"La Cabreta" (Spain): an outdoor goat and sheep production linked to forest and grasslands

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"La Cabreta" is a Galician farm owned by a couple, Ermitas and Joan, who met in 2003 during an Erasmus fellowship, and had a common dream to start their own project: to live in the countryside and own their own farm. They moved from Catalonia (NE Spain) to Meira, Galicia (NW Spain) to start their farm.



Owners of the "La Cabreta" farm

"La Cabreta" is an outdoor goat and sheep production enterprise linked to forest and grasslands.**It was established** in 2008 in Meira (Lugo province of Galicia region) on rented lands from the Banco de Terras de Galicia. Meira is on the limit of "Terra Cha" county characterized by intensive cow milk farms mixed with forestry areas (***Eucalyptus spp.*** and ***Pinus radiata***). Banco de Terras is a web based system where land owners can rent their lands to animal owners to graze animals. The starting point for "La Cabreta" was 26 ha of abandoned land full of bushes (***Ulex europaeus*** and ***Ulex gallii***). In order to control and take advantage of the bushes, they introduced a 150 goat flock and transformed 10 ha to grassland with a long term mixture of seeds.





Transformation of the landscape carried out by goats

It was really hard to establish the farm, as Ermitas and Joan had to learn by themselves everything about extensive goat flock management, which was not a common practice in the area. Nevertheless, they found a way to implement extensive management (all day, all night and 365 days/year outdoor grazing time) in a high wolf density area thanks to the cooperation with their neighbors.

They found a way to help forest owners by grazing during the summertime the bushes that grow under the trees (bramble), while grazing dairy cow grasslands during the autumn and winter, when grass from spring grass silage areas is available. With this system the forest owners get understory bushes removed, while grassland areas are better used. So, the whole system is optimized.

The system reduces the carbon footprint of both farms, as mechanical clearing is not needed, forest fires are reduced and the forest owner has a great reduction of the costs. During the last year, goats grazed 20 ha of grasslands and 10 ha of forestry.

In 2015, a flock of 100 ewes joined the goats to diversify the farm's production and increase the pasture use efficiency. Goats transform forest woody understory into herbaceous vegetation, which is better used by sheep.



Some pictures of the “La Cabreta” farm

Marketing has proven to be really important, because extensive grazing systems are based on low inputs. Therefore, Ermitas and Joan decided to join other sheep and goat farmers and start a quality label called "Cordeiro e Cabrito Atlántico" (Atlantic Lamb and Kit) based on this extensive flock management system. Through the company they started, called Beealia, they sell their products to restaurants, butcheries and the general public all over Spain.

European Agroforestry Federation https://euraf.net/

EURAF is an NGO, based in Montpellier and Brussels (Transparency Register ID of 913270437706-82). It aims “to promote the adoption of agroforestry practices across Europe by supporting efforts to develop awareness, education, research, policy making and investments which foster the use of trees on farms”. It has a network of 31 affiliated entities in 23 countries.