

Grazing4AgroEcology

NEWSLETTER NO.4
JANUARY 2024



Welcome to the Fourth Edition of the Grazing4AgroEcology Newsletter!

In this issue, we're excited to explore a variety of engaging topics:

Webinar 'How to Create a Video? Storytelling in the Agricultural Sector': Learn to craft compelling agricultural stories through video.

Project Members' Latest Activities: Updates on the impactful work being done in sustainable agriculture.

Weather Impacts Analysis: Insights into how weather affects farming practices in different countries.

Partner Publisher News: The latest research and trends from our partners.

Innovative Grazing Technologies: Discover new technologies transforming grazing practices.



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And the winner is ...

On 23 November the G4AE project organised a webinar: 'how to create a video? Storytelling in the agricultural sector'.

During this webinar it was step by step explained how to make a video with your smartphone. Guidance was given about how to tell their story about livestock farming more effectively and efficiently by empowering the use of smartphones and free software for videos and storytelling.

Attendees were invited to share their self-made video with us on social media, using #G4AE. A video would be selected to give stage on the G4AE media channels. And we have a winner! Congratulations go to Hielke en Hanny the Rooij from Boerderij de Heerlijkheid in the Netherlands!

[Click here](#) to watch the video on their Facebook page

[Click here](#) to watch the video on their Instagram account





Grazing4AgroEcology award

As part of Work Package 5, Teagasc is leading the task on boosting engagement through a “G4AE award”. This farm competition aims at rewarding the farmers with the best grazing management practices that fall under at least one of the five agro-ecological principles;

1. adopting management practices that aim to improve animal health
2. reducing the inputs required for production
3. reducing pollution by optimising the biogeochemical functioning of farming systems
4. enhancing diversity within the animal production systems to strengthen their resilience
5. preserving biodiversity in agro-ecosystems by adapting management practices

Each member state will be hosting their own competition during 2024 where the best grazing farmer will be elected from each member state. Winners from each countries will meet in Ireland in 2025. Farmers from each country can apply to this competition and attempt to win.

Go find out about your country’s award on the G4AE website and fill out the form if you wish to enter the competition!



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UPDATES ON PROJECT MEMBERS ACTIVITIES

GERMANY



1ST AKIS MEETING

In December, Germany's first AKIS meeting focused on the future of grazing systems, emphasising the need to balance economic and ecological goals. Key strategies include improving market competitiveness of pasture-based farms, reducing subsidy dependence, and educating about grazing livestock's value. The approach favors diverse solutions tailored to different grassland conditions and supports a transition from penned to pasture-based farming. A significant outcome is fostering a "Grazing mind-set" through targeted training and education for practitioners.

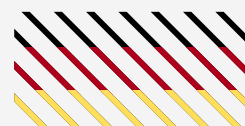
The meeting identified several key strategies: enhancing market competitiveness of pasture-based farms, reducing reliance on subsidies, and raising consumer awareness about the importance of grazing livestock. It also emphasised the need for diverse, site-specific solutions, including easier transitions for penned-livestock farms to pasture-based systems, access to appropriate livestock genetics, and improved training for young farmers. A major focus was on developing a "Grazing mind-set" through professional education, particularly for practitioners, to shift from the traditional penned-livestock production to more sustainable grazing practices.

2ND YOUNG FARMER MEETING

In November 2023, members of a young farmer group in Germany visited two innovative farms in Asche-Hardegsen. The first farm, a dairy operation with 70 cows, has adopted a fixed milking robot, which has led to a halt in grazing for lactating cows. The group discussed the potential of using a mobile milking robot to enable grazing for all cows, a concept inspired by a previous meeting in France. This farm is also notable for its use of the cup plant in biogas production, contributing to the village's bioenergy self-sufficiency.



The second farm, focusing on beef and suckler cow husbandry, practices extensive year-round grazing. Having recently transitioned from dairy to beef farming, the farmer has discovered a diverse range of plant species in his pastures, qualifying for funding under the GLÖZ programme. This farm also maintains pesticide-free grasslands in a water protection area, aligning with sustainable practices that enhance biodiversity. The visit highlighted the farm's commitment to sustainable agriculture, including the identification of several minor plant species part of the GLÖZ programme.



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ITALY



Partner Farm Network (PFR)

"Ziegenhof Trumsberg" in South Tyrol, Italy, run by Bertram and Helena Stecher, is a dairy goat farm at 1450 meters altitude. Specialising in cheese production, it houses 50 milk goats on 6 hectares of steep grassland. The farm uses rotational grazing to manage parasitic pressure, with selective deworming based on analysis. In summer, goats graze on higher altitude pastures for natural parasite control. Milking takes place from January to June at the farm and continues on alpine pastures until late September, aiding in workload management for this part-time business.

THE NETHERLANDS

At the third meeting of the Partner Farm Network, dairy farmers visited Roger Brosens and Kees van Wezel to discuss grazing with robot milking. Interactive farm walk allowed for direct questioning and learning about grazing challenges. The group then shared suggestions in plenary sessions, focusing on two main challenges:

Increasing fresh grass intake while maintaining production:

- ✓ Enhance grass palatability with shorter grass, smaller plots, and minimal slurry fertilisation.
- ✓ Expand grazing area and time.
- ✓ Adjust barn feeding to encourage pasture grazing.
- ✓ Evaluate nutritional value of herb-rich grasslands.

Efficient pasture access and return:

- ✓ Modify stable feeding schedule and quantity.
- ✓ Implement morning grazing with evening stable feeding.
- ✓ Create one-way walkways for better cow movement.

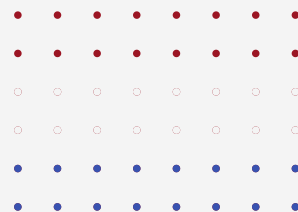
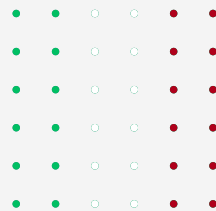
Stakeholder meetings on challenges around grazing and agroecology

On December 6, the first stakeholder meeting was organised at AERES Hogeschool Dronten to discuss the (future) challenges around grazing in the Netherlands. LNV (Ministry of Agriculture), LTO (farmers association), ZuivelNL (sector organization), NAJK (young farmers association), DMS (advisory service) and dairy farmers were present. Challenges with the highest priority were determined, which will be followed up in future stakeholder meetings. The first item on the agenda of the next meeting will be the potential of land use.



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FRANCE



On November 14, nine farmers participated in a meeting to use a self-assessment tool for evaluating their farms' agro-ecological performance, identifying areas for improvement such as agroforestry and feed input reduction.

On December 12, the French AKIS meeting in Rennes discussed the decline of grazing on dairy and beef farms, attributing it to larger farms, labor shortages, the prevalence of robotic milking, and a perception of grazing as outdated. The group suggested that sharing successful grazing practices could help demonstrate its economic viability to other farmers.

PORTUGAL

Portugal's expert meeting and farm walk

On November 10, 2023, the first expert meeting, hosted by CONSULAI and Sociedade Portuguesa de Pastagens e Forragens (SPPF), took place in Montemor-o-Novo, Portugal. This event, supported by APORMOR, the city council, and CONSULAI, focused on Pasture Management in the Montado, featuring the G4AE project. CONSULAI presented the project's goals and results, enhancing understanding of its impact on pasture management.

In the afternoon, the group visited Herdade da Filhardeira, where farmer Joaquim Capoulas shared insights into his innovative and animal-friendly farming practices. This visit highlighted the commitment and advancements in agricultural practices in the region.

