

APPENDIX 5
TRANSNATIONAL COOPERATION WITH THE
GEVAUDAN, LOZÈRE LEADER + PROGRAMME

1. BACKGROUND TO THE LOZÈRE REGION

The Lozère is a French “Department” located southeast of the Massif Central in the Northern part of the Languedoc-Roussillon region. This is shown in white on the picture of France below:



The area is divided into four natural regions distinguished by their different rock types:

- The Aubrac (basalt)
- The Margaride (granite)
- The Cevennes (shale)
- The Causses (limestone) including the Tarn and Jonte Gorges and the Lot Valley

With 73,000 residents, Lozère is the least populated French department and has the highest average height of around 1000 metres. The area includes the Cevennes National Park made famous by Robert Louis Stephenson’s book –Travels with a Donkey in the Cevennes.

There are 2,500 agricultural holdings, often remote and dispersed due to the hilly landscape. 99% of the farms consist mainly of grazing livestock, a third specialising in beef with the remainder in sheep production and milk production from cows, sheep and goats.

As well as farming, tourism is the leading economic activity in the Lozère. There is a strong interest in developing and promoting local products and in linking these to tourism. Products include Aubrac beef, locally branded lamb and a wide variety of cheeses made from milk from cows, sheep and goats.

2. KEY DIFFERENCES AND SIMILARITIES BETWEEN THE HILL FARMING SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES IN CUMBRIA AND THE LOZERE AREA

a) Key Similarities

- Background of changing subsidies and environmental payments as a result of reform to the Common Agricultural Policy.
- Reducing economic returns and threat from the global market
- Traditional hill farming being key to the cultural and physical landscape of the area
- The need for farmers and grazing animals to help control scrub – broom and Austrian pine in Lozere, bracken and scrub in Cumbria
- Similar population size: Lozere has around 70,000 population, the Cumbria Fells and Dales has 100,000 population.
- Both areas contain National Parks on some, but not all of the land.
- It appears that there are tensions in Lozere between habitat conservation and farming potentially mirroring recent experience in Cumbria. These tensions reflect the different cultural values between farmers and conservationists in both countries.
- Both areas have significant upland areas and are inhabited National Parks

b) Key Differences

- Adding Value/branding of local hill farming products is far more developed in the Lozère area partly as a result of state intervention (involvement of the Chamber of Agriculture), farmer cooperation, and a consumer who is still mostly purchasing meat through local butchers rather than multiple retailers. French consumers are also passionate about local products.
- Involvement in hill farming of the National Park Authority is greater in the Cevennes compared with the Lake District National Park.
- There is far stronger cooperation between farmers and collectivisation of activities in the Lozère region – for example, the branding of beef and lamb and the existence of a ram selection centre run on a communal basis.
- There is more state intervention in farming in Lozere, some of which would not be culturally acceptable to Cumbrian hill farmers, for example control of land values and a legal register of farmer details. This system, although bureaucratic, does give benefits to the Lozere hill farmers. Land values are not artificially inflated by bidding from non farming interests and the register of farmer details means that a wealth of information is available to policy makers on aspects such as encouraging new entrants and young farmers.

- There is a great focus in the Lozère region on encouraging new entrants and young farmers with preferential grant rates and low interest loans available. The Chamber of Agriculture has a target of young farmer start ups each year.
- Collective shepherding on seasonal pasture operated in Lozère and was assisted by the Cevennes national park. This used to be a feature in Cumbria but has now ceased. The concept of one shepherd looking after sheep for a number of farmers under a collective arrangement might be worth reconsidering in Cumbria.
- The delivery of public goods by farmers appears to be much more understood and developed in Cumbria. The most obvious example is the level of access to the fells in Cumbria – apart from the GR long distance footpath routes, there appeared to be little open access to the fells in Lozere.
- There is a longer history and apparently greater development of environmental schemes in Cumbria compared to the Lozère area. This may partly be due to the high environmental quality of much of the Lozere area which already has 70% woodland cover. Reliance on agri-environment scheme income is particularly significant in the Lake District.
- The Lozère area is entirely “Zone de Montagne” with an average altitude of 1000 metres and the agriculture of the area is all defined as “low mountain”. In Cumbria, there is a mixture of high fell, valley sides, and lower ground and has a high level of inter-connection with lowland areas and other areas of the UK. For example, Cumbria produces a high volume of breeding stock with store cattle sold mainly in the East of England to farms with access to cheap grain, breeding sheep such as Mules are sold throughout England to lowland farms. In recent years, there is some evidence that this inter-connection is breaking down and more farms are finishing their own stock.
- There are marked differences in the physical characteristics of the Cumbria and Lozère hill farming systems. The Lozère area is characterised by:
 - Wooded valley sides and prairie style agriculture on the fells. 70% woodland cover overall (as opposed to 10 – 12% in Cumbria)
 - Most fells being enclosed and not common land
- The branding of beef and lamb in Lozère is helped by there not being a proliferation of breeds as is the case in Cumbria. In Lozère, there is strong branding of Aubrac cattle and Blanc du Massif sheep. In Cumbria, there is no overall Cumbrian brand for beef and lamb and only small scale schemes for individual breeds – eg Herdwick etc.
- French farmers appear to play a much more influential role in rural policies than in England and the French Government has adopted a different approach to CAP reform. France has tried to minimise the effects of decoupling by keeping payments linked to production as far as possible particularly in the livestock sector.
- The Lozère Chamber of Agriculture is the official body in the region providing the link between farmers, farming organisations and public bodies. They provide technical advice and support, for example to farmers and to the local offices of the Ministry of Agriculture on developing agri-environment schemes.

