

Near-Natural Grazing – Benefits for Nature Conservation, Land Use, and Society

Statement on the Conference at Kirchberg Castle (September 18–20, 2026)

As part of the UN-proclaimed International Year of Grasslands and Pastoralists (IYRP 2026), the supporters emphasize the outstanding importance of near-natural grazing* for the preservation of all natural resources through this sustainable use of the landscape. They recommend creating the right framework conditions and appropriate support mechanisms to achieve this.

Near-natural grazing promotes the ecological “Big Five”—the foundations of our existence:

1. **Biodiversity** - high biological diversity, promotion of dynamics and natural processes
2. **Landscape** - structural richness and aesthetics, including for recreation and tourism
3. **Climate** - climate-resilient vegetation; potential for carbon sequestration and fire prevention
4. **Water** - preservation of unpolluted water bodies; natural flood protection
5. **Soil** - conservation and regeneration of the finite resource that is soil and its functions

Near-natural grazing is an opportunity for agriculture and food security

Landscapes characterized by near-natural grazing are part of our cultural heritage; they foster a sense of identity and provide a sense of home. Near-natural grazing produces high-quality products, creates regional value chains, and opens up new income opportunities. It also offers a solution to climatic, ecological, socioeconomic, and societal challenges. In the context of a “Planetary Health Diet” it contributes to sustainable food security, meets high standards of animal welfare, and thereby strengthens agriculture.

Near-natural grazing is essential for biodiversity

It should play a key role in achieving the central goals of the EU Recovery Regulation (WVO) and the Global Biodiversity Framework (CBD), because it effectively restores ecosystems to a resilient state and maintains them. Likewise, near-natural grazing is an urgently needed component for strengthening green infrastructure and ensuring effective habitat connectivity: grazing animals connect natural areas and enhance their value.

Near-natural grazing requires the right framework conditions

To ensure that the costs of near-natural grazing are covered and that it is effective in terms of land use, practical funding instruments and planning certainty are needed. These include: combinable entry-level programs, multi-year land-use programs, animal-specific support, and investment incentives. The CAP and the Action Program for Natural Climate Protection (ANK) offer opportunities to present the positive effects of near-natural grazing in an economically viable and future-proof manner. Suitable framework conditions can be created through effective collaboration between policymakers, administrators, scientists, and practitioners. This makes a paradigm shift possible that appropriately rewards and values the benefits of near-natural grazing.

* What is near-natural grazing?

The degree of naturalness and the biodiversity benefits of grazing are determined by the interaction between the type of grazing animals, grazing management practices, and site-specific conditions. These benefits increase the more closely grazing practices are aligned with natural models, particularly the key functions of large herbivores in grazing that is as year-round as possible. Characteristic features include an average, moderate impact adapted to the vegetation, as well as a high degree of spatial and temporal heterogeneity in vegetation and structures, with dynamic changes.



The following institutions support the Kirchberg Declaration



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