

PRESS RELEASE

COCO PROJECT

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FENCES, DRONES AND DNA

How Swedish Farmers Are Learning to Live with Large Carnivores

22 September 2026

In Sweden's pastoral landscapes, the challenge of coexisting with wolves and other large carnivores is not a distant policy debate – it is a daily reality managed through wire, technology and close collaboration between farmers and agricultural advisors.

Ingela Löfquist, Advisor at Hushållningssällskapet –one of Sweden's leading agricultural advisory organisations and a partner in the EU-funded CoCo (Co-Creating Coexistence) project– works directly with farmers in southern Sweden to develop and implement practical livestock protection strategies. Unlike in many other European countries, Sweden's pastoral tradition does not include the use of livestock guarding dogs or shepherds. Instead, the country has developed a fencing-based approach, refined over years of experience with carnivore presence.

“Here in Sweden, we don't have dogs or shepherds to help us keep animals in the pasture. We are working with fences – that's the normal way,” Löfquist explains.

Getting the Details Right

The technical specifications matter. A well-constructed livestock protection fence must have its lowest wire no more than 30 centimetres from the ground, with the top wire reaching 110 centimetres. Five tightly-stretched wires are standard. Pastures are typically located close to the farm, with farmers conducting daily checks to monitor animal welfare and assess any signs of carnivore activity. But fencing alone is not enough. Löfquist points to a growing set of complementary tools that are helping farmers stay ahead of carnivore incursions.

Science Meets Practice

Drones and cameras are increasingly being deployed to monitor pasture boundaries and detect carnivore presence before an attack occurs, giving farmers a critical window to respond. DNA testing has also emerged as a powerful tool: when a livestock animal is killed or injured, genetic analysis can identify the specific individual carnivore responsible. This precision allows wildlife managers to target and remove that animal, rather than applying broader and more disruptive management measures.

“We can use drones, cameras and DNA tests to see if there is a problem –perhaps just one wolf coming through the fence to the pasture– and then we can take just this animal and remove it,” Löfquist explains. “That's one way how science and traditional farming knowledge can work together.”

The integration of scientific tools with on-the-ground farming practice is at the heart of what the CoCo project is exploring across its 12 case study countries. Understanding carnivore behaviour –what they prefer, what they avoid and how they move through agricultural landscapes– is key to developing more effective and targeted protection strategies.

The Cost of Coexistence

Coexistence, however, comes at a price. High-quality fencing is expensive to install and maintain, and livestock losses –even when rare– carry both economic and psychological costs for farming families. Löfquist emphasises that financial support remains essential: compensation schemes for livestock killed by carnivores and subsidies for the construction of protection infrastructure are critical to making coexistence viable in practice. “If something happens, if an animal is killed or hurt, farmers need compensation. And when they want to build these fences, it is expensive and they need support,” she says.

Löfquist's work in southern Sweden is part of one of 30 case studies the CoCo project is conducting across Europe, each one documenting how farmers, herders and advisors are navigating the realities of carnivore presence on the ground. Together, they are building the evidence base the project needs to translate local practice into policy recommendations that work for the people living with large carnivores every day. Stay updated on project news and resources at <https://cocoproject.eu/>.

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.