This is in contrast to the proliferation of rural development and environmental agencies in Cumbria.

- Lozère has already experienced problems of depopulation and a decline in livestock farming leading to land abandonment and the reduction in transhumance to summer pastures and associated shepherding and customs. There has been serious encroachment of pastures by shrubs and forest resulting in loss of biodiversity and landscape diversity and an increased risk of fire. Cumbria is only now facing the risk of “ranching” and abandonment with the associated increase in bracken encroachment and potential for under grazing rather than overgrazing.

3. ANALYSIS OF LESSONS LEARNT FROM THE TRANSNATIONAL VISITS

a) The Chamber of Agriculture approach

The French Chamber of Agriculture system consists of a Professional Assembly elected by all the players in the agriculture sector with representatives drawn from farmers, landowners, farm workers, forest owners, and agricultural cooperatives. It speaks on behalf of the agricultural sector to the Government and all public authorities. This coordinated approach to rural development is in contrast with the proliferation of agencies operating in agriculture, environment, rural development and tourism in England. The new Rural Development Programme for England may be a more coordinated approach

b) Involvement of the National Park

The Cevennes National Park appears to be very actively involved with farmers in the area in both provision of advice and sourcing funding. In contrast, the relationship between hill farmers and the Lake District National Park Authority could be improved which might be implemented through a management plan created as part of the World Heritage Site bid. The National Park might also look at ways in which it could more actively be involved in:

- review of planning policy for housing and accommodation facilities on hill farms. Lack of accommodation for shepherds and young farmers on or close to hill farms is a key problem in the area.
- local branding schemes
- communication of delivery of public goods by hill farmers in the Lake District – access, landscape, biodiversity, culture.
- Assistance in cooperative activity – for example:
 - More active support for Commoners Associations within the National Park
 - an analysis of whether collective shepherding might be of assistance in certain areas
 - creation of a group of shepherds/farmers who might be paid to help with gathering of commons
- Being an advocate for, and championing, upland farming particularly from a Cumbrian perspective.

c) Tourism

There is a far closer relationship between farm and landscape tourism in the Lozere area. The rural development agencies in Cumbria should look to more closely integrate with Cumbria Tourism to maximise the benefits of farm tourism and interpretation of the landscape for visitors.

d) Benefits of cooperation

There are huge cultural differences between Cumbrian farmers and Lozere farmers in terms of their attitudes to cooperation and there is also a long history of state assisted cooperation in France. However, there are lessons that could be learnt from Lozere particularly their use of a cooperative for marketing and also for activities such as a centralised ram monitoring centre particularly for the production of rams for commercial sheep farms. There are clear advantages in having a single site for testing of rams which might help accelerate breed improvement.

e) Encouragement of young farmers and new entrants

In Lozere there is great emphasis on encouraging young farmers and new entrants against a background of rural depopulation. This emphasis could be transferred to Cumbria where there are equal concerns about the lack of suitable and skilled replacements for an ageing generation of hill farmers. There firstly needs to be better monitoring of the number of farms where the farmer has no suitable successor and then schemes put in place to help younger farmers take over hill farms addressing their acquiring of skills and knowledge (eg a mentoring scheme) and their individual needs such as accommodation. This is also an activity that the Lake District National Park might want to consider assisting with.

f) Hill farming practices

Certain hill farming practices in the Lozere area might be considered by Cumbrian hill farmers:-

- The French hill farming system appeared to be more “sustainable” with the farms aiming to be mostly self sufficient in production of winter fodder with less feed purchased than on comparable Cumbrian hill farms.
- The cost of land and purchase of breeding animals was less in Lozere because of state intervention and the control over the pricing of animals such as monitored rams.
- Automatic feeding systems in the sheds helped save labour input.
- Although the farming methods were actually more intensive than in Cumbria, the local branding still strongly linked the animals with the local area.
- Higher use of technology such as Artificial Insemination and use of monitoring to improve sheep breeds.

g) Future direction of support for hill farmers

There is a marked contrast between the experience of CAP reform by the Lozere hill farmers and the experience in Cumbria. To date, French livestock farmers have been largely cushioned from the full impact of reforms by the retention of the link with headage for livestock payments. In Cumbria,

farmers are in the process of adapting to the new Single Farm Payment and environmental schemes and this may lead to more rapid restructuring compared to the Lozere region, particularly amongst hill farms. Farmers are looking at the new environmental schemes as a way of offsetting the reduction in livestock subsidies but, particularly in the Lake District, this may not provide as much income as the existing Environmental Sensitive Area schemes. There remains a gap in income to hill farmers as a result of the changes that is, as yet, not being addressed in England and Cumbria.

Our French colleagues were very concerned about the impact of the changes to the Common Agricultural Policy on hill farming and there is great impetus from both agencies and politicians to minimize the negative effects in the Lozere region. In England, decision making on the future of the Common Agricultural Policy and environmental scheme payments has largely been made on a national basis with far less input from local agencies and therefore less ability to influence local schemes.

Perhaps a key lesson to be learned from Lozere is that local politicians, farmers and agencies should be given more control in deciding the future of support to hill farmers.

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