

RUMINANT LIVESTOCK FARMING AND RURAL AREAS



"What makes ruminant livestock farming a key actor for regional areas attractiveness?"

1

The diversity of ruminant farming systems in France contributes significantly to the vitality of rural areas: they shape their visual identity (landscapes and farm animals), contribute to the local economy, particularly through agritourism, and preserve natural and rural areas.

2

Particularly vital in difficult rural areas, ruminant farming sustains a local economy dependent on agriculture by creating direct and indirect jobs, and even induced jobs, and by preserving certain public services or administrative structures that would not survive without the presence of livestock farming.

3

Animal products are essential assets for creating and maintaining the identity of rural areas. They promote economic, cultural and tourist development.

4

Farmers, far beyond their role as food producers, position themselves as essential and committed players in the life of rural areas. Their involvement in local activities, their participation in elected office, and their contribution to public services underscore their importance in the social fabric of rural communities.

5

Pastoralism persists in France thanks to innovations and regional involvement, guided by values of nature and heritage. It is crucial to preserve this practice playing a fundamental role in biodiversity, sustainable ecosystem management, and the preservation of rural traditions.

6

Ruminant farming is crucial for protection against avalanches, fires and floods, thanks to the maintenance of mountain pastures and meadows, the prevention of scrub encroachment and its role as a buffer zone. This highlights its ecological and social key role for the preservation of landscapes and the safety of local communities and tourists.

RUMINANT LIVESTOCK FARMING AND RURAL AREAS

WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

France has soil and climate conditions, crops including grasslands, and a diversity of landscapes (plains, mountains, etc.) that are conducive to livestock farming, which has encouraged its development. It has become an essential pillar of local identity and the vitality of rural areas. Maintaining the density of livestock farms and associated jobs remains crucial for sustaining the dynamism and even the development of rural areas.

Despite the essential role of ruminant farming, its appeal has declined in favour of other activities. These areas have thus experienced a long rural exodus, but have recently attracted renewed interest, offering well-maintained landscapes, animated by animals, and a preserved local way of life, which are attractive to tourists and new residents. This attractiveness is largely due to the role of ruminant farming in the construction and maintenance of landscapes, the creation of local jobs and the enrichment of local life through cultural events and agritourism activities.

1

Farming systems diversity

Diversified French ruminant farming systems, playing a major role in the vitality and development of rural areas

In France, ruminant farming systems vary greatly in terms of land use, herd size, species and breeds raised, feeding methods, labour, marketing methods and combination of activities. They thus enable the diverse demands of the population to be met, both on the domestic and foreign markets. The distribution of farming systems is largely explained by the agronomic and forage potential of each region, but also by the presence of sectors organised around cooperatives and companies. Each system contributes in a unique way to shaping the visual and cultural identity of rural areas through land management, grassland maintenance, grazing and the production of local products using a variety of breeds and species of ruminants. This diversity of systems also contributes to the vitality of the rural areas to which they belong, the local economy and the preservation of natural and rural areas.

Farm diversification: a key driver of rural areas' appeal to tourists

Rural areas meet tourists' desire for tranquillity, cultural visits and outdoor activities. Livestock farming, landscapes and associated heritage are undoubtedly factors that attract visitors and promote these rural areas. In addition, 128 breeds of ruminants (cattle, sheep and goats combined) 'bring to life' and give a local identity to a diversity of landscapes in France. The willingness to bring the manufacturing process through to the end and to better promote their products by processing them on the farm, the desire to interact with customers by marketing their products, and their motivation to share their passion for their profession or their region are all reasons why farmers can diversify their activities on their farms. This diversification takes various forms of agritourism: visits, catering, event organisation (open days, concerts, farm markets, etc.). These unique experiences create an immersive and attractive atmosphere for visitors.

