

LAUNCH OF THE 2026 INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF RANGELANDS AND PASTORALISTS

January 2026

On December 2, 2025, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) hosted the opening ceremony of the [International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists \(IYRP 2026\)](#) at FAO headquarters in Rome.



[Proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly at its 76th session \(Resolution A/RES/76/253\)](#), the IYRP 2026 aims to raise global awareness of the vital roles that rangelands and pastoralists play in food security, climate adaptation and mitigation, ecosystem health, and sustainable rural livelihoods. FAO has been designated as the lead agency for the observance and coordination of the International Year.

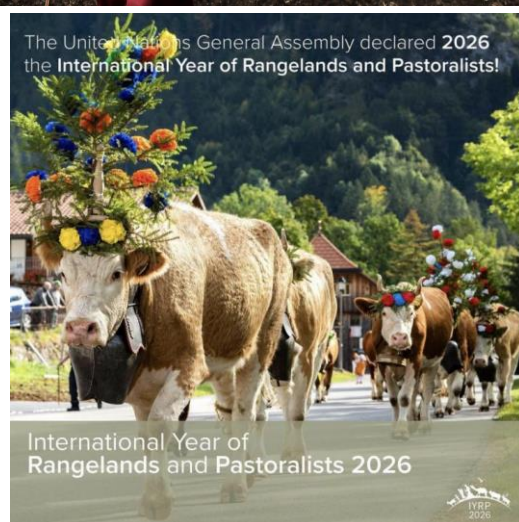
The opening ceremony brought together representatives of FAO Members, intergovernmental organizations, pastoralist communities, research institutions, civil society, and the private sector to launch a year-long series of activities and partnerships in support of sustainable rangelands and pastoralists development.

[The event featured high-level statements and panel discussions.](#) Alongside the launch, FAO hosted a four-day IYRP exhibition in its Atrium, [presenting a photo gallery, interactive booths and displays showcasing pastoralist products, cultural and artistic performances and a tasting experience offering traditional foods from pastoralist communities around the world.](#)

The International Year, approved by the UN General Assembly in 2022, was spearheaded by Mongolia and supported by 60 Member States. As lead agency, FAO will coordinate efforts worldwide to demonstrate how rangelands and pastoralists contribute to resilient rural economies, food security, climate solutions, and ecosystem preservation and restoration.

Pastoralists herd about 1 billion animals worldwide, including sheep, goats, cattle, camelids, yaks, horses, reindeer, and buffaloes, among others. Rangelands cover around half of Earth's land surface in ecosystems such as grasslands, savannas, shrublands, deserts, wetlands, or mountain areas. The steppes of Central Asia, the African savanna, the Alps and the Pyrenees in Europe, the Andes in South America, and the Great Plains of the United States are all examples of these landscapes. They preserve unique fauna and flora and provide essential services including carbon storage and water regulation.

They sustain the livelihoods, nutrition and cultural identities of millions of pastoralists and are shaped by the movement of people and animals. Pastoralists are key custodians of these landscapes.



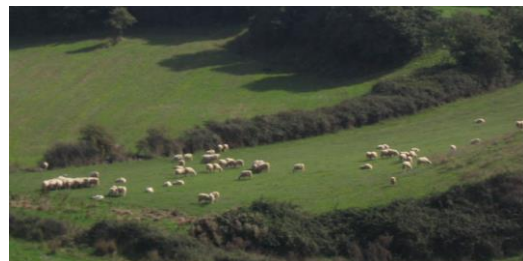
They manage around 1 billion animals worldwide, contributing to food security while preserving ecosystems, cultural heritage, and local and indigenous knowledge. But these ecosystems are under increasing pressure from droughts, floods, and other climate impacts, land degradation, animal diseases, and competing land uses, limiting pastoralists' mobility and threatening their way of life. For example, while rangelands account for about 30 percent of global soil organic carbon stocks, roughly half of them are estimated to be degraded.

Speaking at the launch event, FAO Director-General QU Dongyu emphasized that the International Year is a moment for collective action. "We must listen and empower women, youth, and pastoralist organizations to take part in the decisions that shape their lands and livelihoods. Too often, their voices remain unheard or ignored, and their contributions undervalued. We must safeguard rangelands through responsible governance, restoration, and investment and support the people who steward them. Throughout this year, FAO will work closely with governments and all partners to advance work on rangelands and pastoralists under the overall objective of the Four Betters: better production, better nutrition, better environment, and a better life - leaving no one behind". FAO also manages the [Pastoralist Knowledge Hub](#) that serves both as a repository of technical knowledge on pastoralism and pastoral people's livelihoods, and as a neutral forum for exchange and alliance building among pastoralists and stakeholders working on pastoralist issues. Furthermore, FAO's [Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems](#) recognize pastoral systems around the world, operating in countries as Brazil, China, Tajikistan, and Tanzania.

In 2019, the Mongolian Government began to petition the United Nations to declare an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists to increase global awareness of their importance for food security and ecosystem services. Since 2019, the Mongolian Government's proposal has been following the complex official diplomatic process to be considered. An *IYRP International Support Group* was formed, and a large number of organizations have joined the proposal, including pastoralist organizations, UN Agencies such as FAO, IFAD and UN Environment, international organizations, and environmental coalitions. The IYRP Group has coordinated meetings and events, working with members to gain the support of their partners and new countries for the IYRP. [The website IYRP Info](#), implemented by the *International Support Group* in collaboration with strategic partners, has documented the initiatives carried out worldwide for the proposed International Year and the extraordinary results achieved. In 2025, [102 countries and 409 organisations support the IYRP](#). This website [will continue to be an instrument to inform about the initiatives in progress at different levels for the 2026 IYRP International Year](#), involving all the partners already mobilized.

The IYRP2026 provides a unique opportunity to raise awareness of the importance of rangelands and pastoralists, advocating for increased responsible investment and adapted policies for the pastoral sector. It calls for policies that secure pastoralists' access to land and natural resources, support mobility, and promote customary and inclusive governance, while encouraging adequate investments in rangeland management, ecosystem restoration, animal health services, and equitable value chains.

The Year also aims to foster inclusive policy dialogue and collaborative engagement to improve pastoralist livelihoods and



sustainable rangeland management. Rangelands and pastoralists have great potential to contribute to and deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Key priorities of the IYRP Year 2026 include mobilizing political, technical, and financial commitments to:

- secure access and governance rights for pastoralist communities.
- scale up sustainable rangeland management.
- strengthen value chains.
- restore degraded ecosystems.

[The Official IYRP website](#) invites pastoralists, researchers, governments, private businesses, NGO's, journalists, civil society organizations, academic institutions, or individuals, to take part in the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists 2026.

To know more

[FAO News on the launch of the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists](#)

[International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists website \(IYRP 2026\)](#)

[IYRP.info website](#)

[Concept Note Opening Ceremony International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists](#)

[Opening Ceremony: IYRP 2026 Launch at FAO in IYRP Info](#)

[IYRP Opening Ceremony](#)

[FAO Pastoralists Knowledge Hub website](#)

[FAO Pastoralist Knowledge Hub Publications](#)

[Improving governance of pastoral lands](#)

[Supporting countries and organisations in IYRP Info website](#)

[IYRP Resolution 2022](#)

[IYRP 2026 FAO Photos and Videos](#)

[IYRP2026 Communication Handbook and Toolkit](#)



Mongolian goat herder
(Photo credit: PRIME Kelly Lynch)

