

What is a pasture?

Whether savannahs in Africa, prairies in Canada, heathlands (open shrubland habitat) in Germany, or alpine pastures in the Alps, grasslands are among the largest and most species-rich habitats on Earth. They cover around 40% of the global land area.

To ensure that these valuable areas remain open and diverse, animals are needed to graze them regularly. Without grazing, these species-rich areas would become overgrown with scrub and be displaced by forest. Unlike mowed meadows or fallow fields, pastures are created through the use of animals. **They are living ecosystems that are shaped and preserved by animal husbandry.**

Grazing livestock worldwide

Millions of people worldwide manage grasslands that are unsuitable for arable farming through livestock grazing. They live as nomads in Mongolia, as herders in East Africa or as alpine farmers in Europe. They not only keep cattle, sheep and goats, but also camels, yaks, reindeer or even geese, depending on the region. **Grazing livestock farmers secure food for their families and local communities, maintain biodiverse landscapes and preserve traditional knowledge about sustainable land use.**

The future of pastures

Grasslands are among the most endangered and least protected habitats worldwide. In Europe, species-rich pastures in particular are increasingly disappearing because they are being converted into intensively used hay meadows or arable land – often for industrial animal feed – or are becoming overgrown because they are no longer used. Climate stress (e.g. drought) and the intensive use of pesticides in industrial agriculture are also putting increasing pressure on pastures. **According to estimates, up to 90% of the original grasslands in temperate zones of the world have already been lost and only 1% are adequately protected.** This is devastating for biodiversity and poses an existential threat to the people who make their living from grazing livestock.

Why grazing?

Protection against forest fires

In southern Europe – and increasingly in Germany too – animals are used specifically to keep grass short. This reduces the risk of field and forest fires. Grazed buffer strips around villages can save lives.

Protection against extreme weather

Pastureland acts like a sponge: it absorbs water during heavy rainfall and stores it – which helps prevent flooding and drought. Arable land cannot do this.

Habitat for many species

A single cow pat can be a habitat for over 200 species of insects! Earthworms, beetles, flies and birds all benefit. Pastures are colourful hotspots of biodiversity.

Food sovereignty worldwide

Grazing animals provide protein in places where arable farming is hardly possible, e.g. in dry regions of the Global South. This strengthens local food systems and reduces dependence on imports.

Animal welfare

Grazing, resting, living in a herd: pastures give animals what they need. Exercise, light, fresh air: these things have been proven to make animals healthier.

Climate protection & traditional landscape

Sustainably managed pastures bind CO₂, preserve open landscapes and create jobs in rural areas.

Would you like to know how you can promote sustainable grazing animal husbandry?

Receive the latest information and tips via our newsletter.



Feed locally – relieve globally

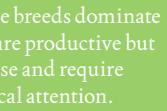
Pasture farming uses what grows locally: grass, clover, herbs. Imported feed is not necessary – this protects rainforests and frees up land for local food production.



What does pasture have to do with YOU?

Buy meat or wool from these animals specifically. Support conservation projects like GEHeV. www.g-e-h.de

More and more old, robust livestock breeds are dying out.



Tons of high-quality sheep's wool are currently being incinerated or composted.

Mass production is displacing sustainable pasture farming.



Climate protection & adaptation on pastureland

Sustainably managed pastures* are water and carbon sinks. Grasslands store about one third of global terrestrial carbon stocks. Every sustainably managed pasture helps to mitigate the climate crisis – especially in the Global South, where its effects are felt most acutely. At the same time, the ability of pastures to store water provides natural protection against drought and erosion. Weiden, Wasser zu speichern, natürlich vor Trockenheit und Erosion.

*Sustainably managed pastures are farmed in such a way that grazing intensity, duration and timing are adapted to the current conditions at the location – to protect the soil, vegetation and animal welfare.



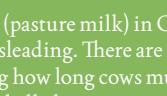
A model for tomorrow

Pastures ensure the survival of millions of people. Grazing animals can convert vegetation on land unsuitable for arable farming into valuable food for humans. According to the FAO, pastoralism is a key source of food and income for around 200 million people worldwide.

Animal products
Less is more

Reduce your overall consumption of animal products. Buy milk, cheese and meat from sustainable pasture farming – preferably directly from the farm! Here you can find offers in your area: hofladen-finden.de, heimischehoflaeden.de or marktschwaermer.de

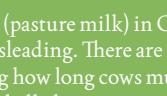
BEST. Even better: support small businesses that process wool, such as Elbwolle, Schafgesteppt or Finkhof. Why not search for a business near you!



Wool
Valuable instead of disposable goods

Buy clothing made from local, sustainable wool. Look for labels such as Naturtextil IVM

Grazing animals and their keepers offer something that is particularly important right now: they promote biodiversity, climate protection and animal welfare. We are fighting for this prosperity as the key to a sustainable future.