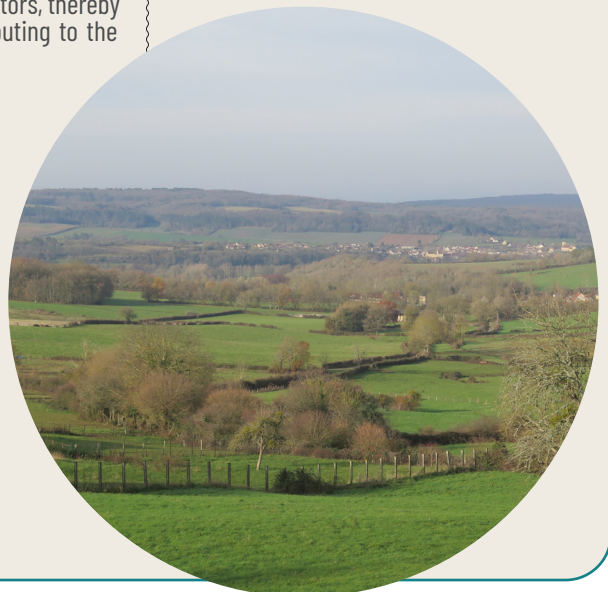
Not only does it contribute to the economic vitality of farms, but it also enhances the overall appeal of rural areas. By offering visitors the opportunity to discover authentic farm life, farm diversification creates positive links between farming communities and visitors, thereby promoting sustainable tourism and contributing to the promotion of local resources.

KEY FIGURES

In France, the agricultural area dedicated to livestock represents **27%** of the land area (GIS Avenir Élevages, 2022).

11,000 ruminant farms offer agritourism activities in France (CNE, 2021).

In France, **12%** of dairy farms, **17%** of beef farms and **29%** of sheep and goat farms sell through short distribution channels (Agreste, 2023).



1 Farming systems diversity

Other methods of diversification experience a real growth and provide a societal and environmental service

The distinctive feature of the agricultural sector, and ruminant farming in particular, is its capacity to produce renewable energy. The methanisation of livestock manure, the installation of photovoltaic panels on roofs or on the ground, solar thermal energy and wood production (logs or wood chips) are all ways of producing renewable energy through livestock farming. The energy produced can be used for self-consumption on the farm and/or for the local area. Electricity and biomethane can be fed into the energy grid and used by everyone. Wood from the farm is also an asset for energy production for the local area.

These promising prospects position livestock farming as a provider of new societal and environmental services thanks to its crucial role in local renewable energy production and the achievement of national objectives. Indeed, the 2019 Energy and Climate Law sets a target for France of 33% of energy produced from renewable sources in gross final energy consumption by 2030.

Finally, eco-grazing also provides environmental services. It offers a natural alternative to the maintenance of green spaces, using animals rather than chemical or mechanical methods. This approach has significant benefits for biodiversity and reduces environmental impact. It also promotes a renewed connection between society and livestock farmers, highlighting the importance of preserving these practices for a sustainable future.

Livestock farming and pressure on property and land: two contradictory dynamics

Livestock farming faces two contradictory dynamics. On the one hand, it plays a crucial role in the production of essential resources, the creation of direct and indirect jobs, and the provision of services to the region. On the other hand, it is confronted with growing pressure on land and property, due to the development of new residential or productive functions in the same areas. This can lead to a decline in agricultural land, even though urban planning regulations increasingly protect natural and agricultural areas.

Furthermore, land and building restrictions are exacerbated by the arrival of a population with high purchasing power and the development of tourism. This leads to an increase in land and housing prices, making them unaffordable for people seeking to set up livestock farms.

Lastly, in rural areas with high population growth, conflicts may arise from these new cohabitations (disputes over the impact of facilities, visual, olfactory and noise pollution, etc.), but livestock farming can also benefit from commercial opportunities through the promotion of products or the diversification of farm activities (farm visits, accommodation, direct sales at the farm, etc.). Thus, the complexity of these conflicting dynamics presents both substantial challenges and opportunities for innovation and development in the livestock sector.



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...about renewable energy production,

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« Ruminant livestock farming and energy ».

RUMINANT LIVESTOCK FARMING AND RURAL AREAS

2

Rural areas economy

Ruminant farming, employment creator and source of wealth in rural areas

In rural areas, ruminant farming is a major sector for the economy. It generates 256,000 full-time equivalents (FTEs) in 144,000 farms and, with indirect jobs upstream and downstream of farms, these sectors generate more than 700,000 FTEs (Lang *et al.*, 2015). These jobs are particularly prevalent in rural and even 'difficult' areas (mountains, disadvantaged areas), where employment pools are highly dependent on agricultural and agri-food activities. Indeed, in these areas, job diversity is much lower than in other areas (coastal, tourist, urban, etc.), which makes the herbivore livestock sector all the more valuable.

