

# PRESS RELEASE

## COCO PROJECT

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## PASTORALISM UNDER FIRE

### How wildfires reshape summer grazing and test resilience

19 August 2026

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Across Europe, summers are getting hotter and drier, and wildfires are more common. Grazing helps reduce that risk. When herds keep grass short and break up brush, there is less fuel for fires to spread. When grazing declines, shrubs and dry grasses build up and fires can move faster. Fire is a bigger challenge today, but not a new one – pastoralism has long shaped the landscape in ways that help prevent and manage fires.

#### Keeping fuel loads in check

Regular grazing keeps grass and low plants shorter, so there's less "kindling" in late summer. On slopes and along tracks, grazed strips can lower flame height and make it easier for firefighters to get through. After a fire, bringing animals back at the right time helps control the burst of new growth, so it doesn't turn into next year's fuel. Keeping pastoralism viable is a key part of fire prevention, alongside brush clearing and professional firefighting.

#### Working under reshaped summer conditions

Hotter, drier summers change how grazing works. Pasture quality drops and safe work shifts to dawn and dusk. As fires approach, familiar routes may close and infrastructure such as fences, shaded pens, and water points can fail at the same time. Keeping herds together becomes harder, yet more critical, especially for young animals. After a fire, recovery is uneven: early green shoots are tempting but fragile, ash and bare soil raise erosion risk, and water sources remain unreliable. In this landscape, pastoralists reorganise movements, re-time access to recovering areas and coordinate locally to sustain animals while vegetation returns.

#### Sharing solutions across regions

Fire is now a concern from the south to higher latitudes and mountains. Regions are exchanging both pastoral resilience practices and fire management experience – from mapping refuge paddocks and planning post-fire grazing to collaborative fuel-break grazing, seasonal access agreements and water logistics for responders. Lessons from Mediterranean transhumance, Alpine summer pastures and

Atlantic rangelands are moving in both directions as conditions grow more similar, helping communities prevent, respond to and recover from fire.

### **Support that makes a difference**

Pastoralists manage fuel through everyday grazing, but support determines how effective that role can be. Practical backing includes ensuring access to grazable corridors and refuge paddocks, timely repairs to fences and water points after fire, and grazing permits that enable seasonal moves when conditions shift. Coordination with responders – on fuel break grazing, seasonal access agreements and water logistics – strengthens prevention and response. Recognition matters too: with the International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists highlighting their wider ecosystem services, policies can better reflect how grazing contributes to fire risk reduction, biodiversity and rural economies. Fire and drought are part of a broader set of pressures – from market volatility to predation risk – that threaten the viability of pastoralism. It will require sustained and flexible support to help pastoral systems stay resilient while delivering the public benefits with which they are associated.

CoCo (Cocreating Coexistence) works across European pastoral landscapes to co-create practical tools and guidance that help pastoral systems remain viable under changing conditions – from heat and drought to the realities of sharing space with wildlife. Stay updated on project news and resources at <https://cocoproject.eu/>.

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### **About the CoCo Project**

CoCo is a Horizon Europe-funded research project working to develop sustainable solutions for human-wildlife coexistence across European pastoral landscapes. The project brings together diverse stakeholders to co-create knowledge and tools that support both thriving pastoral communities and healthy carnivore populations.