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Agro-silvo-pastoral system Mountains of Leon, Spain

The Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems (GIAHS) are agroecosystems inhabited by communities that live in an intricate relationship with their territory. These evolving sites are resilient systems characterized by remarkable agrobiodiversity, traditional knowledge, invaluable cultures and landscapes, sustainably managed by farmers, herders, fisherfolk, and forest people in ways that contribute to their livelihoods and food security.

In the case of the agroecosystem "Mountains of Leon", the systems have been maintained for centuries, contributing directly to food security and the livelihoods of local communities. Local animal varieties have been domesticated and developed over centuries to meet the environmental and social requirements of the territory that forms the Mountains of Leon system.

The diversity of land uses with forests, pastures and areas under cultivation generates a space for coexistence of agriculture, livestock, forestry, gathering, hunting and fishing, giving the area great agro-ecological value.

Global importance

The uniqueness of the Mountains of Leon in biodiversity and cultural diversity is reflected in high-value landscapes that include an exceptional agroforestry and livestock cultural heritage.

It maintains traditional systems of organization of the territory and preserves indigenous breeds and agri-food products which have been recognized with guarantee marks, appellations of origin or protected geographical indications.



This agroforestry and livestock territory also has management, protection, conservation and valorization figures that guarantee its governance and commitment to sustainable development.

Food and livelihood security

Traditional agricultural systems have remained the main source of food and income for some two million people worldwide, mainly local communities and smallholder farmers.

From the cultivation and use of chestnuts and other fruit trees since Roman times to the diversity generated over the centuries in crops and livestock for the best use of space and over time, the entire territory is located far from urban globalization, environmental degradation and the demographic pressure of the large population centres.

Agrobiodiversity

The ability of its inhabitants to domesticate, maintain and adapt agricultural biodiversity has been maintained for centuries, resulting in the conservation and safeguarding of native species such as the Brown and Indian Rooster of Leon, unique in the world and which needs a very specific environment for its breeding; the Mantquera Leonesa bovine species, which is a unique species for the production of dairy products and has received international recognition for decades; or the breeding of the Hispano-Breton horse as one of the most distinctive breeds on the planet, for which this territory provides the ecosystems and life forms necessary for its safeguarding.

Local and traditional knowledge systems

Local communities have established a series of agricultural, livestock, forestry, hunting and fishing systems based on knowledge of the environment and related to new trends in sustainable development, such as the circular economy, which has allowed and continues to allow the continued use of the territory without depleting or degrading it.



Today, many of them are endorsed by quality seals, bringing together processes, techniques and local knowledge inherited from centuries ago. Much of this knowledge now coexists with other innovative techniques that contribute to better yields and quality.

Cultures, value systems and social organizations

The agriculture and livestock farming in the Mountains of Leon includes value systems and agricultural practices associated with the environment, festivals and rituals, which all add up to a transfer of knowledge and traditions to new generations.

Typical examples are the traditional livestock fairs held in many villages for centuries and which are a meeting point for livestock farmers who participate in the exchange of knowledge, providing the necessary dynamism to keep these systems alive.

Local institutions play a key role in balancing environmental and socio-economic objectives, in strengthening the resilience and reproductive capacity of all elements and processes fundamental to the functioning of the agricultural system.

Landscapes features

Pastures, natural hedge fences, dry stonewalls, the grid of fruit trees or the structure of the sloping vineyards are some of the landscapes resulting from the humans' interaction with the Mountains of Leon territory.

All of this, together with the beauty and recognition provided by the seven Biosphere Reserves that coexist in direct harmony with the agricultural systems of the peoples that make them up, constitute a unique territory that brings together components that are difficult to find in other parts of the world.