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Policy Brief

DROME VALLEY | Sheep meat locally produced and valorised

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Summary

Extensive sheep breeding and pastoralism in the Drôme Valley is an example of an integrated mountain value chain that provides economic, environmental and cultural value in rural areas. In fact, this value chain is particularly well organised at the local level: most of the production is valorised and marketed in local supply chains, creating economic value and activity in the territory, and providing a local food supply. Pastoralism practices also strongly contribute to mountain landscape management by providing ecosystem services (maintenance of natural areas and biodiversity, touristic attractiveness). However, current environmental pressures, and the overutilisation of mountain natural resources, are jeopardising pastoral practices. An integrated policy strategy at local, national and European level has to be coordinated to protect this traditional and qualitative know-how.

Know more about the Drôme Valley Reference Region, its selected value chain and the regional multi-actor platform (MAP), here.

Key policy messages

- Environmental preservation
- Maintain traditional practices
- Local food supply

1. The Mountain Reference Region (MRR)

The Drôme Valley is located in the French Pre Alps, surrounding the Drôme River that takes its source in the Diois and flows until the confluence between the Drôme and Rhône rivers. The territory is characterised by 8 important protected natural sites (including 5 Natura 2000 sites) and an important agricultural sector. The north-east of the territory is characterised by middle and high mountains (Pre Alps and Vercors Natural Park): agriculture in this area is mainly livestock and small-scale diversified horticulture. The south is characterised by aromatic plants and large-scale agriculture. The west of the territory is characterised by large areas of cropland.

“Biovallée” is a territorial brand created in 2002 in the Drôme Valley. The aim is to promote the highly diversified assets of the area in terms of geological, natural and agricultural resources, and the ability of local actors to act for the sustainable development of their territory.

Extensive sheep farming and pastoralism are characteristic of Drôme Valley mountain and mid-mountain areas. This strongly contributes to local sustainable development through the production of local economic value, local and qualitative food supply, and the preservation of natural areas.

2. Sheep meat VC, an asset for local sustainable development in the Drôme Valley

The extensive breeding and the pastoralism within middle mountains as well as the slaughter and the local valorisation of sheep meat is an important economic activity in the Drôme Valley. The region has 123 breeders (17% of the agricultural firms of the territory) and more than 8 800 sheep. Besides, 36% of the territory is dedicated to pasture with two main pasture zones (this case study will focus on one of them: Plateau d'Ambel).

Besides, most of the slaughtering and processing activities are organised locally in two main slaughterhouses, in Die and Romans sur Isère. Processing is also done by local butchers' shops or by the breeders themselves. Marketing is mainly organised locally through direct sales or short supply chains in markets, local product groceries, butcher shops, and under the label (L'appellation d'origine) "Agneau de Sisteron".

The sheep meat value chain is highly connected to sustainable landscape management, preservation of traditional know-how, and local and qualitative food supply. Thus, it creates local economic, cultural and environmental value in the territory.

3. Value chain contribution to sustainability and resilience of the MRR: barriers and opportunities

The sheep meat value chain provides economic, cultural and environmental assets in this mountain area. In terms of natural assets, extensive sheep breeding and pastoralism practices, such as sylvopastoralism or eco-pasture, provide ecosystem services (maintenance of grassland, woodland and overgrown areas to prevent fires starting) and contribute to the conservation of biodiversity (habitats and species). Besides, by its connections with other agricultural activities (organic manures for farmers, fodder production), touristic activities (open landscapes, nature activities, gastronomy) and eco-social activities (reinforcement of rural economic activity, human presence in deserted places, repopulation), the sheep meat value chain creates local economic and cultural assets.

However, the sheep meat value chain is facing strong environmental pressures, including predation, pastoral land access issues, climate change, drought, and lack of data on the impact of pasture activities on biodiversity. There is also the difficulty of rewarding the sector for ecosystem services provided by pastoralism.

Besides, local shepherds are also highly dependent on public aid: national, regional, departmental and European support to sheep pastoral activity by means of the Pastoral Territorial Plan (PPT), the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and flocks protection measures.

4. Policy relevant considerations

The sector is strongly supported by local representatives for its positive externalities: maintenance of agricultural and economic activity in all the villages of the valley (jobs and services on the territory), maintenance of the natural spaces, in particular tourist areas and controlling the risk of fire, and the positive image of the territory and participation in the eco-tourist attractiveness (e.g. inhabited and lively villages, walking paths, summer pastures, well-maintained meadows and grazed rangelands, local high-quality products).

In the Drôme Valley, sheep breeders are innovative and committed: choice of rustic breeds and extensive systems, quality production often under a label, direct sales or short circuits, experimentation of innovative practices. These practices are at times very strongly supported by local and European public policies (Territorial Pastoral Plan, LEADER programmes) and at times not sufficiently "in line" to be accepted or recognised by institutions (CAP, health regulations, installation aids).

In conclusion, it is important to support the Drôme Valley local sheep meat value chain in order to sustain the local economy and quality food production. It is also paramount to recognise and reward the sector for the environmental and cultural ecosystem services it provides. Finally, local, national and European stakeholders should also consider the strong pressures that the sector is facing (e.g. climate change, predation of lambs) and should accompany the development of solutions with the breeders at the local level.

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Reference

Drôme Valley Pastoral Territorial Plan, 2017 – 2022.

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