

# *An Outsider's Tour of Conservation Grazing Across Europe*

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WSU Thurston County Extension  
County Director & Regional Agriculture

6-7 Oct 2025

Ethnoecological Seminar  
Nemetzi Botanikus Kert  
Vácrátót, Hungary



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# Practical Context

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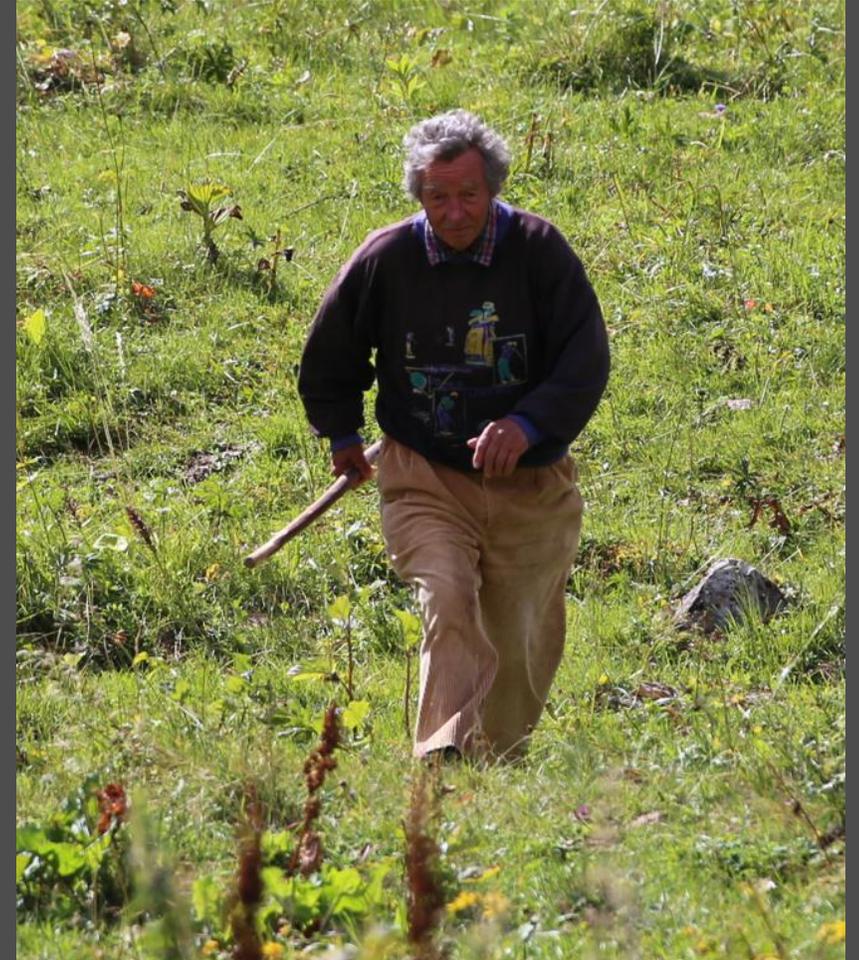


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# Outline & Goals

1. What is “Conservation Grazing”, as a form of multifunctional farming?
2. What kinds of practices are used
3. Training/Co-learning





# What is Conservation Grazing

*Do you think there are different types of conservation grazing?*

*What might these be?*

*What “groupings” of different approaches to grazing for conservation can you think of?*

*Is conservation grazing active or passive?*

# Conservation Grazing for *Economic Survival (Marginalized Partner)*



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- North Pennines, UK
- Remote location
- Land owned by Estate
- Forced stocking rate
- Exceptional wildlife & habitat
- Economically marginalized
- Revenue from payments, off-farm employment

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# Conservation Grazing for *Rare Species Protection (Conservationist Classic)*





# Conservation Grazing for *Landscape-Scale Integrity (Learning on the Land)*

- Alentejo region, Portugal
- “Montado” oak-grassland
- Goal: climax ecosystem reference
- Grazing to produce a complex tree-shrub-grassland mosaic
- Revenue: Research visitors, education, events, specialty products





