



## OUTCOMES

of the V Iberian Congress on Dehesa & Montado

“Resiliência e rentabilidade: Modelos de negócio num contexto de incerteza”

29-30th October, Évora, Portugal

## Aliança Ibérica pela Dehesa e Montado

Iberian Alliance for the Dehesa and the Montado

At a time, the debate and controversy goes on, on how to achieve the ambitious objectives of the European Nature Restoration Law, it is wise to look at the productive systems in Europe which safeguard nature interests and at the same time have a broad geographical coverage. Furthermore, for meeting the challenges of circularity and climate neutrality that we are striving for, preserving the complexity and integrity of these systems, such as agro-silvo-pastoral systems, can be a founding mechanism.

Montados and Dehesas are the agro-silvo-pastoral systems of Iberia. They are similar, with their open tree cover of Cork and Holm oak and pastures used for livestock feeding underneath the trees, in a mosaic of heterogeneous vegetation structures combined with multiple landscape elements which host a high diversity of flora and fauna species. Together they occupy 4 million hectares. Their value is acknowledged by academia and society: (i) as resilient production systems adapted to the scarcity of natural resources in the South of the Iberian Peninsula (which can provide insights into other regions of the world facing similar conditions); (ii) as source of unique products such as cork and the Iberian pig, as particular character landscapes; (iii) as High Nature Value Farming systems, and also (iv) due to their capacity to cope with climate change and mitigate its impacts. The Montados and Dehesas are unique testimonies of a much broader reality of traditional European agro-silvo-pastoral systems, which in Europe operated at different scales and which have been marginalised in favour of specialised and intensive agriculture, but which today can help us cope with the global challenges we face.

If we continue losing these systems, in the highly fragile and threatened environment where they are located, we will be subject to an accelerated process of desertification and degradation of the natural resources, increased fire risks, loss of soil and of water retention capacity and undermining biodiversity. However, we are in fact losing these systems because the low profitability is exacerbating intensification in some cases and abandonment in others. The rate of death and decay of old trees with no renewal, and consequently the opening of the tree cover, is accelerating. In Portugal, an average

decrease of 3000hectares/year of the Montado has been measured since 1990. Simultaneously, the system is becoming oversimplified and soils are degraded due to deep ploughing and to excessively high grazing densities, thus decreasing its capacity to host a diversity of species and its overall resilience. We need to **stop the decline and restore natural regeneration in the Montados and Dehesas.**

To support the agro-silvo-pastoral systems of Iberia and revert their registered and accelerating decline, a **comprehensive and ambitious Rehabilitation Plan**, is urgent., Through the engagement of the full diversity of economic, institutional and research stakeholders, this Plan should study and co-design solutions and tools for the Portuguese and the Spanish reality together.

The Congress demonstrated a wealth of relevant scientific knowledge and successful innovations on soil care and regeneration, pasture improvement, livestock grazing management, tree renewal and improvements to the ecological balance of the system. But this knowledge is not arriving to land managers, nor their feedback and their own knowledge is incorporated into the scientific process, so that ready to implement and successful innovations can be co-created. We need much **more consistent and integrative training and advisory services supporting land managers as well as co-creation processes for innovation focused on the end-user**, specially tailored to the complex multifunctionality of agro-silvo-pastoral systems.

The Congress also demonstrated knowledge gaps related to new threats and new demands on these agroforestry systems. Among others, we need to define **new mechanisms for markets and value chains** to support the maintenance of these production systems, we need more data and validated procedures to assess the carbon credits supported by different types of Montados and Dehesas. To assess biodiversity credits, we need to **identify which tree species and varieties are suitable** for planting in areas subject to severe climate change, and we need to identify how to secure the survival of the tree renewal. We need **more specific and targetted research.**

Public policy mechanisms lag behind in treating the Montado and Dehesas as complex and unique systems. There is no clear classification of these systems as the forest authorities consider them as “forest”, while the agriculture departments classify them as agriculture and provide CAP area payments for parcels which are grazed. For example, the Forestry Department and the EU Joint Research Centre have produced a map showing that there are almost 1 million hectares of forest land in Extremadura. But the CAP SIGPAC system shows only 20% of this is measured in the land registry as “forest”, with 40% “pasture with trees”, 20% “pasture with shrubs” and the other 20% being a mixture of other land uses. There is therefore a clear **need for a single integrated land use classification system** in each of Spain and Portugal which clarifies which parcels are forest and which are agriculture. This is vital in the next 12 months, before the EU Deforestation Regulation takes effect, and owners/operators have to certify that wood and wood products, and meat and meat products have been produced from areas which have not been “deforested” since December 2020.

Within the CAP there are contradictory measures from Pillar I and Pillar II, the first supporting intensification in animal production, the second protecting trees and soil, but none supporting regeneration nor supporting an integrated and adaptive management of the different components of the system. The CAP provides eco-schemes, investment payments and agro-environmental measures, but the economic, environmental and climate impact of these is poorly understood and has not reverted the decaying trends observed so far. The CAP needs in this regard to be improved. We **need specific policies targeted agro-silvo-pastoral systems and paying for the environmental benefits** they provide to society.

Landowners, farmers associations and research entities **stand together to defend these unique Iberian agro-silvo-pastoral systems**. We will pursue the social, technical and institutional innovations required for their regeneration.

December 2024,

Landowners and farmers organizations (more to be added):

Spain

FEDEHESA

Portugal

Apormor

Cooperativa de Produtores do Guadiana

Research entities(more to be added):

Spain

Portugal

CHANGE–Inst.Global Change and Sustainability

MED-Mediterranean Institute for Agriculture, Environment and Development

Further discussion on the need for a clear demarcation of forestry and agricultural land parcels and for a quantitative estimate of which parcels are classified as “agroforestry” is given in EURAF Policy Briefing #15 v5 “Defining forests and agroforests in the EU”.