



Press release #7

EuroSheep – final seminar in France – au revoir & goodbye!

The thematic network EuroSheep ends the dynamic knowledge exchange between European sheep sector stakeholders that was initiated by SheepNet. The knowledge and expertise exchanges in EuroSheep focus on flock nutrition and health management, based on the industry's current needs.

EuroSheep, which is funded by the EU H2020 research programme, started in January 2020 and this seminar marked the end of this project, which is finishing in June 2023. Eight countries are involved, namely Ireland, United Kingdom, Spain, France, Italy, Hungary, Greece and Turkey, representing 80% of sheep production in Europe.

The South of France near Manosque has been the ideal setting for saying good-bye or rather 'au revoir' to the EuroSheep partners and stakeholders. EuroSheep, which started in January 2020 as a continuation of SheepNet, is drawing to an end. The programme looked at farmers' needs and challenges regarding sheep nutrition and health, and proposed solutions to alleviate them.

The 2-days seminar was set in the South of France, where up to 105 delegates from the 8 EuroSheep countries gathered to hear about the final results of the project, and to visit typical pastoral sheep farms from the area.

On the first day, delegates visited 2 meat sheep farms in the morning. The first farm was the GAEC de la Grand' Bastide, where Stephanie, Jerome and Max presented the activities on their farm which carried 2400 Merinos d'Arles ewes. They have 12 protection dogs (Maremma Abruzzes) living with the ewe flocks grazing outside. Max explained how they use the dogs to protect the flock on the summer mountain pastures and on the pastures near the farm. Delegates were also shown how the farmers feed the animals inside, with diet/TMR feeders and self-service racks, and how recurrent droughts made Jerome rethink their feeding systems regularly. Finally, their lambing system (5 lambings over the year) was shown. Stephanie explained how they manage the organisation in the lambing shed and why the number of lambings per year is to be able to produce lambs all year round for the Label Rouge and PGI Agneau de Sisteron. Delegates were very interested and fruitful discussions between the countries ensued, despite the initial language barriers.

The second farm was the GAEC des collines aux montagnes, where Leticia and Alexandre explained to the delegates how their pastoral farm worked, and how their 600-ewe flock

spends most of their time on parcours (shrub woodland grazing) and on estives (high altitude common pastures grazing), with the help of seasonal shepherds. Issues around external parasites, especially scab, due to the mixing of flocks before the summer grazing, were discussed with the delegates, as well as labour issues. A very interesting system which raised many questions from the delegates.

The afternoon was spent inside, where the final workshop took place. Pierre-Guillaume Grisot, the EuroSheep coordinator, presented the project and its progression and achievements after the 3.5 years. Delegates were then split in 4 groups, and had the opportunity to see some examples of the solutions identified to answer the farmers' needs, as well as how they had been tested and assessed by farmers in the various countries of the project. Tips and tricks relating to those solutions and needs were also shown to the delegates. The four showcased areas related to 1) grazing and grassland management, 2) nutritional requirements, 3) internal parasitism, and 4) lameness.

The second and last day was another day of visits and demonstrations. The morning was dedicated to the visit of the experimental meat sheep farm of Carmejane in the Alps of Haute Provence, which is also the site of a lycee agricole. After a very interesting presentation of the meat and dairy sheep sectors in France, delegates were split in groups to see presentations about the farm management, on the genetic management of the Préalpes du Sud breed, results on trials on feeds for fattening lambs, and can the grazing of sainfoin limit parasite infestation? . The farm has 650 Pre-Alpes du Sud ewes, which are part of the local breeding scheme. They produced a Label Rouge 'Agneau de Sisteron' and have 3 lambing periods. The animals graze outside on grassland (50 ha) and parcours (500 ha of shrub woodland grazing) and also go on the 160 ha of estives (mountain summer pastures) during the summer. They also use protection dogs for their ewes. Being an experimental farm, their research areas focus around pastoralism, labour use, feed self-sufficiency and productivity.

The afternoon was dedicated to the last visit of a dairy sheep farm, the GAEC Tchiote Bedigue. The farm was higher in altitude (1100 m) and has a mixture of 175 meat ewes (Merinos d'Arles), which spend most of their time on the mountain pastures, and 240 dairy ewes (Lacaune), which stay on site for the daily milking and cheese making. Isabelle and Jerome presented their system to the delegates, with Isabelle focusing on the cheese making aspect of their organic farm. Trials on multi-species grasslands to meet the challenges of feed self-sufficiency to climate change were also presented to the delegates. The visit finished by a degustation of the wide variety of cheeses made by Isabelle, to the delight of the delegates.

These 2 days had been a perfect end of a successful project, with fruitful exchanges and discussions amongst all countries participants.

All Eurosheep best practices are available in all the languages of the project on www.eurosheep.network.



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