

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.



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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.



Pastures strengthen food sovereignty

! Pasture farming is only sustainable if it is part of a genuine transformation of the food system: with local cycles, agroecological principles and food sovereignty. This requires a reduction in livestock numbers, an end to industrial animal farming and global justice through fair agricultural policies.

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.

What does pasture have to do with YOU?

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.

Preserve old livestock breeds

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

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

Mass production is displacing sustainable pasture farming.

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

The term „Weidemilch“ (pasture milk) in German supermarkets can be misleading. There are no legal requirements stipulating how long cows must graze in pastures for milk to be labelled as pasture milk. The labels vary slightly. Find out what's really behind them!

Wool Valuable instead of disposable goods

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

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

The future needs pasture!

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 proven system as the key to a sustainable future.

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)



We call on the German Federal Government

- 1. Recognise and promote grazing livestock farming**
The German Federal Government must make a clear commitment to promoting sustainable grazing livestock farming in its agricultural, climate and development strategies and reward grazing livestock farmers appropriately for their valuable work.
- 2. Strengthen regional supply systems**
Regional markets, small-scale farms and local value chains, both domestically and internationally, must be specifically promoted.
- 3. Ensure active participation of grazing livestock farmers**
Sustainable grazing farming representatives should be structurally involved in international decision-making bodies.
- 4. Preserve old, robust livestock breeds for pasture farming**
The German Federal Government must expand programmes to preserve and utilise old, locally adapted livestock breeds.

More background information and the latest updates on our campaign
The Future Needs Pasture: