



Grazing4AgroEcology
NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2025
No.10

Welcome to the 10th Grazing4AgroEcology Newsletter!

In this edition, we bring you highlights from across the Grazing4AgroEcology community, starting with the International AKIS Meeting 2025 in Romania, where farmers, advisors, researchers, and international partners came together to share knowledge on manure management, circular practices, and sustainable grazing systems. You'll also find country updates from our project partners, showing how local conditions, climate, and policies are influencing grassland farming. The Partner Farm Network (PFN) shares new examples of practical solutions for low-input farming, biodiversity, and the smart use of technology in grazing systems. Our Country Views section includes national perspectives from different regions, offering a clearer picture of current trends and challenges in pasture-based agriculture. These updates are complemented by contributions from partner publishers, who help tell the farmers' stories in meaningful and engaging ways. We invite you to explore this edition and discover how grazing-based farming continues to evolve across Europe—towards more resilient, sustainable, and farmer-driven systems.

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5.0 Rating

[For more information click here.](#)

Between 8–10 September 2025, Cluj-Napoca and its surrounding region hosted the International AKIS Meeting, gathering farmers, researchers, advisors, policymakers, and international partners to discuss manure management and sustainable grazing practices. The event was organised by Grazing4AgroEcology partners in Romania together with Dutch experts, creating a unique platform for knowledge exchange and collaboration.

Event highlights



- Day 1 – Green FarmSel (Cornesti, Cluj County): Participants visited Alexandru Szell’s family-run beef cattle farm, which manages 1,000 Angus cattle on 370 hectares. The farm applies rotational grazing, produces much of its own fodder, and adds value through a Halal butchery in Cluj-Napoca. The discussion focused on manure as a resource, with plans for bagging technology to support soil fertility and local fertiliser markets.
- Day 2 – Apuseni Mountains (Măguri-Răcătau): The group explored traditional mountain farming systems, where family farms combine cattle grazing with haymaking in biodiverse landscapes. Manure is typically stored in simple stacks and directly applied to meadows, maintaining soil fertility with low inputs. Discussions showed how heritage practices adapt to modern sustainability challenges.
- Day 3 – Blue Butterfly Land & Pâglişa: The final day highlighted the link between agriculture and biodiversity conservation in High Nature Value areas. Visits included traditional hay meadows supporting rare butterfly habitats, cultural heritage in Chidea village, and Mihai Horvath’s farm in Pâglişa, where agritourism and cooperative membership strengthen rural economies.



Dutch experts enriched the discussions with insights into manure management in the Netherlands, where high livestock densities and strict EU regulations drive innovation in nutrient use, storage, and processing technologies. Guest speakers included:

- Hans Dirksen (DMS): Showcased farmer-to-farmer learning and benchmarking for improved nutrient cycles.
- Auke Spijkerman: Presented his organic dairy farm, emphasising grazing-based systems and nutrient recycling.
- Prof. Agnes van den Pol-van Dasselaar (Aeres University): Shared research on integrating grazing, nutrient efficiency, and climate-smart dairy systems



The meeting underlined that manure is not only a challenge but also a resource for building soil fertility and supporting circular farming systems. By combining traditional knowledge with innovative practices and cross-border collaboration, participants identified pathways to more resilient and sustainable grazing-based agriculture in both Romania and other parts of Europe.



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Ireland



National AKIS Meeting Showcases Key Research Updates

 On 8 July 2025, the National AKIS Meeting took place at Teagasc Moorepark Research Centre in Fermoy, Co. Cork. The agenda focused on five main themes, followed by a tour of the grass plot trials. Discussions included an external review of Teagasc’s Clover and Multi-Species Sward research programme, recommending a coordination group and further work on biological nitrogen fixation, sward establishment, grazing management, and environmental impacts. Updates to the Pasture Profit Index 2026 were presented, reflecting genetic improvements in perennial ryegrass and farm practices, with revised baselines for yield, quality, persistence, and grazing utilisation. Results also highlighted consistent differences in grazing efficiency among ryegrass varieties, confirmed through on-farm evaluations. Research on the Clover Profit Index (CPI) showed major agronomic differences between clover varieties, with CPI ranking them by grazing performance and persistence, while also underlining clover’s role in nitrogen management and its 8–10% boost in animal performance. The meeting concluded with updates from the Clover 150 group, stressing the need for tailored fertiliser strategies at farm level and reductions in nitrogen only when clover content exceeds 20%, alongside adaptive management to cope with weather variability affecting grass and clover growth.



Italy



Partner Farmers’ Network Meeting in Sardinia

 On 27 June 2025, the local Partner Farmers’ Network gathered at Monteforte farm in the Nurra plain, north-west Sardinia, to plan the upcoming grazing season. Despite the hot summer temperatures, the meeting was well attended by farmers and CNR staff, who explored two alternative approaches to ensure diverse and balanced sheep diets: the use of forage mixtures or grazing circuits of forage crops. Mixtures can include many species and bring environmental benefits, but challenges remain with establishment, weed control in Mediterranean climates, limited market availability, and the need for more research on species combinations, drought tolerance, and persistence. In contrast, monocultures within grazing circuits simplify weed management, tillage, and sowing, and allow staggered forage availability, but require accurate planning, more farmer effort in moving animals, and careful estimation of grazing times as pasture quality changes. Some farmers noted that forage circuits can increase intake and lead to higher productivity, particularly milk yield. The group agreed on the importance of further research into drought-tolerant species and innovative grazing systems beyond traditional forage legumes, including herbs and more complex grazing circuits.



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Portugal



2. PILARES DA AGROECOLOGIA

3

Reduzir a
Poluição

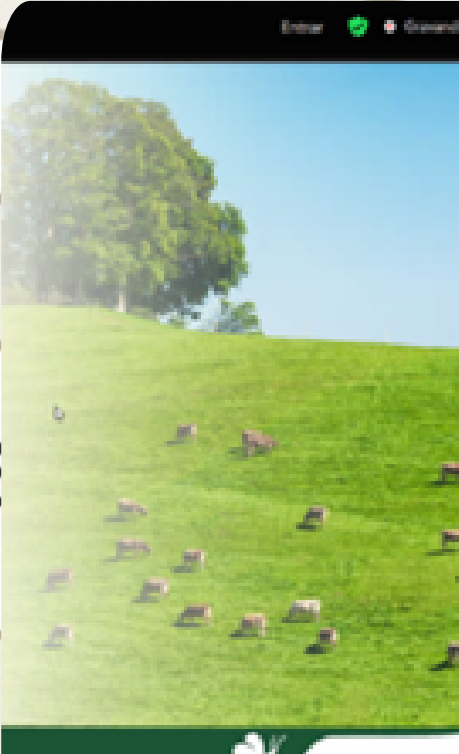
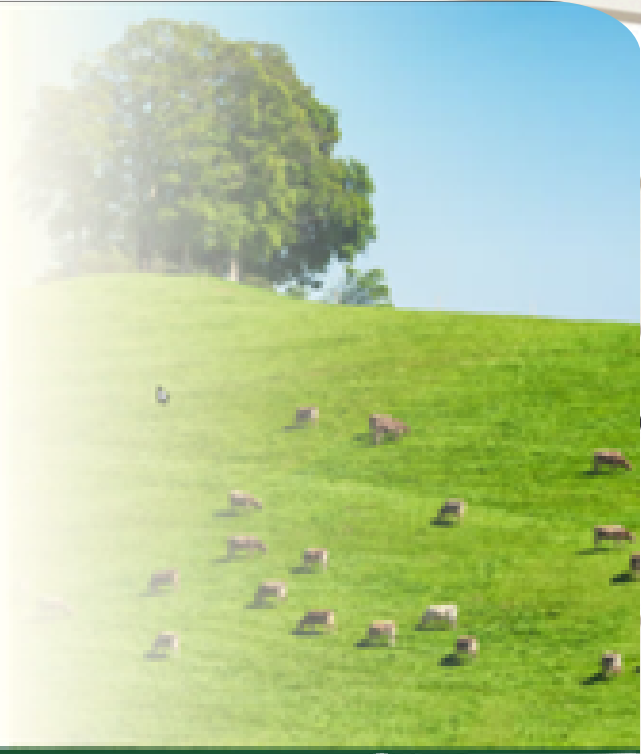
Exemplos de práticas implementadas noutros países que influenciam este pilar

- 1

Uso do plate meter - prevenir sobre ou sub pastoreio
- 2

Gestão do estrume e chorume - separação da parte líquida e da sólida
- 3

Aplicação de chá de composto



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AKIS Meeting Highlights Sustainable Soil Management and Agroecology



On 9 July 2025, CONSULAI organised an online AKIS meeting within the Grazing4AgroEcology project, bringing together around 45 participants including farmers, organisations, technicians, and advisors. The session focused on sustainable soil use and featured three expert presentations. The first explored soil fertility and sustainable fertilisation, emphasising the value of organic and eco-labelled products, which, despite higher costs, were seen as more beneficial for the environment, pastures, and animals. The second looked at biodiverse pastures and forages, underlining the importance of adapting seed mixtures to Portugal’s diverse climate conditions and offering practical guidance on suitable crop options. The third introduced the European TOPPS project on soil health monitoring, which promotes best practices to minimise plant protection product losses to water through training, tools, and coordinated dissemination. The meeting concluded with a presentation from Margarida Próspero on Grazing4AgroEcology, highlighting the five pillars of agroecology, their interconnections, and showcasing some of the 120 innovations collected from farmers’ networks. Participants valued the opportunity to learn from experiences across Europe and adapt them to Portuguese conditions.



Sweden



Swedish Grasslands Society’s Annual Summer Meeting



On 17–18 July 2025, the Swedish Grasslands Society organised its Annual Summer Meeting as a two-day bus tour with field walks at eight farms in southern Sweden, where the G4AE Partner Farmers Erica Helweg and Stefan Einarsson are also based. The event gathered around 60 participants and focused on ley management across both dairy and beef production, with many farms in the region outsourcing ley field work to contractors. Timothy was the dominant grass in the leys visited, though soft-leaf tall fescue also sparked lively discussions. Participants saw technical demonstrations, including an IR scanner used to measure dry matter and protein content in forage. The tour was guided by Martin Ivarsson, Partner Farmer in G4AE, and concluded at his farm, Stommen in Köinge. Known for his experimental approach, Martin collaborates with the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences and the Swedish Grassland Society on various research projects.



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Exploring Mindset and Economics at the International AKIS Meeting

On 21 May 2025, an international AKIS meeting was held in the Netherlands with Dutch and German partners including farmers, policymakers, advisors, researchers, teachers, and dairy chain representatives. The day began with a visit to the organic dairy farm of Auke Spijkerman (NL), home to more than 100 cows. Auke practises intensive grazing supported by smart infrastructure that maximises fresh grass intake, and by producing organic, antibiotic-free milk under a sustainability label, he secures a price premium that strengthens farm resilience. In the afternoon, participants joined interactive sessions on farmer mindsets and grazing economics. The first explored decision-making processes, contrasting the fast, intuitive “System 1” with the slower, rational “System 2,” showing how awareness of these can improve farm choices. The second analysed financial data from Dutch and German farms, revealing that those with higher levels of grazing achieved significantly lower feed costs and stronger economic performance. The event highlighted how both behavioural and economic perspectives are key to successful grazing-based dairy systems and encouraged valuable cross-border knowledge exchange.

Portugal: Innovation and Diversity at Herdade do Monte Branco da Loira

Herdade do Monte Branco da Loira, part of Casa Agrícola Manuel Gil Ferreira, covers 680 hectares and combines remarkable diversity in production and forestry. The farm includes cork oak and holm oak forests, pine areas, and 250 hectares of arable land, of which 60 are irrigated. A 32-hectare alfalfa pivot, introduced six years ago, has been highly successful: most of the crop is sold, while lower-quality cuttings feed the farm’s 1,400 sheep, which also graze the remaining area. The farm makes extensive use of technology to support crop management. The Normalized Difference Vegetation Index (NDVI) is applied to identify areas needing extra attention in terms of irrigation, fertilisation, or harvesting. Temperature integrals are also monitored to track crop development, phenological stages, and pest influence, allowing for better predictability and early responses. In addition, pigs are incorporated into the system during winter to consume acorns from the Montado. This integration of forestry, arable crops, livestock, and advanced technology makes Herdade do Monte Branco da Loira an outstanding example of sustainable mixed farming.



Italy: Grazing Management at Mair am Hof Experimental Farm

One of this year’s highlights comes from the experimental farm Mair am Hof in Dietenheim, South Tyrol (900 m), where grazing management is overseen by the Laimburg Research Centre, a project partner. About 15 Tyrolean Grey cows are managed under a rotational short sward grazing system. The grazing season began early in mid-March, encouraged by a warm and wet spring that, however, left no window for spring fertilisation. By April, strong growth required reducing the grazing area, while in May the cows benefited from abundant forage. After flowering, overmature patches appeared, making a cleaning cut necessary in June. Although grass growth slowed in July, cooler weather maintained active grazing. On alpine pastures, conditions were more challenging: an early start in spring and lush growth in June were followed by forage shortages in the unusually cool July, forcing many farms to adapt. The ongoing debate around large carnivores also remains an important concern for mountain farming. For winter forage production, weather conditions were more favourable. Dry spells at the end of May and in mid-June enabled timely cuts, securing excellent forage quality for the months ahead.



Sweden: Field Walk at Hackeberga Farm

On 8 July 2025, a field walk was organised at Hackeberga farm in Fyledala, southern Sweden, where Erica Helweg and G4AE Partner Farmer Stefan Einarsson manage certified organic beef production across 300 hectares. The farm is currently expanding, and animals are moved with the help of quarter horses, border collies, and kelpies. The leys include tailored grass mixtures with species suited to local conditions, such as perennial ryegrass, chicory, white clover, and plantain. During the visit, Nilla Nilsdotter-Linde also introduced participants to the G4AE project, linking the farm’s practices to wider European innovations in sustainable grazing.





Sweden: Making Semi-Natural Grasslands More Productive

In July, Anna and Anders Carlsson hosted a Partner Farm Network Meeting at their farm Skogsgård in southern Sweden, where they run certified organic dairy production with 230 cows and youngstock. The farm’s pastures include both permanent and semi-natural grasslands, and the couple shared their experience of improving these nutrient-poor and acidic soils through liming, compost application, and grazing management. An old pasture once dominated by wild grasses has, after a few years of such practices, begun to show more white clover. Discussions highlighted the challenge of strict Swedish regulations, which prohibit fertiliser and lime use on semi-natural grasslands in order to qualify for agri-environmental payments. Farmers agreed that nutritious forage requires at least grasses and legumes, ideally complemented by herbs. Sheep farmer Gunnar Danielsson referred to New Zealand trials showing that no fertiliser use can reduce lamb growth by 20–25%, a challenge familiar to Swedish farmers who manage extensive semi-natural pastures. According to Anna, allowing compost and lime could enhance biodiversity, improve forage quality, and support better animal growth.



Ireland: Clover and Nitrogen Management in Irish Dairy Farming

On 14 August 2025, a PFN meeting was held at Mark Bateman’s dairy farm in Warrenscourt and at Teagasc Clonakilty Agricultural College, both in County Cork. Discussions centred on clover management, grass growth, and the influence of weather on farm systems. Mark shared his success in introducing clover on his farm, which has enabled him to reduce chemical nitrogen use by measuring clover content and lowering fertiliser applications on paddocks with over 20% clover. At Teagasc Clonakilty, participants received updates on ongoing trials investigating the role of white clover and nitrogen fertiliser in dairy systems. The college farm is testing four grazing treatments, all stocked at 2.75 cows/ha, to assess the impact of different nitrogen application rates and clover inclusion in grass swards. Water quality monitoring is also carried out during autumn, winter, and spring to determine whether nutrients are being leached into groundwater. Current nitrogen treatments combine grass-only and grass-clover swards with varying fertiliser levels, offering practical insights into how clover can support more sustainable and resilient dairy production. More information you can find [here](#).





Romania: Maramures Mixt Dairy Farm: Innovation through Local Gastronomy

In Maramures, tradition and innovation meet at Dănilă Vlad’s family farm, where 27 Bruna de Maramures dairy cows and 350 Turcana sheep graze across 110 hectares of alpine meadows and 20 hectares of mown land. The farm preserves the authenticity of mountain farming while opening new economic opportunities.

The key innovation is the creation of a Local Gastronomic Point (LGP), a €50,000 investment established in the family’s 100-year-old house. Here, visitors can taste traditional dishes made with local ingredients, enjoy overnight stays, and discover cultural heritage such as traditional clothing. This initiative not only provides an additional income stream for the family but also boosts rural tourism in the region, attracting visitors with clean mountain air, breathtaking landscapes, and authentic lifestyle experiences.

The Maramures model is especially relevant for family farms in culturally rich regions, offering a way to connect agriculture with tourism. Future challenges include preserving authenticity while adapting to evolving tourist expectations and improving marketing strategies to reach wider audiences. The farm shows how agriculture and tourism can work hand in hand, delivering both cultural recognition and economic value.



The Netherlands: Partner Farm Spotlight: Auke Spijkerman

Organic dairy farmer Auke Spijkerman runs a 100-cow herd on 80 hectares in the Netherlands, including a 40-hectare grazing platform. His cows — a crossbreed of Meuse-Rhine-Issel (MRIJ), Jersey, and Holstein — are managed through seasonal calving, with about 60% calving in spring and 40% in autumn. This system aligns calving with grass growth, ensuring ample high-quality forage for freshly calved cows in spring while spreading production more evenly throughout the year.

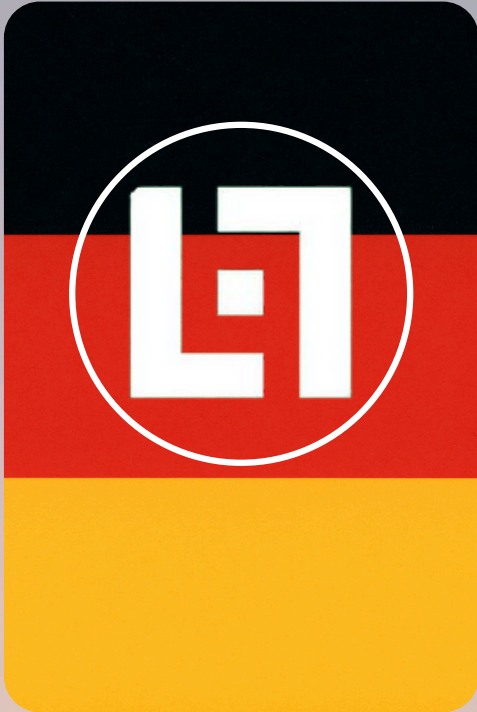
The cows graze the same paddock 7–8 times annually, with turnout beginning when pre-grazing yield reaches around 1,500 kg dry matter/ha. Auke manages grazing tightly to avoid tall patches and to maximise both milk production and grass utilisation. With an impressive 3,500 grazing hours per year, fresh grass makes up 55–60% of the herd’s diet, fully exploiting the spring peak in grass growth.

This approach shows how carefully synchronising calving patterns with pasture availability can create a resilient, efficient, and sustainable dairy farming system, combining strong grassland management with high milk performance.

[Watch the video interview here](#)







Sweden



Dutch Farmers Featured in Lantmannen

In April 2025, journalist Malin Eborn from the Swedish agricultural magazine Lantmannen connected with Dutch farmers through the G4AE Network of Publishers. She published an article about Hanny and Hielke de Rooij, who run a dairy farm in the Netherlands. The story highlighted the farm’s challenges, their grazing system, and their strategy of reducing inputs while focusing on cost effectiveness. Malin plans to revisit the family for follow-up pieces, continuing to share insights into their farming journey.

Hanny och Hielke och dottern Lauri de Rooij driver mjölgården ihop. Familjens hund Nova, en grosser schweizer sennen-hund fick också vara med på bild. Familjens andra dotter Femke, som tog bilden, jobbar utanför gården.

FOTO FEMKE DE ROOIJ



Om gården

DRIVS AV: Hanny och Hielke de Rooij med hjälp av dottern Lauri de Rooij.

MJÖLKPRODUKTIONEN: Genomsnitt per år 9324 kg mjölk, (4,68 % fetthalt, 3,65% protein).

ANTAL DJUR: Cirka 170 mjölkkor och 80 ungdjur.

ODLING: 90 hektar, enbart vall och bete, ensilagemajs köps in.

UTFODRING: Mycket gräs, ensilagemajs och så lite tillskott av proteinrika produkter som möjligt.

SKOG: 3 hektar produktionsskog med europeiska lövträd och delvis poppel.

ÖVRIGT: Har en obemannad mjölkautomat där färsk mjölk säljs vid vägen och där andra bybor satt upp en matkista för att ge matstöd till behövande.

Nederländska de Rooijs blir nya Bönder i världen

Familjen de Rooijs har nyligen gått över till robotmjölkning och jobbar för att öka antalet betestimmar per dag för mjölkarna. Nu börjar de rapportera till Lantmannen från sin gård i Nederländerna.

TEXT **MALIN EBORN**

Mellan de stora floderna Waal och Lek ligger jordbruksområdet Betuwe. Jordmänen består huvudsakligen av flod-lera och det finns utmärkta marker att bruka i området. Här driver Hanny och Hielke de Rooij "konventionell mjölkproduktion med stor hänsyn till naturen" som de själva uttrycker det. Till sin hjälp har de sin 22-åriga dotter Lauri som parallellt med arbetet på gården studerar husdjurskötsel och

lantbruksföretagande på yrkeshögskola. Sedan flera år satsar gården på att maximera användningen av betet. Korna får ett nytt gräsbete varje dag och roterar mellan betesmarker. För två år sedan gick gården över till robotmjölkning. "Hielke fick slitageproblem i axlar och armar efter mer än 30 års mjölkning i mjölkgrup. Robotmjölkning minskar arbetsbelastningen. Vår dotter Lauri är intresserad av att ta över gården, och hon kan också arbeta bra med robotmjölkning" berättar Hanny de Rooij via mejl till Lantmannen.

EN BETESORIND ANVÄNDS och korna får bara gå ut precis när de har blivit mjölkade eller när de just ska mjölkas. Gruppen går alltså inte ut samtidigt, utan successivt. "Tyvärr vill alla gå in samtidigt. Utmaningen är att öka

antalet betestimmar per dag för mjölkarna. Tidigare var det inget problem, men nu är det en utmaning. Särskilt då vi bara har 22 hektar bete tillgängligt runt ladugården" fortsätter Hanny de Rooij. Just därför försöker familjen också starta betessäsongen tidigt, i början av mars, och hålla på så länge som möjligt, helst fram till november.

Något annat som är viktigt att känna till om gården är att strategin framför allt handlar om att hålla ner insatserna. "Vi strävar inte efter högsta produktion. Kostnadskontroll och nettovinst per liter mjölk är viktigast. Vi ligger inte i framkant vad gäller nya innovationer, men vi försöker förbättra verksamheten steg för steg varje år så att vi inte fastnar i gamla vanor" svarar Hanny de Rooij.

GÅRDEN ÄR MED i Grazing4Agroecology, ett europeiskt nätverk som ska främja betesdrift och som även har svenska medlemmar. "I nätverket samlas mjölkbönder som tänker längre än standardlösningar. Det är lärorikt att diskutera betesstrategier och besöka varandras gårdar" berättar Hanny de Rooij. Det var också genom Grazing4Agroecology som Lantmannen kom i kontakt med gården. I Lantmannen kommer vi framöver att få veta mer om de Rooijs strategier och vad som händer på gården. 🐄

För tio år sedan började familjen de Rooijs med Nieuw Nederländskt system för betesdrift som syftar till att bland annat maximera användningen av bete och färskt gräs och därigenom minska foderkostnaderna.

FOTO HANNY DE ROOIJ



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Repost



Sweden

The Swedish summer began with normal temperatures in June, accompanied by drier conditions in the south and wetter conditions in the north. July turned out unusually warm, particularly in northern regions, where some locations even recorded tropical nights with temperatures staying above 20°C. Rainfall in July was highly uneven, with local areas experiencing both record highs and record lows.



Italy

June brought exceptionally high temperatures (+4.1 °C above average) and very low rainfall, with two early heatwaves intensifying stress on pastures. The Temperature Humidity Index (THI) reached Alert and Danger levels for up to 600 hours, especially in central-western Sardinia, causing severe discomfort for livestock. While mowing and haymaking proceeded as planned, irrigated crops required constant water supply.

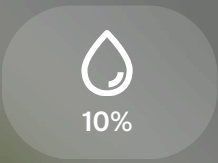


In June, Italy recorded its first cases of Lumpy Skin Disease (LSD) in Sardinia and Lombardy. The viral disease, spread by mosquitoes and flies, reduces milk yield and animal condition, and is difficult to control in extensive grazing systems. Preventive vaccination exists, but outbreak management requires strict measures such as culling, quarantine, and insect control.



Romania

Spring brought generous rainfall in April-May, helping recovering wheat crops and boosting expectations for a record harvest of 13-14 million tonnes. However, from June into August, southern and eastern Romania faced persistent heat and drought. Summer crops like maize, sunflower, and soybean suffered yield reductions due to dry soils and high temperatures. Winter crops were mostly spared since they were near maturity. In short: strong start with wet spring allowed hope for record cereals, but summer stress is weighing heavily on summer crops.



PARTNERS







PARTNERS







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