The future needs pasture!

Preserve old livestock breeds

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A few high-performance breeds dominate the market today. They are productive but very susceptible to disease and require intensive care and medical attention. Traditional breeds, such as the Alpine stone sheep, are robust and have a natural resistance to disease and environmental conditions. Especially in times of climate change, resilient animals and genetic diversity are essential for food security in the future.



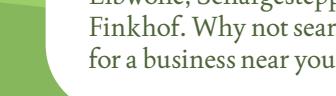
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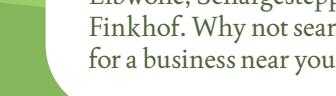
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The future needs pasture!

The Mera Declaration of Pastoralists

In 2010, 160 pastoralists* – delegates from 32 countries – met in the Indian city of Mera and jointly drafted the Mera Declaration. 'We have unique and equally valuable contributions to make, both within our own communities and to the global community,' it states. As pastoralists, they have accumulated knowledge about adaptation, mitigation and sustainable living through direct experience with climate change. The declaration sets out more than 20 demands, including education for girls and equal rights for women – also in the pastoralist community – pastoral mobility as a fundamental right, and the representation of women at all levels of decision-making.

*Pastoralism refers to a way of life and economy centred around livestock farming. Unlike the general term "herding", pastoralism also encompasses the social, economic and ecological organisation of this way of life.

International Year 2026

The United Nations (UN) has declared 2026 the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP). The proposal came from the government of Mongolia, a country with a long tradition of rangeland pastoralism. An international alliance of individuals and organisations aims to give herds' associations worldwide a stronger voice and to promote recognition of pastoralism as a particularly valuable way of using global grazing lands in harmony with nature. The German Alliance for Grazing Lands and Pastoralism also supports these demands and is part of the international movement. (weidelandschaft-hirtentum.de)

„Livestock grazing is the most efficient way of utilizing most of the land we graze cattle on. Raising cattle on grass is a good way to add value to marginal land and is often preferable to any other type of production.“

Arno Doerksen rancher

Cattle
are the world's most important grazing animals and provide milk, meat and leather. You can find these classic ruminants in stationary pastures and in migrating herds – from savannahs to highlands. In many cultures, they also have great symbolic significance.



Donkeys
are robust and undemanding animals that are adapted to dry and mountainous regions. They are social and sure-footed. In addition to being used for transport, they also occasionally provide milk. Donkeys also eat woody plants and grasses.



„Pastoral livestock farming coexists and co-creates life alongside other species. This invites us to be part of an integrated environment where all forms of life are respected, and allows us to build resilience, build the economy and build community. Currently, other tools such as nature tourism are being incorporated to strengthen our economy, and encourage young people and women to stay in the region.“

Marite Alvarez herder in Formosa

„Sheep [...] are extremely gentle on their environment, they are light, have small hooves, get on well with birds and insects, do their job every day and maintain nature reserves, spread seeds and also fertilise some catch crops. [...] Personally, I think it's important that animal husbandry is visible so that people, young and old, don't forget that grazing animals are a natural part of the cultural landscape.“

Magdalena Molinski from the Schnuckenschäferei (sheep farm)

Sheep and goats
are grazing animals found worldwide, especially in dry or mountainous regions. As ruminants and herd animals, they provide meat, milk, leather and wool. Goats are considered particularly sure-footed and adaptable, while sheep are wool suppliers with a wide variety of breeds.



„In societies like ours in Iran, people are beginning to realize that although non-native breeds raised in industrial farms may produce more meat in terms of quantity, local cows, native sheep, and goats raised by pastoralists provide superior meat, milk, and wool. [...] That is why I believe pastoralism will survive.“

Manouchehr Heydari traditional cattle herder

Camels
Dromedaries and their South American relatives (llamas, alpacas) are perfectly adapted to extreme habitats – especially deserts, semi-deserts and high altitudes. They serve as riding and pack animals, providing milk, meat and wool. Even though their stomachs are structured slightly differently from those of ruminants, they are also able to digest grasses and other plants well.



„What motivates me are the resilience, the indigenous knowledge and the deep ecological wisdom that pastoralist communities carry. Despite limited infrastructure and despite insufficient external support, pastoralists sustainably manage fragile ecosystems and maintain social cohesion in often challenging environments.“

Aden Kamate Arbore pastoralist community

„In northern Kenya, where about 80% of the population depends on livestock as their primary source of income, the industry remains the backbone of economic stability. The region boasts vast grazing lands, though largely undeveloped, offering immense potential for pastoral livelihoods.“

Dr. Armara Galwab herder of camels, cattle, goats and sheep

Seuri Sanare Lukumay Maasai from Monduli

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Reshma Begum from the Bakarwals pastoral community

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