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# Shepherd school as a tool for the empowerment of the livestock sector

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**Abstract.** Grazing as a basis for feeding flocks is declining in the European Union. Different problems related to the access of the land and the hardness of the shepherd's work, among others, have meant that the number of farms with this model have dropped. Andalusia (Spain) created its Shepherd School in 2010, an initiative based on collaboration between different entities in the field of livestock and environment. The figure of the shepherd teacher is fundamental for the success of the school: during six weeks, the students carry out practices with them in their farms. In total, there are eighty-four active shepherd teachers, with different local breeds and flocks with different types of production: meat, milk and cheese making. The Shepherds School changes its location in each edition, locating in areas where extensive livestock farming and environmental aspects (protected areas, forests, mountain areas ...) are important. Normally, all the agents of the livestock sector interact in different activities: round tables, workshops with students, group visits, child activities, etc. The media (television, radio and press) regularly visit the school, which is an opportunity to show a sustainable, professional and innovative sector.

**Keywords.** Training – Shepherds – Ruminant – Andalusia – Society.

## *L'école de berger comme outil de renforcement du secteur de l'élevage*

**Résumé.** Le pâturage comme base d'alimentation des troupeaux est en déclin dans l'Union européenne. Les problèmes liés à l'accès à la terre et à la difficulté du travail des bergers, entre autres, ont entraîné une baisse du nombre d'exploitations utilisant ce modèle. L'Andalousie (Espagne) a créé en 2010 son Ecole de bergers, une initiative basée sur la collaboration entre différentes entités dans le domaine de l'élevage et de l'environnement. Le rôle du maître berger est fondamentale pour la réussite de l'école: pendant 6 semaines les élèves pratiquent chez eux. Au total, il y a 84 maîtres de berger actifs, avec différentes races autochtones et des troupeaux avec différentes aptitudes: viande, lait et fromage. L'Ecole de bergers change de lieu chaque année, s'installant dans des zones où l'élevage extensif est important et où il existe des lieux à haute valeur environnementale (aires protégées, forêts, zones de montagne...). Normalement, tous les acteurs du secteur élevage de ces sites interagissent dans les différentes activités développées par l'école: tables rondes, ateliers avec des adultes, visites de groupes, activités pour des enfants, etc. Les médias (télévision, radio et presse) visitent régulièrement l'école, ce qui est l'occasion de montrer un secteur durable, professionnel et innovant.

**Mots-clés.** Formation – Bergers – Ruminants – Andalousie – Société.

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## I – Project origin

Andalusia created its Shepherd school in 2010 through collaboration between the agrarian and environmental Administration. Since then, a multitude of students has passed through, aimed at settling in or working in the livestock sector in its nine editions. In addition, the livestock sector collaborates intensely in its development through the Associations of breeders, professional organizations, cooperatives and companies, contributing teachers and farmers for the development of the theoretical and practical sessions.

The main objective of the Andalusian shepherd school is to train new farmers, so that they form part of an increasingly competitive and professional sector, combining theoretical knowledge with practical experience on farms. In addition to this general objective, there are others such as: (i) preservation of protected natural areas through the maintenance of extensive livestock, (ii) the conservation of local breeds, (iii) the enhancement of the pastoral products obtained and (iv) the social recognition for the profession of shepherd.

The total training is 540 hours, divided between a theoretical-practical part (300 hours) and another practical part directly with shepherds (240 hours). The participation of shepherds-tutors is essential for the development of this formative activity; the shepherds-tutors are farmers who, after a training process, can receive the students on their farms.

The content of the training is divided into three different parts: (i) a technical and management part: reproduction, genetics, food, health and facilities; (ii) a business part: economic management, marketing and associative actions, and (iii) a third part on the positive role of the shepherd and his flock towards the environmental sustainability of the territory in which it is located (Table 1).