AKIS meeting and farm walk

At the AKIS meeting on January 10, 2024, in Montemor-o-Novo, CONSULAI gathered 40 participants to discuss the G4AE project and extensive grazing in Portugal. The group identified key challenges such as balancing economic-environmental sustainability, soil and pasture quality, market recognition of extensive systems, communication issues, consumer awareness, climate change, and support for cork oak forests. Innovations discussed included valuing extensive grazing, responsive public administration, new management techniques, better climate and soil data, forage capacity calculation methods, exploring new markets, and improved communication and training. This meeting was crucial for fostering collaboration and addressing challenges in the agricultural sector.



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ROMANIA

Partners from Romania recently organised a significant meeting at Agro Cosm Fan SRL farm in Mociu. The event, led by Mugur Jitea and facilitated by Adrian Gliga, Vlad Isarie, and Valentin Mihai, gathered over 15 farmers from various organisations. Discussions covered beef cattle farming topics, including breed preferences, carcass finishing, and crossbreeding, with a focus on Angus and Bălțată breeds. The meeting also compared grazing practices in Ireland and Romania.

A farm visit highlighted Agro Cosm Farm SRL's operations with 200 dairy cows and 100 beef cattle, emphasising feed production, direct sales, and farm management challenges. The tour included the dairy processing areas, discussing milking practices and cheese production using camel rennet. This gathering offered valuable insights into cattle farming and processing efficiency.



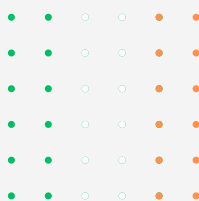
IRELAND

Young farmers meeting

In early November 2023, the G4AE Irish young farmers' group met in the west of Ireland (Co. Galway). The host farmers Kevin Moran and David Gannon are part of the Irish G4AE partner farm network. Both have included clover in their pastures for the past number of years and are able to grow high quantity of herbage (around 14 to 15 tDM/ha/year). With close management of their grazing systems, they were able to decrease the nitrogen fertiliser applied on their farms and achieve their objectives of herbage production.



Following the farms presentation, the young farmers exchanged not only on the technical aspects of grazing and clover incorporation on swards but also on the image and role farmers have in today's society. The young farmers also discussed the importance of work-life balance in farming. Finally the group discussed the impact new nitrates regulation coming in to Ireland will have on their farm. Group consensus identified a need to communicate better to the local/national authorities and consumers on the innovative practices they are implementing every day to mitigate the impact of farming on water quality. The farmers exchanged positive thoughts and discussed about actions needed to communicate about their work.



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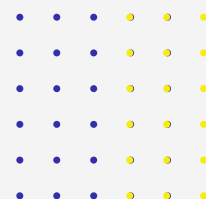
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SWEDEN

Young farmers shared their impressions of the Young Farmers Tour

At the annual meeting of Swedish Grassland Society in November 2023 young farmers reported their summer journey. Sara Carlsson and Lovisa af Geijersstam talked about what they learned, saw and appreciated when joining the Young Farmers Tour in Germany in June 2023, as part of the project.

Sara and Lovisa appreciated a lot the opportunity to join the tour. It was interesting to meet young people from many countries. They aimed to speak to them all, learned a lot and concluded that there are many differences between our countries both in conditions and opinions.



AKIS meeting with fruitful discussions

The first AKIS meeting gathered nine selected persons – farmers, advisors, authorities, NGOs and other stakeholders for a meeting at the Swedish Board of Agriculture in Jönköping in January.

Short speeches on the topics of the five pillars of agroecology were made as introduction and inspiration. Thereafter discussions between the people who attended the meeting led to prioritised topics for coming meetings.

The AKIS group will meet for further discussions in another four AKIS meetings during the coming two years, the next in June on one of the partner farms in the project.



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WEATHER IMPACTS ON PASTURE AND FARMING: A COUNTRY-BY-COUNTRY ANALYSIS

GERMANY



In December 2023, Germany faced severe floods causing extensive damage to farmlands and impacting farmers' livelihoods. Additionally, farmers protested against austerity measures, including an automotive tax on agriculture and taxation policies on Agrardiesel (agricultural diesel). These financial burdens led to widespread demonstrations, calling for policy revisions to support the sustainability of farming operations amidst government fiscal measures.