Although they are still difficult to assess, it is also important to take into account the jobs generated by the spending of households that work directly or indirectly in livestock farming. These jobs created by the herbivore sector include, for example, the maintenance of local facilities and services, but also its contribution to the residential and tourist appeal of rural areas. It thus enables the maintenance of certain small businesses, public services and administrative structures (bars, bakeries, schools, post offices, etc.), which would not survive in these areas without the presence of livestock farming. Without livestock farming, some of these sparsely populated areas would most likely be doomed to abandonment.

Ruminant farming, a key player in the local circular economy

The main purpose of ruminant farming is to provide products such as milk and meat, which are then used by the agri-food industries. In addition, it promotes the use of coproducts, thereby further strengthening this link within circular and local economy.

For example, the agri-food industry sees ruminant feed as an opportunity to add local value to its byproducts (beet pulp, wheat draff, etc.). This collaboration between crop producers, agri-food industries and livestock farming contributes to a more sustainable use of resources, promoting waste reduction and eco-responsible practices.

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création

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« Ruminant livestock farming
and employment ».

KEY FIGURES



3.2%
of total employment
depends on French
livestock farming
(Lang *et al.*, 2015).

100%
of sugar beet pulp,
which is not consumed
by humans, is used in
livestock farming
(Laisse *et al.*, 2018).

3

Farmers, key players in rural life

Farmers: committed stakeholders and pillars of rural life

Livestock farmers in particular, and farmers in general, do not just produce food; they are also very involved in the life of rural areas. They are more involved than average in local activities such as associations or elected office. In 2020, 11.6% of mayors were farmers (Foucault, 2023).

They also help with snow clearance and gritting roads, which is invaluable in areas where access can be difficult for public services. This active involvement in rural life highlights the key role of farmers as committed and responsible members of their communities, making a significant contribution to the social fabric and daily functioning of rural areas.

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farmer job

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and the livestock farming profession ».



KEY FIGURES

In 2020, **11.6%**
of french mayors
were farmers
(Foucault, 2023).

42% of french farmers
are involved
in an association
(Rieutort *et al.*, 2014).



4 Livestock products

The central role of animal products: a key driver of the appeal and identity of rural areas

Animal products are of significant importance in the appeal of rural areas, providing essential economic, cultural and tourist wealth. Livestock farming, as a fundamental activity for many rural communities, creates a deep connection between inhabitants and their environment. Derived products such as meat, milk, cheese and other animal resources not only provide livelihoods for local farmers, but are also key elements of local gastronomy, helping to forge a distinctive regional identity.

Quality schemes contribute to the development of rural areas

The concept of 'quality scheme' refers to the manufacture and sale of a product that offers superior quality. This quality is defined in a set of specifications established voluntarily by a group of farmers and processors. The adoption of quality schemes helps to preserve the presence of stakeholders in the territories (Aubron *et al.*, 2014). Their contribution to regional development stems in particular from their collective nature, bringing together, depending on the case, farmers and downstream stakeholders involved in transport, processing, distribution and communication about the products. This is particularly evident in the tourism sector, where quality schemes are regularly promoted by tourist offices. Tourist events showcasing the products concerned are organised, and visits to farms or cheese dairies are offered to tourists. Local businesses often sell products from their region's quality schemes. In return, these initiatives regularly mention the region's tourist and gastronomic characteristics in their communications.

Local products from ruminant farming attract consumers in peri-urban areas

In peri-urban areas, urban consumers' demand for local products represents an economic opportunity for both producers and various players in the agri-food sector. This promotes job creation, diversification of activities and the development of services (retail, transport, business and personal services), thereby helping to increase the appeal of rural areas.

