The [Pastoralist Knowledge Hub](#) managed by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization FAO is spreading the article [Seven reasons why pastoralism supports a better future](#).

The article reports that pastoralism, a traditional and extensive form of raising livestock, employs more than 200 million people in 100 countries, guiding and feeding their animals through diverse landscapes such as prairies, savannas or tundra. Employing different species of local breeds that adapt to variable environments, pastoralism is critical to reducing poverty and providing food security in these areas. By working with nature, pastoralism champions productivity, sustainability and animal welfare.



The article presents the seven reasons why pastoralism plays a key role for a better future, summarized below:

1. *It diversifies food production.* Pastoralism provides affordable, high-quality proteins and nutrients to meet local demand and can help reduce a country's reliance on imports. Because herders travel with their livestock and work knowledgeably with nature to access water and forage, production inputs are low relative to outputs.
2. *It acts against climate change.* Pastoral landscapes have the potential to achieve a neutral carbon balance, as grazing can offset carbon levels by stimulating plant growth, which helps sequester carbon in soil. Pastoralists also manage natural resources, helping preserve biodiversity in all kinds of environments, from deserts to wetlands and forests. Thus, respecting and incorporating pastoralists' knowledge and practices can help protect these ecosystems.
3. *It functions as an early warning system for pandemics.* The COVID-19 pandemic shows that dealing with health challenges requires paying attention to the health of animals, the environment, and humans. Pastoralists play an essential role providing early warnings of new infectious disease threats in wildlife populations. Improving access to veterinary services and prevention measures will help reduce the risk of disease transmission.
4. *It strengthens the labour force and offers employment opportunities.* Pastoralism secures the livelihood of millions of people in 75 percent of the world's countries. Boosting pastoralists' access to education, training, information, markets, veterinary and animal production support, health and finances and facilitating transboundary movement can yield substantial economic and social benefits.
5. *It reduces feed-food competition.* Consumer demand for naturally raised and grass-fed animal sourced foods continues to expand the retail market of these products, presenting new opportunities for exports and profitability. Grazing systems can help reduce food insecurity by reducing the competition for cereals between livestock feed and food for human consumption.



6. *It protects animal diversity.* Pastoral herds and flocks have been bred for thousands of years, resulting in some of the highest levels of genetic diversity and resilience of any breeding population. The need to interact and work with other herds also allows for greater genetic diversity. Through genetic selection and local ecological knowledge, herders continuously improve their animals' breed, allowing them to adapt to environmental changes, diseases and changing market preferences.
7. *It helps forests grow.* Pastoralism and forests are interdependent. In some areas, riparian forests close to a body of water are a significant grazing resource for livestock during dry seasons. In exchange, pastoralism helps maintain and renew these lands. Herders also play a role in preventing wildfires, as their animals remove biomass in forests.

In 2021, the [FAO's Animal Production and Health](#) program also published the Paper *Pastoralism – Making variability work* presenting the pastoral systems as emblematic farming systems evolving to function with the natural environment. In the presentation, the Paper underlines that “Recently, innovative and nature-based approaches have been receiving increased attention from many stakeholders as they consider ecological concepts and principles that optimize interactions among plants, animals, humans and the environment, while taking into account the social aspects that need to be addressed for sustainable food systems. Pastoralism is such an innovative system: a time-tested, undervalued alternative path to food production that provides valuable lessons for the much-needed evolution towards *farming with nature* and has largely untapped potential for income growth and employment in marginal areas, such as drylands and mountain areas.”

The Paper highlights that engaging with pastoralism has strong relevance to virtually all the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Pastoralism has also a key role to play in the important and current global frameworks promoted by the United Nations: the UN Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, the UN Decade of Family Farming and the UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.

In December 2020, the [Committee on Agriculture of FAO](#) already endorsed the proposal of the Mongolian Government to declare in 2026 an [International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists \(IYRP\)](#). Awaiting the results of the complex official process followed by this Mongolian proposal to be considered and approved by the UN General Assembly, the new materials published by FAO during 2021 and others available in the [Pastoralist-Knowledge Hub](#) represent an important contribution to the ongoing campaign to raise awareness of the great potential of pastoralism.

By increasing new investments in the pastoral livestock sector including sustainable land-management practices, improved or restored ecosystems, access to markets, livestock health and breeding and enhanced livestock extension services, it will be possible to improve productivity, help reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and maintain and enhance biodiversity.

To know more

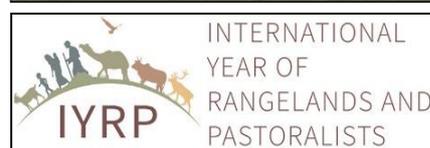
[Seven reasons why pastoralism supports a better future](#)

[Pastoralist Knowledge Hub – FAO website](#)

[Pastoralism – Making variability work in FAO website](#)



International Year
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