DECLARATION OF CARPATHIAN HERDERS/PASTORALISTS

ON THE OCCASION OF THE UN INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF RANGELANDS AND PASTORALISTS
FOR THE FUTURE OF EXTENSIVE LIVESTOCK FARMING AND PASTORAL CULTURE IN THE CARPATHIAN REGION

Pastoralism is living knowledge, living culture, living landscape and everyday work. Across the Carpathian region, pastoralism takes diverse cultural, ecological and economic forms, shaped by different histories and landscapes, yet shares a common reliance on mobility, local knowledge, access to land and water, and the ability to adapt to environmental variability.

We, who have inherited or chosen this way of life, are both custodians of the knowledge of our predecessors and active in shaping its place in a changing world. We believe that the values and beauty of the past can continue to be lived in the present, and that pastoral culture, natural rangelands and extensive livestock farming have an important place in the future of the Carpathians. Women and men contribute in diverse and changing ways to sustaining, renewing and transmitting this way of life.

We call on the National Governments of the Carpathian Convention countries, national parks and other relevant public authorities to ensure that all policies, regulations, support systems and land-management decisions affecting pastoralism, recognise pastoralism's distinctive capacity to work with environmental variability, and serve to maintain and strengthen the ecological, territorial, institutional and economic conditions that enable traditional herding to function.

To this end, we call for the following:

Recognition and decision-making

1. Recognise the social and economic contribution of pastoralism, and ensure that herders are valued by decision-makers and society not only as custodians of cultural traditions, but also for their work and contribution to rural communities and the wider society.

2. Ensure that herders participate in the design, implementation and review of decisions affecting herding, particularly within agricultural policy, protected-area management, veterinary regulation and public land allocation.

3. Ensure that decision-makers consult meaningfully and in sufficient advance with affected herders and other extensive livestock keepers on new rules and restrictions affecting their farming practices. Abandon regulatory practices that systematically place herders at a disadvantage. Regulation must be developed not above farmers, but together with them.

4. Ensure that the media and education system contribute to an accurate, respectful and diverse representation of pastoralism. Herders should not be portrayed merely as folklore or a cultural spectacle; their work, knowledge, values and challenges should be represented, with due respect for their right to self-representation.

5. Speak out against unfounded, outdated, generalising or derogatory claims about herding and extensive livestock farming. Ensure that herders' voices are heard in public debate and that, alongside different animal welfare, vegetarian and vegan perspectives, herders' experience and perspectives are given appropriate weight.

6. Recognise the work, knowledge, economic contribution, cultural stewardship and innovation of women and girls engaged in herding and extensive livestock farming, and ensure their equal and meaningful participation in decisions affecting herding. Support the network of herders and their collective advocacy and representation.

Land, mobility and pastoral land management

7. Ensure the long-term availability of, and secure and sufficiently predictable access to, the land, routes and water needed for grazing.

8. Recognise and support short-distance and transhumant pastoral mobility; flexible movement of grazing livestock between natural and agricultural ecosystems enables herders to make productive use of seasonal and spatial variability under ordinary conditions as well as during droughts and other environmental extremes.

9. Acknowledge herders' experience and knowledge in nature conservation decision-making. Nature conservation professionals and organisations should recognise herders as partners in land and nature management, rather than merely as actors subject to regulation, and should work to align nature conservation objectives with the realities and interests of pastoral livestock farming.

10. In addressing drought and climate change, recognise that the condition and adaptive capacity of rangelands-herders systems are determined not only by rainfall deficits, but also fundamentally by land use and water management options.

11. Examine the environmental, economic and social drivers underlying both sustainable and detrimental grazing practices, including inequitable decision-making, unfair market conditions and regulations that fail to reflect place-specific circumstances. In addressing grazing-related problems, avoid placing one-sided responsibility on herders and address the underlying systemic causes.

