

STUDY AREA DESCRIPTION

VÄSTRA GÖTALANDS

LÄN

SVERIGE, SWEDEN



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1 INTRODUCTION

The case study area covers the central and south-eastern part of Västra Götaland County, where plains, small-scale cultivated land, and forested areas meet. The region is geographically and ecologically diverse, with a clear transition from the open agricultural landscape of the Västgöta Plains to forest-rich midlands and hilly terrain in the south and west. The area includes both intensive agricultural districts characterised by large fields, as well as more fragmented agricultural–forest landscapes, in which grazing and nature conservation play central roles. Västra Götaland has a long tradition of livestock farming and grazing. In recent decades, however, the return of large carnivores has changed the conditions for farmers across several parts of the county.



Figure 1: Flock of sheep (Photocredit: Karin Carlsson).

2 OVERVIEW

- ▶ **Municipalities:** Skövde, Falköping, Tidaholm, Mullsjö, Ulricehamn, Götene, Hjo, Herrljunga, Härryda, Tranemo, and Borås.
- ▶ **Geographical size:** 7,200 km².
- ▶ **Human population:** 335,000.
- ▶ **Number of livestock farmers (approx.):** 2,240.
- ▶ **Livestock farming systems:** Dairy and beef cattle, as well as sheep.

- ▶ **Wild large carnivore species:** Wolves and lynx (permanent), bears and wolverines (rare).
- ▶ **Wolf population:** Five family groups and two territorial pairs (winter 2024/2025). Several of these territories are shared with neighbouring counties, which is common given the county's location within the wolf range
- ▶ **Lynx population:** Twelve family groups.



Figure 2: Two cattle grazing in a wood pasture, an agroforestry practice that integrates trees and livestock grazing (Photocredit: Karin Carlsson).

3 SOCIOECONOMIC CONTEXT

The landscape forms a mosaic of farmland, forests, and wetlands, with a rich network of lakes and waterways. The eastern parts – particularly the areas around Falköping, Skövde, Götene, and Hjo – belong to the Västgöta Plains, one of Sweden's most productive agricultural regions. These areas contain extensive arable land and a high concentration of crop farms. In the western and southern municipalities – including Borås, Härryda, Tranemo, Mullsjö, and parts of Ulricehamn – forests, grasslands, and more varied terrain dominate. A mix of pastures, meadows, and production forests is common here. The greater number of edge zones between open land and forest supports higher biodiversity, but it also increases the contact zones between livestock and large carnivores.

The Billingen and Mösseberg plateaus rise as landmarks and create local variations in vegetation, climate, and land use. Several municipalities host nature reserves, Natura 2000 areas, and protected wetlands, which contribute to ecological and cultural values while influencing grazing management.

The municipalities in the area range from growing urban centres to sparsely populated rural districts. The population is growing fastest in Borås and Härryda, while municipalities such as Hjo, Herrljunga, and Mullsjö have stable or slightly declining populations.

Agriculture and forestry remain important sectors, often combined with other activities such as contracting, energy production, equine enterprises, and tourism. Many farms are family-run and play a key role in rural social and economic life. At the same time, structural rationalisation is reshaping the sector: fewer, larger farms now account for most of the production. Agriculture in the plains is intensive and large-scale, whereas small-scale, extensive farming with grazing and nature conservation orientation is common in the forest-rich areas.



Figure 3: A group of Hereford heifers on a natural pasture (Photocredit: Karin Carlsson).

4 FARMING CONTEXT

Agriculture in Västra Götaland is highly varied. In the plains municipalities (Skövde, Falköping, Götene, Hjo), grain production as well as dairy and beef cattle farming dominate, often involving large herds and modern technology. In the forested municipalities (Tranemo, Mullsjö, Ulricehamn, Härryda, Herrljunga), smaller mixed farms are more common, with livestock playing a central role in keeping the land open.

Cattle and sheep are the most common grazing animals, and there is a clear concentration of livestock farms in Falköping, Skövde, and Ulricehamn. Sheep farming has expanded in parts of the area, particularly where pastures border forest edges.

Organic livestock farming is well established, and many farms combine agriculture with forestry, contracting, or tourism. In several municipalities, semi-natural grasslands and cultural landscapes are part of the local identity, with grazing supporting both biodiversity and scenic value of the area.

Main Challenges:

- ▶ An ageing farming population.
- ▶ The presence of large carnivores.
- ▶ Low profitability.

5 LOCAL CONFLICTS ASSOCIATED WITH LARGE CARNIVORES

Number of attacks: 28

Wolves and lynx are permanent residents of Västra Götaland, while bears and wolverines are very rare. During the 2023/2024 monitoring season, the county hosted seven wolf territories and twelve lynx family groups.

Wildlife management in the region is based on coexistence. The County Administrative Board provides advice, training, and preventive support. Where livestock come under direct attack, authorities may authorise protective hunting. Farmers, hunters, authorities, and environmental organisations participate regularly in dialogue meetings to address shared concerns and build understanding.

In 2024, Västra Götaland recorded 28 predator attacks on livestock: 16 caused by wolves and 12 by lynx. A total of 72 sheep were killed, a further 11 injured, and five reported missing.

Social conflict:

In 2024 and early 2025, wolf activity drew increased public attention, particularly around Ljungstorp, Tidaholm, and Habo. Reports from local support groups indicate considerable impacts on livestock owners, including stress, reduced herd sizes, abandoned pastures, and increased costs for feed and fencing. The emotional toll is also significant. Livestock owners describe feelings of constant worry, a loss of trust in authorities, and a reduced motivation to continue grazing-based farming.

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