Animal by-products also drive economic growth in rural areas

In addition to producing milk and meat, ruminants generate a variety of other by-products that can be used in various sectors of activity. Leather, wool, fats and manure are all animal by-products that can be used locally. For example, livestock effluents can be used to fertilise agricultural land and are a valuable resource for renewable energy production through methanisation.

By-products are also a vital source of employment for local areas. Hides and wool, for example, have led to the creation of tanneries, laundries and spinning mills located in the heart of livestock farming areas. Although many businesses have now closed, an industrial fabric remains thanks to these activities. This sector continues to play a crucial role in the local economy, providing jobs and supporting communities in rural areas.

KEY FIGURES

France has
438 dairy PDOs and
51 red labels, including
56 for meat
(CNAOL, 2023, INAO, 2021).

There are **1,200** varieties
of cheese in France
(Ministry of Agriculture and
Food Sovereignty, 2023).



LEARN
MORE...

...about animal
products

CHECK OUT THE SHEETS →

« Ruminant livestock farming
and the production of food for
humans »,
« Ruminant livestock farming and
gastronomic heritage ».

LEARN
MORE...

...about by-products
valorisation

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« Ruminant livestock farming and
by-products ».

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5

Pastoralism

Pastoralism, a traditional practice with positive externalities

Pastoralism includes all livestock farming activities using extensive grazing of natural forage resources in natural areas to provide all or part of the animals' feed" (<http://www.pastoralisme.net/>).

This practice is based on the seasonality and mobility of herds and people. Although pastoralism is an ancient system, it continues to thrive in France thanks to various innovations and a regional commitment based on an awareness of the values associated with nature and heritage.

In France, pastoralism is recognised as being of general interest by the Rural Code. It is characterised by several aspects, notably the diversity of the livestock systems involved (sheep, cattle, goats, horses). It also encompasses a variety of natural environments used for grazing, ranging from high mountain pastures to Mediterranean rangelands, as well as wetlands such as those in the Camargue or the Atlantic marshes. Similarly, more and more additional areas such as vineyards can be grazed in order to limit mechanisation. Collective management is also a distinctive feature of pastoral farming. The quality of its direct products, such as certified lamb and cheeses with quality labels, is another distinctive feature (grazing may be required in certain specifications).

In addition, pastoralism has proven its ability to generate indirect production, such as cultural and tourist activities, the creation and maintenance of attractive landscapes, fire and avalanche prevention, and the attractiveness of the territories (French Pastoralism Association). Furthermore, transhumance, recognised in 2023 as part of UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, is an opportunity to bring the valleys to life by organising transhumance festivals during which the local area and the trades associated with this practice are celebrated. The International Year of Pastoralism and Pastures, scheduled for 2026, will also be an opportunity to highlight this practice and its essential role in the health of grazing lands, the creation of a sustainable environment, economic growth and resilient livelihoods. Nevertheless, pastoralism faces new challenges, such as the impact of climate change on grass resources, increasing competition for land use, conflicts between users (hunters, foresters, hikers, recreational users, etc.), the declining appeal of the shepherding profession, uncertainty surrounding the future of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and predation on livestock.

Despite these challenges, pastoralism remains an essential practice for the sustainable management of ecosystems, the preservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of traditional ways of life in rural areas. Resilience and adaptation in the face of these challenges are crucial to ensuring the sustainability of this activity and its positive impact on communities and rural landscapes.



LEARN MORE...

...about the predation pressure,

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« Ruminant livestock farming and predation ».

KEY FIGURES

The **12,000** collective pastoral areas cover **530,000** ha. This is equivalent to the surface area of the Lot-et-Garonne French department (Agreste, 2020).

Number of grazing animals on collective grazing land in France in one year:
1,054,100 sheep,
170,700 cattle,
13,800 equines and
10,100 goats (Agreste, 2020).

Alpine pastures, estives and mountain rangelands contribute to the livelihood of **60,000** farms, i.e. **18%** of livestock farms in France and **22%** of the total number of animals (Association Française de Pastoralisme).

In France, **7,800** grazing livestock farmers practised transhumance to collective pastoral areas in 2020 (Agreste, 2020).

Metropolitan France's **8** national parks are home to **460,000** hectares of pastoral landscapes (Idele, 2022).