**Table 1. Shepherd's school training program**

Module	Training program	Hours
Module 1	Shepherd, livestock and grazing	30
Module 2	Livestock facilities and management	30
Module 3	Genetic, reproduction and production	30
Module 4	Feeding, forage production and conservation practices	30
Module 5	Feeding in grazing systems and the role of the shepherd in the maintenance of environmental sustainability	30
Module 6	Healthcare and hygiene of livestock	30
Module 7	Economic management	30
Module 8	Marketing and associations	30
Module 9	Agricultural accounting	30
Module 10	Business relations and risk prevention	30
Module 11	Practices with shepherd teachers	240 (3 periods/80 hours)

The Andalusian shepherd school is itinerant, it changes location every year, but it is always linked to a territory where pastoral livestock is important.

The Andalusian Shepherd School is currently coordinated by the Andalusian Agricultural Research and Training Institute (IFAPA-Junta de Andalucía). This activity is partially financed with funds of the European Union (EAFRD).

## II – Results

The school has trained one hundred thirty four students (one hundred two men and thirty-two women), with a rate of incorporation to the livestock activity of around seventy per cent of the participants; mainly as owners of the farm or as workers in family businesses with the aim of carrying out a generational relay.

In addition, 84 shepherds or mentor shepherds have been trained. After the training period (20 hours) they become shepherds-tutors, and then students can do one of the three work experience periods with them in their farms.

There is an important link between the Shepherd's school and the autochthonous breeds present in Andalusia. Andalusia has a high number of local breeds that are used in systems based on grazing,

each of them with its corresponding breeders association. Throughout the training, students know the maximum number of these breeds, through visits to farms, practices with shepherds-tutors who work with some of them or contact with the technicians of the corresponding associations. Generally, each of the editions has been linked to one or some of the breeds present in Andalusia (Table 2).

**Table 2. Shepherd's school training program**

<b>Edition</b>	<b>Province</b>	<b>Species and major breeds</b>
1	Granada	Sheep, Segureña
2	Málaga	Goat, Malagueña
3	Cádiz	Sheep, Merina Grazalema Goat, Payoya
4	Córdoba	Sheep, Merina Goat, Florida
5	Almería	Sheep, Segureña Goat, Murciano-granadina
6	Granada	Sheep, Lojeña Goat, Murciano-granadina
7	Jaén	Sheep, Segureña
8	Sevilla	Sheep, Merino Cattle, several breeds (Retinta, Berrenda,...) Goat, Florida
9	Málaga	Goat, Payoya Sheep, Merina de Grazalema Cattle, Pajuna

The aspects linked to the environment are transversal in the development of training, since the beginning is one of the principal axes. In practice, protected areas are visited every year where extensive livestock farming is a traditional activity, such as the Sierra Nevada National and Natural Park, and in this context we interact with environmental agents, managers of these areas and livestock farmers who carry out their work under this environmental framework. Other topics are also covered, such as: wolf and other predators, fire prevention with animals, transhumance...

At present, the market for agri-food products is beginning to differentiate livestock products coming from grazing systems. It is very important to show successful initiatives where companies or individual farmers are marketing their products, and grazing is one of the attributes of sale.

Finally, the social recognition of the role of the shepherd is one of the main objectives. Different activities are carried out here. In one hand, working with schools in areas where the Andalusian shepherd's school is located each year: as an example of last edition, an activity entitled "Shepherd for one day" was carried out with the participation of a total of five hundred children. On the other hand, the media (press, radio and television), who are particularly interested every year in the different activities carried out by the School giving them dissemination. Also from an institutional point of view, it has been chosen as activity of the month in the European Network of Rural Development (2018), and also as Good Practice of the Plans of Rural Development at national level by the Ministry of Agriculture, Fishing and Food of Spain (2019).

### **III – Future actions**

The future of the Andalusian shepherd school is to become a reference in the training of people who want to dedicate to extensive livestock in Andalusia.

The application of new technologies in the pastoral livestock sector is essential to improve, among other things, the quality of life of the shepherd, and because of that becomes an important milestone for future editions.

The differentiation of products from extensive livestock farming, and the diversification of incomes in order to improve farm management will also be promoted in future editions.

The aim is to make this activity more attractive for young people who are interested in starting a pastoral livestock activity.

Finally, it is essential to continue developing activities to publicize the positive aspects that this type of livestock does for society, the possibilities are varied: media, exhibitions, workshops, tastings products.

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