MOVING
MOuntain Valorisation through INterconnectedness and Green growth

Policy Brief

DROME VALLEY | Lamb and sheep meat in the Drôme Valley

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Lamb and sheep meat in the Drôme Valley

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Summary

The sheep and lamb sector is a major agricultural, economic and ecological asset for the Drôme region. Constant dialogue between elected representatives, local authorities and breeders is essential to ensure its sustainability and meet new challenges. A number of measures and policies are already in place to support the sector's players. However, specific policies for mountain areas, changes to the CAP, the recruitment of young people and women, and the competitiveness of local products are needed to ensure the long-term viability of this agriculture and avoid its decline.

Figure 1: A herd of sheep grazing on a summer pasture in the Drôme Valley.

Key Policy Messages

- ☞ Supporting local and collaborative initiatives
- ☞ Supporting farmers to help them achieve self-sufficiency
- ☞ Make local products more competitive on the market
- ☞ Strengthening the link between agriculture and environmental protection

1. The lamb and sheep meat sector: an asset for the Drôme valley

The lamb and sheep meat sector fits perfectly into the mountainous environment of the Drôme thanks to its extensive model. The value and quality of the final product is reflected in the healthy environment in which the animal has grown up, the spontaneous plant resources it has fed on and the proximity of the slaughter and processing site. Almost all the lambs are reared on grass.

Pastoral activity in this sector generates a number of positive externalities. Firstly, it contributes to the management of natural areas and the regulation of the environment, preventing overgrowth and forest fires. In addition, this practice promotes biodiversity by maintaining varied habitats and allowing numerous plant and animal species to coexist. The sheep industry is also a key economic activity, helping to create high-quality local products that reinforce the region's identity. The industry offers employment opportunities in the mountains, creating jobs directly linked to livestock farming, but also in the processing,

marketing and tourism sectors. In this way, the sheep meat industry plays a crucial role in maintaining and developing mountain regions, where other activities are struggling to establish themselves.

2. Value chain contribution to resilience and sustainability

The sheep meat industry has demonstrated a great capacity for adaptation and resilience in the face of variations in its environment. The industry's players are well aware of the constraints inherent to mountain regions, the impacts of climate change and the socio-economic issues affecting their activity and their region. This awareness is nurtured by the sharing of knowledge between breeders, the collaborative structuring of the industry, and the active involvement of local authorities in raising awareness of current challenges.

These territorial assets are reflected in the way of life of the local inhabitants, a dynamic governance structure close to the stakeholders, and an environment rich in biodiversity. This diversity encourages the adoption of new adaptive techniques, strengthening the resilience of the sector and the sustainability of pastoral practices in the region.

However, the sector faces a number of challenges, such as cohabitation with other mountain activities, increasing predation, the impact of climate change and foreign competition. For example, predation exerts significant pressure on breeders, sometimes leading to the abandonment of certain areas such as undergrowth. The economic crisis and rising energy costs are accentuating the sector's vulnerability. Breeders' incomes are fragile and largely dependent on public subsidies. What's more, climate change, with its unpredictable seasons, water shortages and frequent droughts, is altering the natural vegetation cycle, posing new challenges for the industry.

3. Policy experiences

In the face of these many challenges, the region remains deeply attached to the industry and is demonstrating its inventiveness. Local authorities and breeders' associations are implementing a range of initiatives to raise awareness among the general public and schoolchildren, help farms become more self-sufficient, promote the economic value of the sector's products, and support the acquisition of protective infrastructure. Concerted and collective initiatives at local level are essential to reinforce the resilience of the sector.

Local inter-municipalities have set up a slaughterhouse and processing facilities in the area to promote short distribution channels and strengthen the local economy. By integrating these facilities, they aim to support local producers and reduce the distances food travels, thus contributing to a more sustainable, higher-quality food supply.

As part of their agricultural and food strategy, these inter-municipalities play a crucial role in facilitating the integration of products from this sector into school catering. European policies, such as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), which finances Territorial Pastoral Plans, and the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which supports the Compensatory Allowance for Natural Handicaps (ICHN) and

Agro-Environmental and Climate Measures (MAEC), sometimes support this local dynamic.

Faced with the increase in predation, national policies such as the National Action Plan on the wolf support the farming profession in the face of this threat.

4. *Recommendation for future policies*

The collaborative work carried out as part of the MOVING program has highlighted future policy recommendations to ensure a sustainable future for the sheep industry and agricultural sectors in mountain areas:

- Implement a policy of welcoming young people and women and enabling young farmers and women to set up in rural areas.
- Set up subsidy programs for collective and local initiatives.
- Adapt governance in mountain areas.
- Modify the CAP to a) subsidize practices rather than surface areas, and b) take account of wooded pastures.
- Implement standards to make local products competitive on the market.
- Introduce legislation to impose a minimum quota of local produce in canteens, supermarkets and hypermarkets, thus encouraging the sale and consumption of local products.
- Changes and adaptations to agricultural practices should be encouraged to strengthen the resilience of ecosystems.
- Allocate specific funds within rural development programs or agricultural budgets to support the salaries, training and resources needed by local development agents to stimulate local and collective initiatives.

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Reference

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