6

Protection against risks

Ruminant farming: protection against avalanches, fires and floods

In the absence of livestock grazing and the maintenance of summer pastures, entire areas become overgrown with scrub, leading to the closure of landscapes. This situation is a cause for concern in ski resorts, as snow adheres better to short grass, and the disappearance of summer grazing increases the risk of avalanches during the winter season.

In dry areas, the proliferation of scrubland linked to the abandonment of grazing increases the risk of fire, particularly in the Pyrenees and the south-east of France (Mediterranean areas). Livestock farming maintains grasslands and open environments, prevents scrub encroachment, creates firebreaks and thus limits the risk of fire. In summer grazing areas, some villages encourage the arrival of transhumant herds by providing financial support to livestock farmers in order to preserve the condition of the mountain pastures (Rieutort *et al.*, 2014) or to ensure protection against fires. In flood-prone areas, meadows, as well as the embankments and hedges that border them, play a crucial role in absorbing excess water during floods, acting as buffer zones.

Grazing also helps to maintain coastal dykes, as in the Vendée region, where sheep grazing compacts the soil, thereby strengthening the structure of the dykes and helping to maintain them. These services provided by grazing can also be observed along rivers (e.g. the Rhône and the Loire) and streams.

In short, maintaining livestock farming is important from both an ecological and social perspective, preserving the balance of the landscape and ensuring the security of local communities.

KEY FIGURES

In France,
13 million ha of grassland,
i.e. **20%** of the territory
(Idele, 2018).

In France,
132 breeds
are covered by
conservation
programmes
(Dumont *et al.*, 2019).

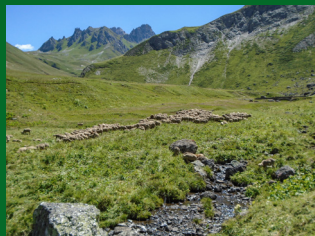
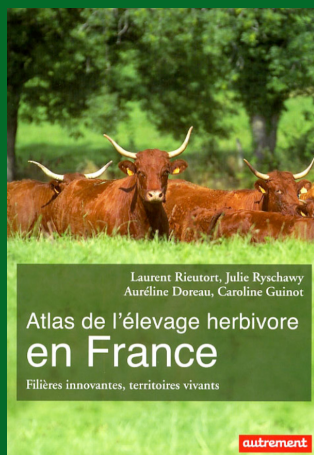


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- « Ruminant livestock farming and biodiversity »,
- « Ruminant livestock farming and soil quality »,
- « Ruminant livestock farming and water resource »,
- « Ruminant livestock farming and greenhouse gases ».



ACTIONS AND TOOLS IMPLEMENTED BY THE SECTORS

The 'Welcome to the farm' activities

Created by the Chambers of Agriculture in 1988, the 'Bienvenue à la ferme' brand supports more than 10,000 farmers across France. Focusing on the values of hospitality and friendliness, 'Welcome to the farm' producers open their doors to the general public. Visitors can shop, share a warm meal, stay in a cottage or guest room, or discover agricultural activities. 'Welcome to the Farm' highlights the diversity of French agriculture by offering local and seasonal products, promoting the 'farm-to-fork' experience, while also offering agritourism activities to extend the farm immersion experience. For farmers, 'Welcome to the farm' represents a supportive network that allows them to share their values with visitors. These values include listening, discovery, authenticity, product quality, responsible practices and a passion for their region (www.bienvenue-a-la-ferme.com).

Atlas of herbivore livestock farming in France

Supplemented by maps and infographics, this atlas provides an overview of herbivore farming and its sectors in France in order to better understand its key role in our territories. It offers:

- An overview of French cattle, sheep, goat and horse production and the challenges of sustainability in a rapidly changing global context;
- An immersion into the world of livestock farming and its supply chains to better understand where the meat and milk we consume come from and who are the men and women who invest in and innovate in this sector;
- An overview of the many services provided by herbivore farming in terms of food production, rural vitality, heritage and the environment (www.la-viande.fr/environnement-ethique/atlas-elevage-herbivore).

