



German herders unite to influence policy and public in 2026



Shepherds throughout Germany and in neighbouring countries are taking advantage of the IYRP2026 to achieve their aims. In October 2025, shepherds from seven German Federal States met in Muehlhausen, Germany, together with representatives of the *Bundesverband Berufsschäfer* (Federal Association of Professional Shepherds) and the *Vereinigung Deutscher Landesschafzuchtverbände* (Association of German Federal State Sheep Breeding Associations). The meeting was moderated by Walter Aigner, wool expert and documentary filmmaker from Austria, who also leads the Animal Fibre Working Group of the Global Alliance for Rangelands & Pastoralists (GA4RP), formerly known as the IYRP International Support Group.

The shepherds drew up a road plan for several events in 2026, with the overarching goal to lobby the European Union with regard to the next Common Agricultural Policy (GAP) so that the economic viability of pastoralism can be maintained.

Their first activity in January 2026 is at the large agricultural fair *Grüne Woche* (Green Week) in Berlin, where the shepherds will launch the IYRP 2026 with an exhibit of the work of herding dogs and a church service dedicated to herders. They are planning a march with successive flocks of sheep and goats through all of Germany's Federal States and onwards to Brussels in order to draw attention to the diverse contributions of pastoralism to society and nature. Symbolically, a shepherd's crook will be passed from flock to flock. This crook will be blessed at the Green Week in the church service on 25 January 2026. During the Green Week, shepherds will greet visitors to the fair, introducing themselves and their herding dogs, and will talk about their work and the pasture landscapes they steward.

The shepherds' march to Brussels is planned for October 2026. This follows the example of the march involving shepherds and their flocks from Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxemburg in 2010 (see www.youtube.com/watch?v=ol3fnBcrCJE) – and that march was, in turn, inspired by the event each October in Spain, where several thousand sheep pass through the Spanish capital Madrid. The shepherds in Germany decided to use the same motto they developed for their march in 2010: "*Wir pflegen die Landschaft, die Sie lieben!*" (We take care of the landscape you love!)

They are encouraging herders from all over Europe to join them on their march to Brussels. In the coming months, they will compile a document that clarifies their concerns and will hand this over to the European Union in October.

Still further awareness-raising activities are planned regionally in Germany and across state and national borders. The following topics, which were discussed during the Muehlhausen meeting, will be incorporated into these activities: necessity for continuation of herding, training of young herders, and the specific situation of women shepherds trying to balance their vocation with caring for their families.

It is noteworthy that the shepherds who met in Muehlhausen agreed to leave out the topic of wolves, over which they have had heated discussions for years. This is because they want to build a united campaign during IYRP2026 to raise awareness about the importance of pastoralism in Europe and to lobby the European Union so that pastoralism can continue.

by Ann Waters-Bayer based on reports by the shepherds Christiane Geiger and René Jeronimus