FRANCE



September 2023 was France's hottest month since 1900, followed by a record-breaking October. Rain delays in seeding were offset by a 40% above-normal total monthly rainfall. Grass growth, initially favorable, halted in September but resumed with rain. Some farmers continued grazing, while others distributed forage. Prolonged rain deteriorated grazing conditions, ending the season in some regions by mid-October. Maize silage was satisfactory, filling barns and silos. Southern France faced poor-quality fodder due to persistent rain during haymaking. Detailed reports: Institut de l'Élevage. Brittany's grass growth forecasts

ITALY



In 2023, Italy, particularly Sardinia, experienced higher than average temperatures and lower rainfall, leading to extreme weather events affecting agriculture. While late September rains allowed for successful harvesting of summer crops and autumn sowing, insufficient rainfall in most areas hindered the growth of rainfed grasslands, resulting in limited livestock grazing.

SWEDEN



In Sweden, January experienced an uncommonly cold spell characterised by high wind speeds and snowfall. This posed challenges for manure management and led to technical equipment failures. However, it brought a welcome source of income for farmers who cleared snow, especially following the poor grain harvests of the previous year.

The cultivation season in Sweden for 2023 proved notably challenging, marked by a dry early summer and a wet late summer. As a result, forage had to be partially harvested from designated set-aside areas or other lands with extremely tall cutting heights.

The utilisation of this forage during the current indoor season is resulting in reduced milk yields and diminished weight gains.

IRELAND



Start of the calving season in this cold January

In Ireland, most dairy farms follow a spring calving system to have a milk production following the grass growth curve. Some farms might have already started to calve but most farms will begin calving this February. Currently in Ireland temperatures are fluctuating between below 0°C and 13°C. Soil temperatures have currently risen to around 8°C.



PARTNER PUBLISHER UPDATES

G4AE NETWORK OF PUBLISHERS

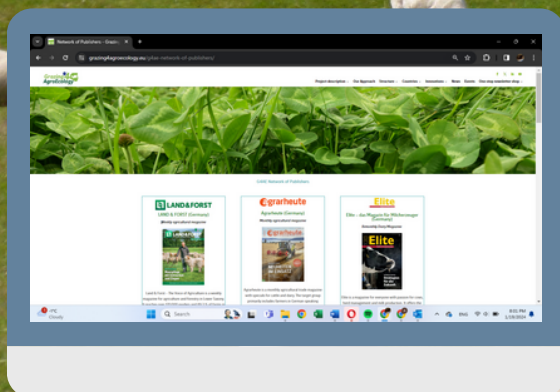
The vision of the "G4AE Network of Publishers" is to establish a leading platform for sharing diverse, innovative insights in agroecology and sustainable agriculture.

We presently collaborate with more than 10 partner publications spanning 8 member countries in our network. To identify the publications included in our network, you can refer to the dedicated section on [our website](#).

PAN-EUROPEAN GRAZING PUBLISHERS WEBINAR

A key segment of the webinar will focus on the benefits of collaboration within the G4AE network. This discussion aims to highlight the mutual advantages for partners and foster a strong community dedicated to advancing sustainable grazing practices across Europe.

The Grazing4AgroEcology project is set to host the "Pan-European Grazing Publishers Webinar" on February 15, 2024. This pivotal event will begin with welcoming introductions and an in-depth overview of the project, providing a comprehensive understanding of its objectives and achievements.



PAN-EUROPEAN GRAZING PUBLISHERS WEBINAR

15.02.2024

AGENDA

LINK



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INNOVATIVE GRAZING TECHNOLOGIES AND ADVANCEMENTS FROM PARTNER FARMS



ITALY

"Ziegenhof Trumsberg," run by Bertram and Helena Stecher in South Tyrol, Italy, is a family-operated dairy goat farm located at 1450 meters above sea level. The farm, covering 6 hectares of steep grassland, specialises in cheese production from 50 milk goats of various breeds.