Pasto UMT

The Joint Technology Unit 'Resources and transformations of pastoral livestock farming in Mediterranean territories', or UMT Pasto, is a partnership structure between research (INRAE), a higher education institute (Institut Agro Montpellier) and a technical institute (Institut de l'Élevage).

Formed in 2015 and renewed in 2020 for five years, UMT Pasto's objectives are to:

- Produce knowledge and methods to support the maintenance and development of livestock farms;
- Facilitate consultation to encourage coordination between pastoralists and research and development initiatives at national and international level;
- Contribute to the training of those involved in livestock farming and environmental management.

The UMT has 2 main areas of work, each structured around 4 themes. The predation theme is part of the UMT's first area of work, i.e. changes in farming systems and pastoral areas in the face of local and global change ([UMT PASTO - Idele.fr](http://umt-pasto-idele.fr)).

Transmission Past'Orale

The jobs of shepherd and pastoral farmer are complex and involve a great deal of embodied know-how, based on the senses, experience, instinct and reflection - all aspects that are not always acknowledged, rarely put into words and therefore complicated to pass on. The Transmission Past'Orale project uses videos to better understand and pass on agropastoral knowledge to new generations. The aims of the project are as follows:

- Proposing a new way of transmitting agro-pastoral knowledge using the self-confrontation method;
- Improving knowledge of career paths and learning tools;
- Improving apprenticeships for shepherds and highlighting the technical aspects of the job to achieve a shared and transferable understanding of its specific features, particularly its agro-ecological dimensions (<https://idele.fr/pastorale/>).



ACTIONS AND TOOLS IMPLEMENTED BY THE SECTORS

RMT Fromages de terroirs

The RMT Filières fromagères valorisant leur terroir (or 'Local cheese network') has 13 partners. Its aim is to encourage exchanges and the emergence of projects between research and development players and local cheese producers. The aim is to generate projects that meet the needs of the industry and are easy to transfer.

The network carries out work of interest to operators in cheese sectors rooted in their terroir: raw milk and its microbiota, management of grassland resources, traditional know-how, sustainability of sectors, and much more.

The current thematic programme covers the period 2020-2024 and aims to support, through research and development, cheese sectors that enhance the value of their terroir and face various changes, such as societal and regulatory developments, technological advances and the challenges of climate change. The RMT aims to stimulate discussion, promote and preserve the fundamental principles on which these sectors base their differentiation.

ADAoPT Project

The ADAoPT project aims to support PDO and PGI dairy sectors in developing their strategy for adapting to climate change, by enabling them to understand the consequences for the natural resources of their terroir, in relation to the quality of the cheeses produced and in line with the fundamental characteristics of these quality labels.

Its operational objectives are as follows:

- Organise a forward-looking debate at regional level to identify the effects of climate change on the industry and on the state of the region's natural resources, and to discuss the levers to be developed and the possible scenarios for change;
- Use experiments to test the organoleptic, environmental and economic consequences for the product of adopting certain levers;
- Facilitate acceptance of the levers by producers, processors and consumers, while maintaining harmonious relations with other users of the region's resources;
- Draw up recommendations to support GDOs in implementing their medium- and long-term climate change adaptation strategy.

TRAC Project

TRAC (trajectoire d'évolution de l'organisation du travail pour les exploitations en circuit court) aims to support the installation and development of socially and economically sustainable short-distance farms.

- Through knowledge of the ways in which work is organised and the meaning given by farmers to their work as producers, processors and sellers;
- By analysing the trajectories of farms producing milk (cattle/goats), meat (cattle/sheep) or vegetables, in 4 contrasting areas in terms of producer density and proximity to consumers;
- By identifying the strategic issues facing producers and the levers used to address them;
- By co-constructing a method that integrates the different dimensions of work in supporting producers' projects ([TRAC - Idele.fr](https://trac-idele.fr)).

Recognition of transhumance as a UNESCO World Heritage Site

In June 2020, transhumance was included in France's list of intangible cultural heritage (ICP). In December 2023, UNESCO granted it the status of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

This recognition ensures the preservation of mountain farming techniques and herd management methods, as well as traditions of collective management of pastoral areas. It also covers the know-how associated with craftsmanship and the production of food products, considered to be a valuable contribution to humanity as a whole.

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