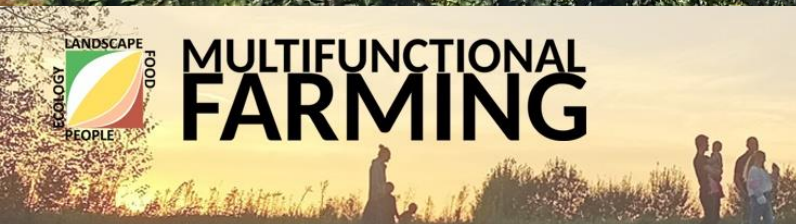


1st Multifunctional Farming Conference: Report

16-20 September Rzeszow, Poland

Photo: Harm Smeenge



Stephen Bramwell, Washington State
University Extension, USA

16th Meeting of the Carpathian Convention
Implementation Committee

2-3 December 2025, Belgrade, Serbia

General premise:

Traditional agriculture - whether smallholder, mixed or pastoralism - nested in the landscape and tradition, should be protected and revitalised as an indispensable contribution to food security and ecological resilience.

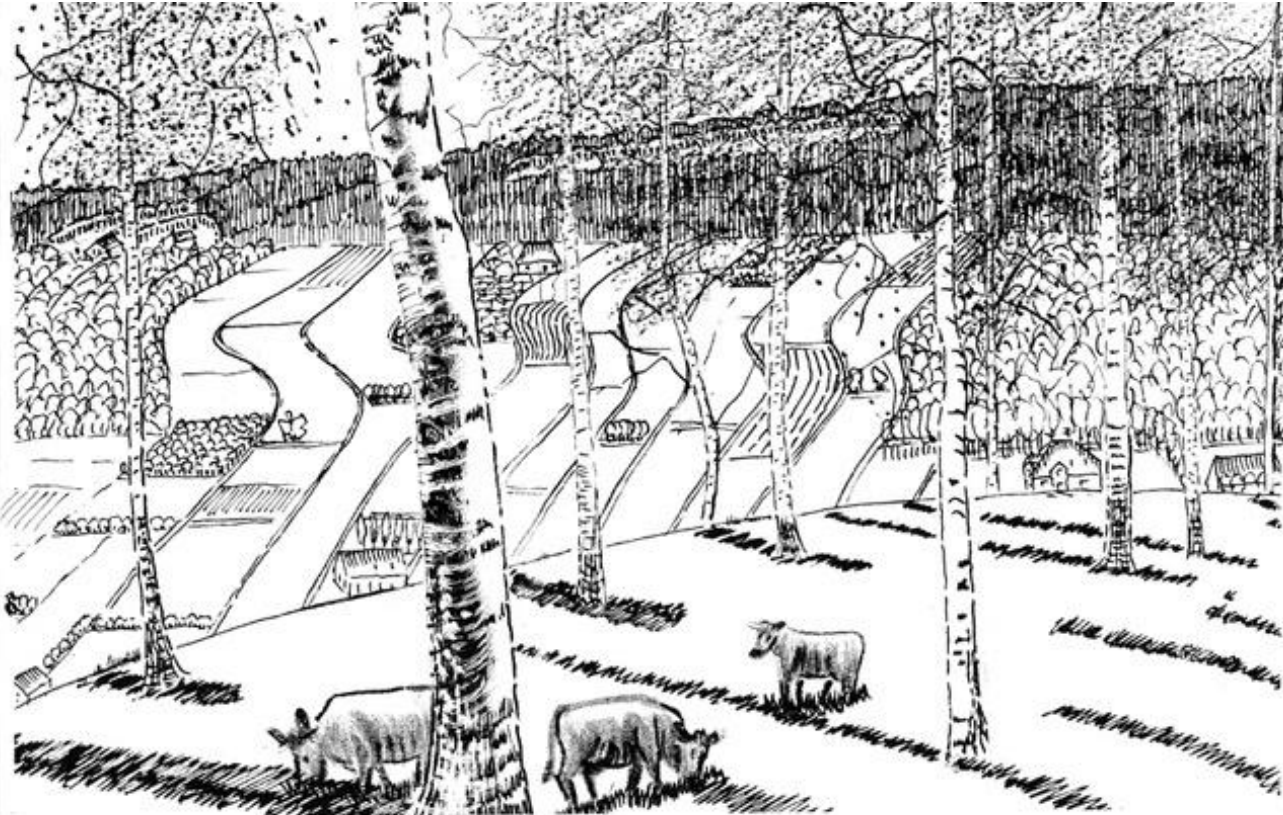
Conference Questions:

- *Why is “traditional” or “multifunctional” farming” important?*
- *What values has and can it provide?*
- *What immediate action can we take to support it?*



Photo: Karol Scrobacz

Smallholder, traditional farms provide multiple functions:



Johan Meeus, Conference Presenter & Landscape Illustrator

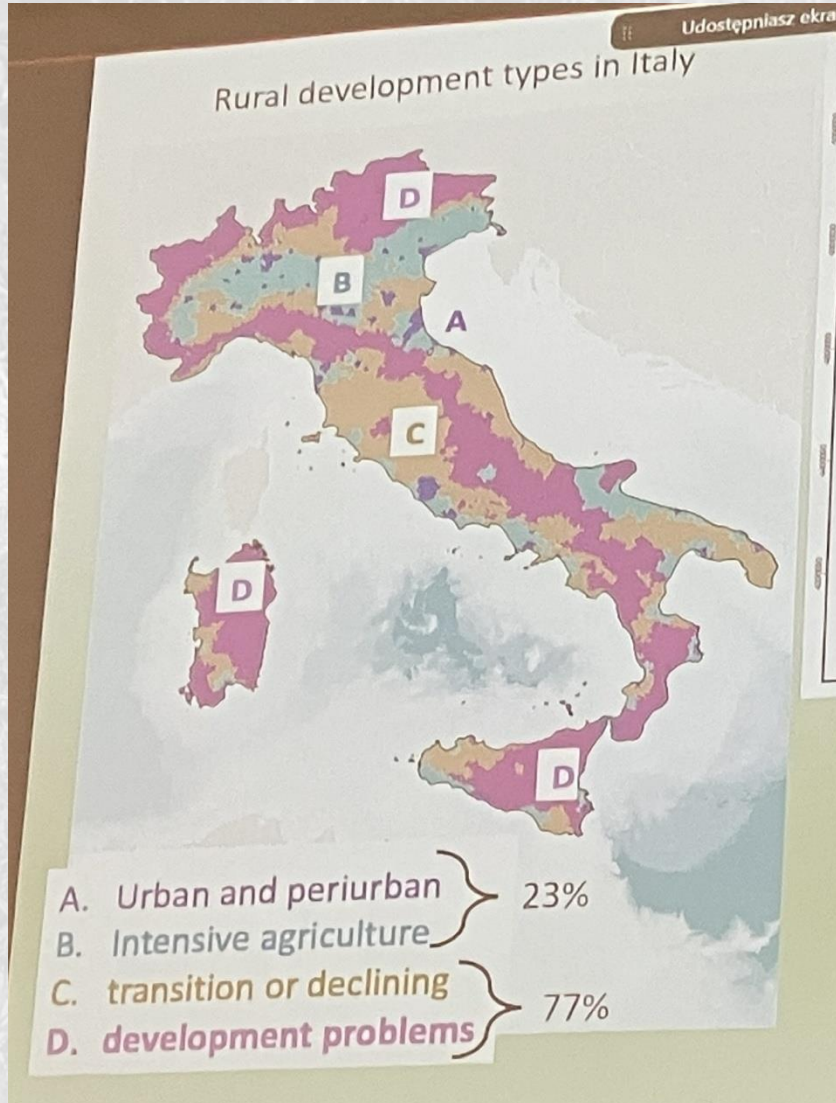
- A broad spectrum of ecosystem services
- Supply healthy food
- Create and maintain biodiversity-supporting habitats
- Recycle nutrients, sustain fertile soils
- Provide meaningful work and preserve the unique character of the landscape – an essential factor in the sense of identity and belonging
- Are an effective school of practical "reading of nature," which cannot be replaced by formal, theory-dominated education.

