Pastoralism

Autumn meeting 2026

18-20.09.2026, Jugendherberge Göttingen, Habichtsweg 2, 37075 Göttingen.

The Agrecol Autumn 2026 meeting, held in Göttingen on 18–20 September 2026, brought together 27 members and guests to explore pastoralism as a key part of agroecology. The topic was chosen for this meeting to mark the United Nations International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026).

The weekend meeting had two aims: to raise awareness about pastoralism around the world; and to give participants a chance to discuss pastoralism in different ecosystems, the challenges it faces, and the initiatives and pathways that can support it. Through expert inputs, excursions and interactive discussions, participants explored the realities of herding communities across continents, and how mobility, local knowledge and innovation help to build resilience in changing environments.



Ute Schneiderat introducing the topic of pastoralism (@Fanos Birke)

Day 1: Exhibition and expert inputs

The meeting started on the late afternoon of 18 September with a poster exhibition. Twelve selected posters were brought from the exhibition at the Tropentag 2026 conference, where pastoralism was featured as an example of multifunctional agro-ecosystems that support a climate-resilient future. Agrecol members Paul Mundy and Ann Waters-Bayer enriched the exhibition with publications, photos and artefacts that pastoralists use in their daily lives.

Ute Schneiderat gave a global overview of pastoralism, covering current threats and presenting potential measures that development partners, governments, pastoralists or other stakeholders could take to sustain the system. Ann Waters-Bayer presented the initiative of a global alliance of volunteers that started in 2016 to convince the United Nations (UN) to designate an International Year of Rangelands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026).

The expert input was further enriched by three young researchers (Malit Wako, Wilhelmina Nuule and Sri Keerthana), who conducted individual field studies in Kenya and Namibia. They presented how pastoralists use customary local governance systems to effectively manage rangelands; how pastoralists use local knowledge about their cattle and the environment to organise their rangelands into seasonal grazing units; and the insufficient recognition of the local knowledge and networks women pastoralists have and use to manage the size and health of their herd.

Day 2: Landcare Association, Pastoralist Map and excursions

The morning session was dedicated to an introductory presentation about Landcare Associations in Germany by Klaus König-Hollrah, founder and former director of the Landschaftspflegeverband (LPV) Landkreis Göttingen e.V. Such associations advise on preserving landscapes and natural resources; connect people from agriculture, forestry, nature conservation and politics; and represent their members at national and European level.

Paul Mundy then introduced and demonstrated the World Pastoralist Map. This interactive tool shows livestock distribution, pastoralist groups, migration routes and grazing areas worldwide. Each group's entry includes its name, location, language, livestock, photos, videos and related organisations. Also, Paul presented the recently introduced mapping initiative Threats to pastoralism, an interactive crowd-sourced map to document long-term and land-related threats affecting pastoralist communities worldwide.

The afternoon was devoted to two excursions:

1. Hutewald (forest pasture): Participants visited a research project, begun in the early 2000s, that studies how grazing helps biodiversity regenerate in the Solling-Vogler Nature Reserve. In the project, wild cattle and horses are used as agents that influence vegetation cover and biodiversity through their grazing and movement.



Friederike Kaiser explaining about the Hutewald project (@Ute Schneiderat)

2. Goat and sheep herders north of Göttingen: Unlike in the Hutewald, the sheep and goats graze open land, keeping it open by preventing trees from taking over. The two herders that the group visited – Anke Busch and Bernd Bodmann – earn their living partly from selling sheep meat, but mainly from the EU subsidies for maintaining the landscape biodiversity. The Landcare Association (LPV) plays a very important role for both enterprises (sheep and goats) – it provides information, supports networking (e.g. monthly meetings), supports in dealing with bureaucratic issues, helps in fundraising (e.g. for a sheep barn), etc.



Group visiting herders practising landcare (@Sabine Homann)

Day 3: Reflections: learning and insights

Through facilitated reflection sessions, participants were able to consolidate their learning and insights from the weekend meeting. Many left with a broader and more nuanced picture of rangelands and pastoralists than they arrived with. Many were surprised by the diversity of pastoralism, which extends beyond cattle and sheep to bees and ducks, and by how similar the threats and interests of pastoralists are across continents. That commonality made networking a recurring theme: connecting pastoralists, building solidarity and a stronger collective voice.

The field visits also shifted how people think about nature. Seeing the Hutewald and the sheep and goat herders first-hand showed that landscapes in Europe have been shaped by people and livestock for centuries, and that grazing can also maintain biodiversity rather than only damage it. The weekend also offered an opportunity to discuss important questions: fragility of pastoral systems, aging farming population, climate change, role of women and youth in decision making.

The young researchers' fieldwork results and the World Pastoralist Map showed how evidence and visibility could support decision making, strategic planning and policy formulation.

For many, the opportunity to network was as inspiring as the content of the weekend. The mix of work experiences in various countries, backgrounds and disciplines gave participants fresh perspectives and energy. This was translated into concrete ideas: actively contributing information about pastoralist organisations to the map, joining local landcare groups, showing the posters and photos on pastoralism in schools and adult learning centres, inviting more young scientists to future Agrecol meetings, and following up with an Open Space Agrecol meeting on selected pastoralism issues and other issues in spring 2027.



Participants discuss learning and inspirations from the weekend meeting (@Christine Martins)

Short report for Agrecol website by Fanos Birke, Ute Schneiderat, Christine Martins and Ann Waters-Bayer (a more detailed report with Powerpoints is available upon request).