A regulatory and economic environment compatible with pastoralism

12. Ensure that regulations affecting pastoralism are clear, proportionate and practicable. They must not impose agricultural and nature conservation requirements contradicting each other on livestock keepers, and must distinguish pastoral and other extensive livestock systems from intensive livestock systems, taking into account their different characteristics and impacts.
13. Ensure that the application of EU rules within the national regulatory frameworks is adapted to local conditions, local knowledge, traditional farming practices and the specific characteristics of the Carpathian pastoral culture.
14. Reform animal health and veterinary regulations so that they safeguard animal health and welfare while also enabling traditional and sustainable livestock-keeping practices to continue.
15. Significantly reduce the bureaucratic burden on herders and establish simpler, more transparent and predictable administrative procedures.
16. Recognise and make visible the distinctive values of meat and dairy products originating from extensive livestock farming, and ensure that consumers can clearly distinguish food produced through extensive grazing-based systems from that produced through intensive production systems.
17. Strengthen local production, processing and fair market access in ways that improve pastoralists' livelihoods and serve first and foremost to sustain their current and trans-generational capacity to practise pastoralism; markets alone cannot secure pastoral viability; public support should strengthen pastoral work and its social and ecological functions without turning those functions into carbon credits or other tradable compensations.

Knowledge, transmission, research and renewal

18. Recognise and support pastoralism's specialisation to benefit from highly variable environments, including both changing weather and farming conditions, while managing their risks, adapting flexibly to changing weather and farming conditions, and support the maintenance of this capacity. We must also learn from herders' adaptive capacity as we respond to the climate and social changes ahead, particularly in preparing for potential major disruptions to European food supply in an increasingly uncertain global context.
19. Preserve the traditional knowledge of pastoral culture, particularly the practical knowledge essential to livestock keeping and land management. Agricultural and support systems must ensure that people can make a decent living from extensive livestock farming and that pastoralism offers a genuine future for younger generations.
20. Meaningfully involve herders in agricultural and other relevant research, and bring together traditional knowledge, the valuable experience accumulated during the socialist era, and contemporary scientific knowledge and proposed approaches, including regenerative grazing, critically assessed in relation to local ecological conditions and herders' experience. On this basis, renew and strengthen rangeland ecology and grassland management research in the Carpathians.
21. Ensure the pastoralist-led, intergenerational and practice-based transmission of pastoral knowledge and skills, alongside vocational training and recognised qualifications that strengthen the capacity to practise pastoralism; recognise pastoralist youth not only as successors to existing knowledge, but as present-day knowledge makers and innovators.

Climate responsibility and the direction of development

22. Move away from development models that concentrate land and market power, standardise diverse farming systems and disregard local social, cultural and ecological realities, and address the social and economic inequalities that disadvantage rural communities and small-scale farms.
23. Ensure that climate policy distinguishes the biogenic carbon cycles of pastoral systems from fossil-fuel emissions and does not use pastoral land or changes in pastoral practice to offset emissions generated elsewhere. Climate support should strengthen pastoral knowledge, mobility and access to land and water.

These are not separate or optional measures. Together, they constitute the conditions required for pastoralism to remain viable in the Carpathians. Recognition without secure access to land, participation without influence over decisions, or support that requires pastoralism to conform to unsuitable regulatory and market models will not be sufficient.
We share a responsibility for the future of herding in the Carpathians. Carpathian pastoral systems are diverse and place-specific. Policies and regulations should therefore respect this diversity and be adapted to local ecological, cultural, social and economic conditions, while being guided by shared regional principles. We therefore call on decision-makers not to make decisions about us without us, but to shape together with us the social, economic and environmental conditions in which extensive livestock farming and herding can continue to thrive in the Carpathians.
Herders transform grass that is inedible to us humans into food, making productive use of land that is often unsuitable for other forms of food production.

This Declaration builds on the three global declarations adopted in Mongolia in August 2026: the Global Pastoralist Declaration, the Declaration of Youth Pastoralists, and the Declaration of Women Pastoralists.

September 2026 **By whom… (Convention / herder NGOs?)**