

Explored and unexplored topics in mountain livestock farming scientific literature

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Mountain areas represent more than 40% of European land. In the mountains, the primary sector has a key role in terms of employment, livelihood structures in rural communities, landscape management and conservation and provision of high quality food products. In addition, mountain farming is tightly bound to High Value Nature areas since farming activities significantly contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity and the provision of ecosystem services, due to their low-input/extensive character. However, these features limit productivity which impairs the economic viability of mountain agriculture, despite its pivotal role in providing key services for society. The new EAAP Mountain Livestock Farming Working Group performed a review of the existing scientific literature to investigate explored and unexplored topics in Mountain Livestock Farming (MLF) research. An electronic search on literature published from 1960 to 2017 was carried out using Scopus database. A string of key words Livestock and Farm and Mountain was chosen to retrieve the most relevant scientific papers. A total of 545 papers were identified. The year with more publications was 2014 with 47 papers. During this timeframe, 20 peer reviewed scientific journals have published at least 5 papers related to MLF. Text mining analysis on the 547 available abstracts aimed at identifying the most frequent words used in these papers. Most of them were dealing with livestock management (e.g. sheep, cattle, transhumance, stocking density) and with landscape management (e.g. land, forest, grazing, water). Fewer papers were targeting socio-economic (e.g. livelihood quality and income) and environmental sustainability issues (e.g. climate change, biodiversity). The results of this exercise highlight a growing interest towards mountain farming related topics by the scientific community and reveal the need to build on current knowledge by engaging with new disciplines and expertise in order to strengthen the key role of MLF for the survival of agroecosystems and local communities.

Livestock farming systems and the French society: key controversies

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For several years, French livestock farming has been frequently questioned by society. Those questions concern its environmental impact, sanitary risks or animal treatment and ask, more generally, livestock farming's place among a society that is more and more concerned about its alimentation. To understand this phenomenon, analyse representations on livestock farming that coexist within the society and enlighten agricultural actors on those social evolutions at work, the project ACCEPT, funded by the CASDAR and led by the French Pork and Pig Institute (IFIP), has been carried out between 2014 and 2018. With the aim of identifying the subjects of controversy about breeding in France, all animal productions considered, and to describe the diversity of actors and arguments, both qualitative and quantitative studies were conducted: around seventy interviews were conducted, in France and five other UE countries, with the main stakeholders (livestock farming professionals, farmers, companies, journalists, NGOs, consumers) and more than 2007 French citizens were questioned on a online survey. The analysis of discourses led to classify the debates on the French livestock farming in four major areas: environmental impact, animal welfare, risks to human health and socioeconomic model of livestock farming. It reflects expectations for different types of system: some want a gradual disappearance of intensive farming systems for the benefit of under official quality signs or implementing alternative practices; others want the development of intensive farming to produce more and become more competitive; and between them many want a gradual improvement in the intensive system, with stronger environmental and animal welfare requirements. We consider that we face a global controversy on livestock farming: indeed, beyond specific controversies on practices, debates regarding the very legitimacy of livestock farming or the consumption of animal products gather all the different topics, and are linked with larger society problematics (consumption habits, growth models, globalization, etc.). This feature may complicate the resolution of the controversy and make it hazardous and longer.