Conference Topics

Holistic:



What We Learned: Importance



- Small and traditional farms occupy large proportions of national farmland areas
- Significant overlap with regions of declining farm population + rugged or sub-optimal production conditions
- “De-agrarianization” is desolating cultural landscapes
- Cultural severance: unravels ecological knowledge and relationships (human-human, human-nature)
- Loss of traditional agriculture creates displacement, and social and political unrest
- Frustration among small-scale/traditional farmers:
 - lost markets, subsidized industrial competition, inadequate investment, inadequate engagement in problem-solving, often “invisible”

Conference Discussions: What is Needed?

- Recognition that cultural landscapes/ traditional agriculture provide:
 - Rural livelihood (**economic**)
 - Biodiversity (**ecological**)
 - Belonging, cultural connections and knowledge (**social**)
- Economic opportunity
- Valorization (*pride, retain youth*)
- Strategic investment
- Creative initiatives to train, retain, connect, and support farmers, shepherds, herders



Photo: Stephen Bramwell

Actions at the Conference:

[Petition Traditional farming for better future: A Rzeszów Manifesto](#)



YOUR VOICE COUNTS

Traditional farming for a better future: The Rzeszów Manifesto

73 people have signed this petition. Add your name now! 



“...we, the undersigned, are convinced that multifunctional, family-based farming holds great value: economic, social, environmental, as a provider of high-quality food, and as an important factor in shaping rural landscapes and culture - an indispensable factor of the sense of community and identity”

Actions at the Post-Conference Workshop: Recommendations

Market development

- Invest in infrastructure in traditional areas
- Create initiatives for market and resource access (grazing services)
- Product development investments
- Mechanisms for traditional foods to markets

Education

- Demonstration farms
- Financial support for open farm days
- Increase knowledge of farm-nature link
- Increase agro-ecological literacy
- Youth farm visits, taste tests
- Change perception of farmer as 'backwards'
- Educate banking sector (shift support: traditional)

Policy

- Spatial planning to protect traditional landscapes
- Somehow 'force' regional products
- Support in value-added traditional products
- Identify more "food cachements"
- More flexible rules (vet care, food safety)

Governance/local initiatives

- Encourage wise ("real") agritourism
- Increase strength of local governance
- Manage food waste with processing capacity

Initiative for Programming in “Landscape Farming”

- *A counterbalance to intensive specialized agriculture detached from landscape and biocultural heritage*
- *Good for traditional landscapes with unfavourable production conditions*
- *A middle way between intensification and abandonment*
- *A holistic and interdisciplinary approach to agriculture, which is essential for the preservation of food sovereignty, biocultural heritage and a real relationship between man and nature.*