# Conservation Grazing for *Committed for Flavor*

- i.e. Yorkshire Dales, UK
- Marketing traditional products
- Meeting grassland restoration targets: fobs, breeding waders (lapwing +, etc)
- Top commitment to conservation
- Award-winning products
- E.g. branding linking forage to milk to cheese flavor





# Conservation Grazing as a *Means to End (Transactional BioAg)*

- Northern England
- Use payments on rotational grazing
- Low-input, low-cost, low equipment
- 1 hedgerow = 2 fence-lines
- Goals: autonomy, “biological” (range)
- Direct or organic sales
- Moderate “rare species” conservation value





# Conservation Grazing to keep *People on the Land*

- People are a conservation value
- Maintenance of mid-successional grasslands (encroachment)
- Knowledge holders
- Boots on the ground, eyes and ears





# Conservation Grazing for *Payments (Institutionalized...dependence / opportunistic)*

## Farmer Perspectives on Other Farmers:

- “You would need to be incompetent to fail”
- “Direct payments [for practices] don’t make sense. There has to be an outcome for it [result]”
- “Most people know this [degraded, high-input farms propped up by subsidy] is not right but can’t see a way out because it’s so highly capitalized”
- 
- “It is a waste of money to pay farmers in unproductive systems. There is no right to farm a bit of ground.”



# What Conservation Grazing Practices Do Farmers/ Pastoralists Use

What types of practices are used for conservation grazing?



# North Pennines National Landscape

Northern England, SSSI – AONB

Mix close grazing and extensive fell graze

Traditional breed + modern

Low input, low return

Swaledale sheep (Dutch spotted pictured)



- Winter bale feeding to decrease soft and sharp- rush
- Spring-summer hay meadow 'shut up'
- Late cut hay (July 25 →)
- Late harrowing after fledging, daily nest monitoring
- No fertilizer
- Winter cattle graze to "open" rush pasture
- Rotation ("keep them moving")

Diverse structure for "pee-wits"  
"I am always trying to watch on the quad bike"



Graze to open rush pasture



Close grazed areas, resource rich



Spring "shut-up" of hay meadows (Betonica, sp.)





# Krispetri, Romania



- Livestock selection for brush encroachment
- Rotational grazing system for targeted vegetation management (electronet)







- Promoting multi-species grazing with neighboring sheep producer for landscape woody vegetation control

# Montado oak-savanna, Portugal



- Water infiltration
- Prunings to encourage oak recruitment via Jays



- Shrub/tree nursery for seed dispersal by birds
- Aggregated herd to manage graze and rest periods
- Rotational grazing in 6-7 ac paddocks
- Seeding for biological fertility (legumes)
- Tree cages to aid oak recruitment

# Lakes District, England



- Habitat, "wide hedge" plantings
- Woodland pasture, agroforestry
- Restored "becks" and fruit tree



- Rotational grazing
- Bale grazing + “herbal ley”



