

# Sheep on the move: A trek through Europe to highlight mobile herding

They are good-natured, produce tasty meat, and their wool gets turned into sweaters. Everyone knows so much about sheep. But few people know about the benefits that sheep provide through grazing. As they move from place to place, mobile flocks maintain the ecology, so conserving many threatened plants, animals and insects. The landscapes they create enhance the quality of life for local people and tourists alike.

Grassland that has been extensively grazed in a controlled way is an excellent filter for drinking water. Grassland protects the soil from wind and water erosion, stores a huge amount of carbon, and converts carbon dioxide into oxygen in winter when trees no longer have leaves.

But grassland must be maintained through grazing – otherwise it will be overrun with brambles and scrub, which lack many of the advantages of grasses. Mobile flocks of sheep are an important way to conserve these landscapes.

To raise awareness of the advantages of mobile livestock production, Europe's shepherds have organized a sheep trek across Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands during the summer of 2010. The trek aims to draw attention to the contribution that mobile herding makes, as well as highlighting the need to reduce the bureaucracy and regulations that make mobile herding difficult.

The trek will start in Berlin on 5 June and end at the “Green Land Day” (*Grünlandtag*) in Trier on 16-17 October. The trek will be a kind of a relay walk, with each flock and shepherd covering a certain distance and then handing over to another flock for the next stage. Accompanying vehicles will manage traffic and distribute information materials.

Special events in Paderborn (1 August), Duisburg (21 August) and Brussels (16 September) will highlight the contributions of sheep. Other events may be organized throughout the trek. The trek will provide excellent opportunities for school classes to learn about agriculture and ecology in general, and mobile herding in particular.

A similar but smaller trek took place in Belgium in 2008. The webpage [www.sonnisheide.be/wandelroute%202008.htm](http://www.sonnisheide.be/wandelroute%202008.htm) from this earlier trek gives an idea of what a trek might look like,

If you want to know more, or if you would like to participate or support the shepherds, contact Günther Czerkus, [Czerkus@eifel-lamm.de](mailto:Czerkus@eifel-lamm.de), or visit <http://www.hirtenzug.eu>.