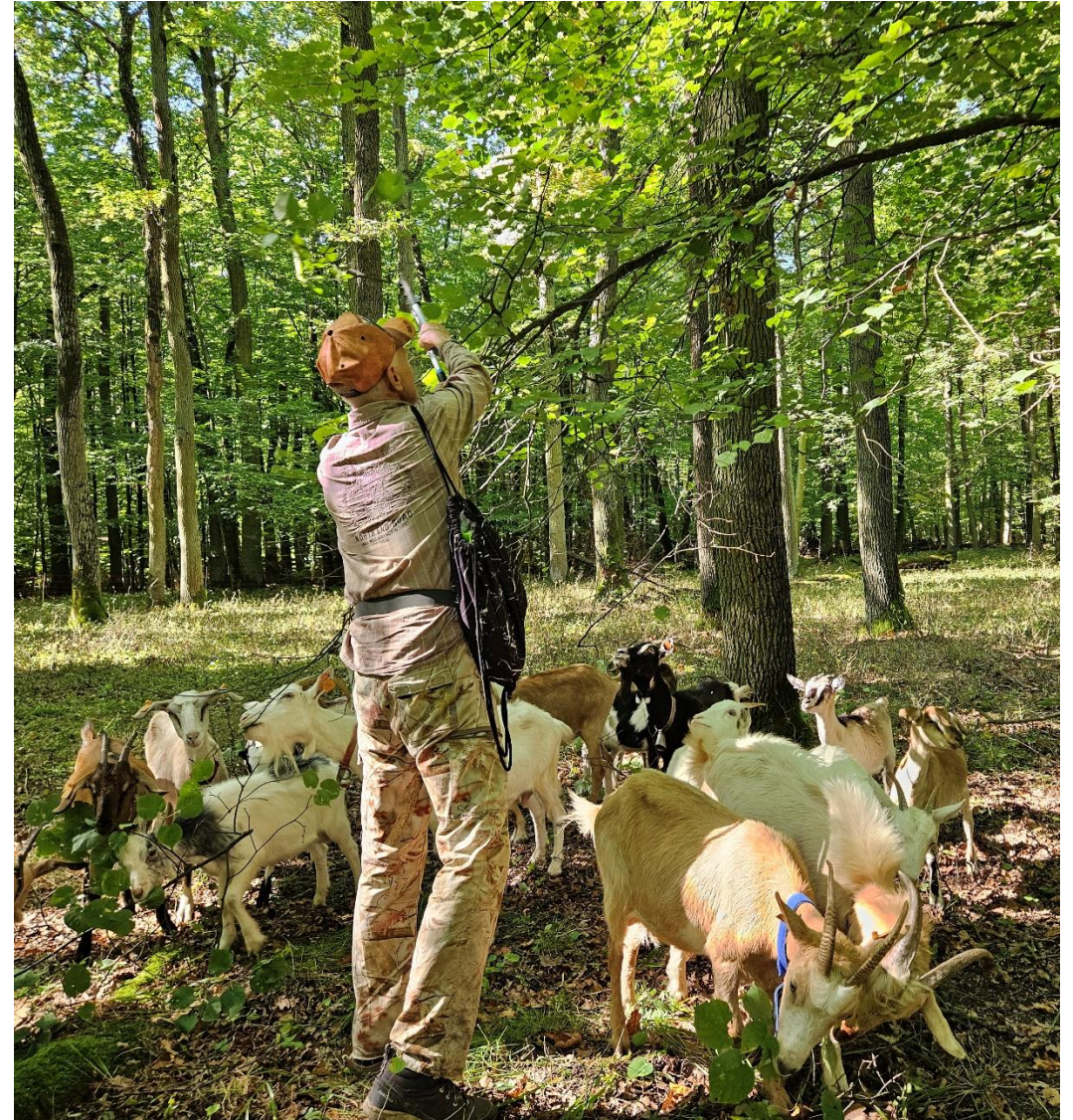
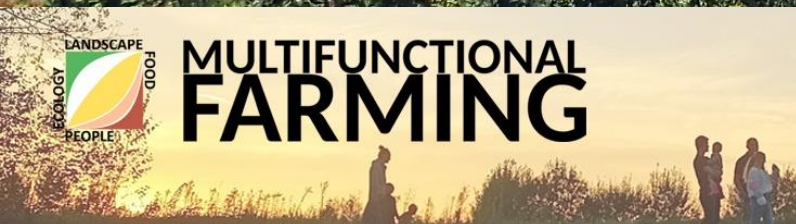


Photo: Gantuya Batdelger

Thank You, Hvala!

Photo: Harm Smeenge



16th Meeting of the Carpathian Convention
Implementation Committee
2-3 December 2025, Belgrade, Serbia
Conference Report: Stephen Bramwell