It uses rotational grazing for effective parasite control and moves the goats to higher altitude pastures in summer. Milking is done from January to September, with part of the period spent on alpine pastures to ease farm workload.

Renke Westermann runs a 120 ha organic farm in Northwestern Germany, focusing on suckler cow husbandry with German Black Pied cattle. This shift from intensive milk production to a full grazing system with 60 animals on 70 hectares of grassland enhances ecological pasture management.



The farm is self-sufficient in feed and diversifies its income through the "Earl of Lowlands" pasture fattening programme and public funding for nature conservation efforts, including meadow bird protection and maintaining species-rich grasslands. These changes support sustainable farming and promote biodiversity.

GERMANY



FRANCE

At GAEC Penfra in Morbihan, Florian and his father expanded their dairy farm's grazing area through land exchange with neighbors. This strategy supported a 40% increase in their herd size to 80 cows, allowing them to replace a labor-intensive mobile milking parlour with a fixed one. This land swap has enabled more efficient farming and plans for further infrastructure improvements, demonstrating the value of collaboration and adaptability in modern farming.



INNOVATIVE GRAZING TECHNOLOGIES AND ADVANCEMENTS FROM PARTNER FARMS

THE NETHERLANDS

Since 2006, the Netherlands has been granted derogation, allowing for increased manure application (230 kilograms of nitrogen on sandy soils, 250 kilograms elsewhere) on grasslands while minimising nitrate leaching into ground and surface water. This allowance is based on the government's demonstration that Dutch grasslands have a long growing season and exhibit high nitrogen uptake. Furthermore, nitrate in grassland soil undergoes a relatively swift conversion into harmless nitrogen gas.

However, recent drought conditions have slowed both grass growth and the conversion of nitrate in the soil. Consequently, nitrate concentrations in ground and surface water are on the rise. To address this issue, the EU asks for a reduction in the application of animal manure from 250 to 170 kilograms of nitrogen per hectare per year.



What are the potential consequences?

- The manure surplus in the Netherlands is likely to increase.
- More grassland may be converted to arable land (maize), resulting in reduced nitrogen uptake from the soil, heightened nitrate leaching to groundwater, and potential biodiversity loss.
- An increase in low-protein forage (maize) could lead to a smaller nitrogen surplus on livestock farms and slightly lower ammonia emissions (positive).
- The use of chemical fertiliser is expected to rise as farmers would like to maintain yields.

For further details, read the full article (in Dutch): <https://www.wur.nl/nl/show/wat-betekent-einde-derogatie-voor-de-nederlandse-landbouw-en-natuur.htm>

ROMANIA



Răzvan, a farmer from Hunedoara County, Romania, operates a family farm with 120 Aberdeen Angus cattle that graze across 130 hectares in a mountainous region. The average altitude of the pasture is 1,830 meters.

Employing a rotational grazing system, he has divided the pasture into 20-hectare plots. Fencing these plots used to be a time-consuming challenge.

Demonstrating ingenuity, he devised his own fence sticks with a focus on improved maneuverability and durability. The posts are crafted from reinforced steel, featuring two insulators and a small piece of iron that can be easily pressed down with the foot.

Thanks to this innovation, he can efficiently enclose a 20-hectare area in 3-4 hours using a two-wire electric fence. The production cost was approximately 1 euro per piece, and for a 20-hectare plot, he required approximately 60 of these fence posts. Despite being in use for over 5 years, they still maintain their original condition.

SUPER-G final stakeholder conference

A significant event titled "Sustainable Permanent Grasslands (PG) in Europe: Services, Management, and Policies" is scheduled to take place. This final hybrid conference is set for the 7th of February 2024, from 9.30 am to 4 pm CET. The event will focus on various critical aspects of permanent grasslands, including their extent, condition, and the threats they face. Discussions will also cover sustainable management practices for permanent grasslands, their role in farming systems, and policy options to support their sustainable management. This conference aims to contribute significantly to the support of sustainable permanent grassland management across Europe.



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