• Tree fodder



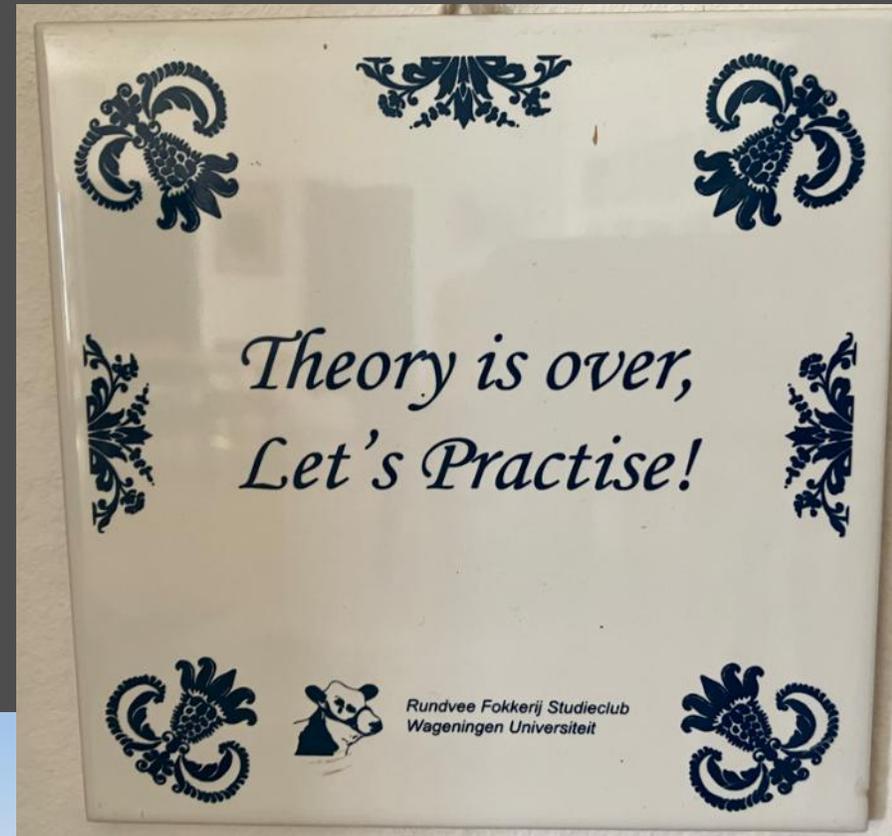
# Montado oak-savanna, Portugal

- Shrub expansion
- Multi-story vegetation
- "Revisioning 15<sup>th</sup> century Montado structure" (a complex late succession grazed ecosystem)





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# Hortobágy, Hungary



- Close herding with dog “e-fence doesn’t see pasture”
- Multi-species grazing: sheep and cattle (collab. Neighbor). Cattle graze tall tussocks 1<sup>st</sup>)
- Rest/return. a.m. west, p.m. east. (away from sun)
- Rotate across 10-ha spots (vary route)
- 12-farmer collaboration
- 240 ha, 9 arable, <20 ha hay
- Seasonal variation. Hand-pumps far shaduf wells later



Strategic use of bells  
Targeted weed removal  
"herders" "gardeners"  
Seasonal forage  
prioritization





# Kiskunsag National Park

1,200 species / 5 km<sup>2</sup>

Steppe & sand oak woodland

Mix primary and secondary grassland



- Protection of “shrub skirts” for tree protection
- Residual cut woody debris (reduce viper predation)
- ~10% target shrub cover on landscape + tussocks
- Careful stocking rate match to variable weather
- Limited mechanical mowing to protect vipers
- Machine and hand-seeding (20-45+ mixes, 20kg /ha)

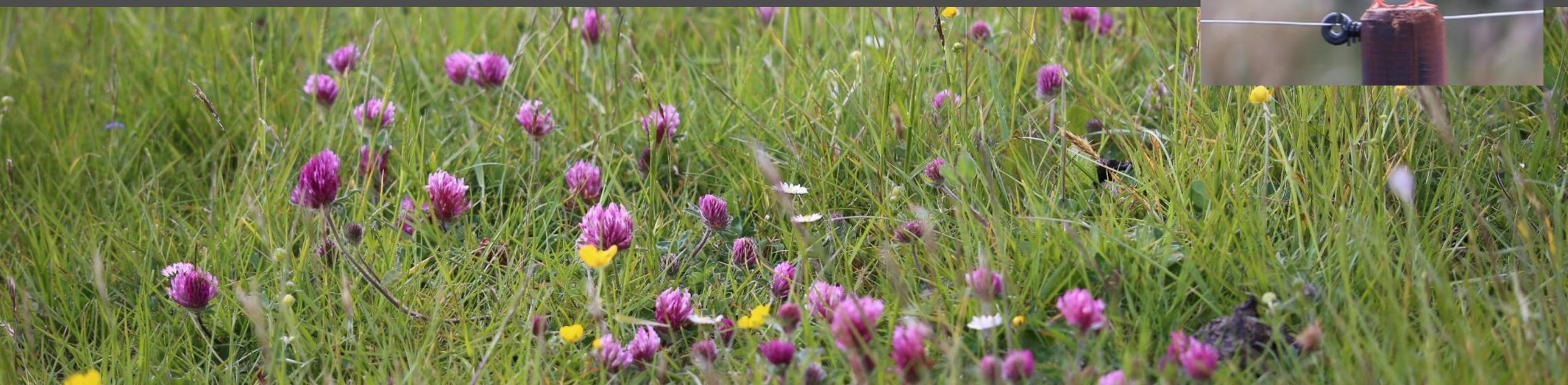
- Herding when possible
- Livestock selection to prevent tree herbivory



# Barnard Castle, N. England



- Late hay cut after 7/15
- Mixed herd: Dale ponies, Dales bred sheep
- Perimeter tree planting
- Hedgerow breaks
- Rush mowing for bird nests
- Fencing waterway
- Minimizes antibiotics for dung beetle
- Traditional breeds: 'fit for function'
- Rested meadows for seed



# Hortobágy , Hungary



- Balanced stocking rate, close monitoring
- Graze closer in in spring, acclimatization for sheep
- Collective shepherd hire (5 farmers)
- Shepherding with a dog. "herd in front, go slow"
- Rest periods to regrow
- Graze foxtail in spring

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Infrastructure investment



Traditional sheepfold construction



Knowledge transmission



## Kiskunsag National Park

- Undergraze to maintain tussock
- Trampling when wet to create pools

# Mosaic Wetland, Körös-Maros National Park

- 60 pair grazing, turn out June/July,
- Gray cattle
- Graze light (if heavy, will open up and don't want open water)
- Goal: mosaic for 'bird paradise'



# Gortyna Grazing Plan, Hortobágy NP



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Water buffalo to graze down reedgrass, *Gortyna borelli lunata* uses *Peucedanum officianis* as host plant; is getting choked out

# Gortyna Grazing Plan, Hortobagy NP



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Water buffalo to graze down reedgrass, *Gortyna borelli lunata* uses *Peucedanum officianis* as host plant; is getting choked out

# Top: England, Bottom: France

- “Scare bars”



- “Scrapes”. 30 across two fields for wader birds
- Excavated (England), or with water buffaloes (Romania)

# Agroecosystem diversity on small spatial scales

*Bordeira, Portugal*

Cereal

Orchard

Pasture



*Shishtavec, Albania*

Potatoes, cereal, forage, pastures, uplands

# Some Reflections



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- Agricultural practices (technology) and ecology used to be aligned, but are no longer
- Emphasis on start-end dates and spatial boundaries, and grazing prescriptions hampers flexibility, both for production and conservation
- Environmental schemes have created unpredictability, tension between conservation and production, and a mindset to 'game the system'
- Emphasizing practices over results under-utilizes farmer creativity and knowledge
- Education/knowledge is not well developed
- Farmers get enthusiastic about innovation and new practices
- Practices are traditional and modern (not preserving a time capsule)
- There are fewer and more deskilled farmers
- Farmers are a conservation value; youth do exist who want to farm (but need opportunity)
- It is not always clear if conservation grazing is an active or passive process

# Thank you



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Conservation  
Grazing Toolkit





# Activity #1 (revisit starting questions with a partner) Conservation Grazing

*Do you think there are different types of conservation grazing?*

*What might these be?*

*What "groupings" of different approaches to grazing for conservation can you think of?*

*Is conservation grazing active or passive?*

*Discussion Landscape: Is this conservation grazing? The seed-rich area around this corral in Kosovo is a resource patch attracting dozens of common linnet. The surrounding landscape is grazed moderately and very expansive.*



The common linnet has a Red List conservation status in the UK, meaning it is of high conservation concern. This designation is due to significant population declines caused primarily by agricultural intensification, leading to a loss of seed sources and nesting sites. The linnet is also a UK Priority Species and is protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981



# Activity #2

## Conservation Grazing

*How can we define what conservation looks like?*

*Brainstorm ideas to illustrate and stimulate discussion about what conservation grazing practices across knowledge systems*