

SUMMARY OF ARTICLE: [HTTPS://DX.DOI.ORG/10.12795/REA.2024.I48.02](https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/rea.2024.i48.02)


## Sheep and goat farming in Los Pedroches (province of Córdoba, Spain) in the context of sustainable development

**Ricardo Manuel Luque-Revuelto**  
[ch1lurer@uco.es](mailto:ch1lurer@uco.es)  0000-0001-6148-4043

**Daniel Moreno-Muñoz**  
[gt2momud@uco.es](mailto:gt2momud@uco.es)  0000-0003-2264-263X

*Universidad de Córdoba. Departamento de Ciencias Sociales, Filosofía, Geografía y Traducción e Interpretación, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras.  
Plaza del Cardenal Salazar. 14001 Córdoba, España.*

**Rubén Giménez-García**

[cruben.gimenez@um.es](mailto:cruben.gimenez@um.es)  0000-0001-7889-994X  
*Universidad de Murcia. Departamento de Geografía, Facultad de Letras.  
Campus de la Merced. Calle Santo Cristo, planta baja.  
Universidad de Murcia. 30001 Murcia, España.*

### KEYWORDS

Sheep and goat farming  
Agricultural crisis  
Depopulation  
Cultural heritage management  
Los Pedroches (Cordoba, Spain)

### INTRODUCTION

The region of Los Pedroches with the Guadiato Valley and Sierra Morena itself, make up the northern part of the province of Cordoba. It is a territory characterized by its rugged relief and a weak human occupation. However, it has an important agricultural and livestock tradition, a vocation that is currently struggling with the socioeconomic and demographic crisis that affects the areas of the Andalusian mid-mountains.

The purpose of this work is to analyze the current situation of sheep and goats in the region of Los Pedroches based on the hypothesis that it can play a central role as an agricultural activity that allows a sustainable territorial development, the conservation of biodiversity and the maintenance of the cultural values of the region in fragile landscapes such as those of Sierra Morena.

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology used in this work is based on the use of different research techniques based on the postulates of geographical analysis. The sources used have been heterogeneous and are based on bibliographic consultation, statistics and existing cartography. It has also been necessary to study technical documents published by public and private institutions that reflect rural development policies. On the other hand, field work and semi-structured interviews with livestock farmers were essential to understand the spatial and socioeconomic reality of sheep and goat farms.

**DOI:** <https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/rea.2024.i48.02>

**Formato de cita / Citation:** Luque-Revuelto, R.M., Moreno-Muñoz, D., & Giménez-García, R. (2024). Sheep and goat farming in Los Pedroches (province of Córdoba, Spain) in the context of sustainable development. *Revista de Estudios Andaluces*,(48), 33-48.  
<https://dx.doi.org/10.12795/rea.2024.i48.02>

**Correspondencia autores:** [ch1lurer@uco.es](mailto:ch1lurer@uco.es) (Ricardo Manuel Luque-Revuelto)



## RESULTS

The sheep and goat herd in Los Pedroches is, after the cattle herd, the most important in the region and is home to two thirds of the number of farms in the province of Cordoba. The sheep and goat herd in Los Pedroches reaches 482,256 head, according to the 2020 Livestock Census. This figure represents 13.13% of the Andalusian herd (3,670,279 head) and 2.58% of the national herd (18,678,301 head). Organic production is particularly relevant since it represents around 70% of the provincial total and more than 80% of the production units in the region.

In the last decade, the number of farms and head of cattle in Andalusia and Spain has been reduced. On the other hand, in Los Pedroches the number of head of cattle has increased by 33,666, which indicates that these farms, although fewer in number, have increased in size. This fact corroborates the farmers' commitment to these herds, but also the attempt to make their farms profitable with higher production. Such a high number of farms and head of cattle requires agro-industrial facilities or specialized farms, and so there are eleven feedlots, two slaughterhouses and five typification centers.

Likewise, in the last decade there has been an important restructuring of the sector with the registration of the farms in producer groups, among which COVAP, Merinos del Sur, Dehesas Cordobesas, Dehesa de Los Pedroches and San Miguel stand out. Also noteworthy is the presence of the EA Group S.C., a group of cooperatives that integrates sheep producers from Andalusia and Extremadura based on the initiative of Corderos del Sur and Oviso with the aim of taking advantage of the opportunities presented by new markets, such as Turkey or Libya, Eastern Europe, the Middle East and Asian countries.

In addition, in Sierra Morena, most of the farms remain in extensive farming in a beneficial way, taking advantage of natural pastures in the *dehesa*, also in forest areas or in stubble fields in arable land, or even, and more recently, in olive groves. But it is in the *dehesa* where extensive sheep farming is best adapted, since it is relatively simple to manage, requires few livestock installations and respects the repopulation of trees or heritage elements such as fences or abandoned rural habitat. In addition, it allows the differentiated use of leguminous and grass pastures in coexistence with extensive cattle, and where the *dehesa* is well formed with large trees, it coexists with the Iberian pig under the *montanera* system. The use of native breeds resistant to climate and seasonality and adapted to the ecological conditions of the Mediterranean mountains, is another of the sector's strengths. They have also been metaphorically attributed the denomination of firefighters or firebreakers due to their intake of herbaceous plants and scrub, which reduces the capacity of fire to spread.

It is difficult to delimit the heritage and cultural elements associated with the activities related to the breeding and exploitation of sheep and goats, as they have a centuries-old tradition that includes very diverse historical, natural, demographic, agrarian, architectural, social and cultural aspects. Also, the livestock activity of small ruminants is found in the existence of an extensive intangible heritage such as oral traditions, folklore or gastronomy.

Today, the livestock sector is still very dependent on official aid because it records low profits in relation to the investment made, requires a high level of labor dedication and the farms are largely family farms, owned by men, with a high average age. The lack of PDO, PGI or other certified private guarantee brands that provide greater national and international visibility to their products and consumer confidence is a major competitive disadvantage in an increasingly globalized market. The other problem that affects the products derived from this livestock is the scarce consumption in the homes, being the case that there is a delocalization of the production of this sector with respect to the main centers of consumption. Regarding the production of skins and wool, which was so important in the region until the middle of the 20th century, it can be said that it has practically disappeared. With respect to CAP aid and subsidies, livestock farmers consider them insufficient to alleviate the consequences of the reduction in demand due to the pandemic or the current rise in farm costs, which have drastically reduced the meager profit margins of these and lead producers, in order to survive, to increase production to the limit, in which case other problems appear, such as overgrazing, which puts the sustainability of the *dehesas* at stake.



From the heritage point of view, there is still a long way to go for the study, conservation and enhancement of the heritage left in the region by pastoral activities in its multiple dimensions –historical, natural and landscape, demographic, management techniques and practices, architectural, social or cultural, in both tangible and intangible aspects–, opening up a very extensive field for future research. These tasks will contribute, in addition to strengthening the identity of Los Pedroches, to economic development in different economic sectors. Thus, because of a landscape, patrimonial or cultural differentiation on a regional scale, this economic diversification can take place and it would constitute a tourist attraction of the first order, under the modality of a rural tourism, demanded by a generally urban population that seeks to establish a contact with the natural environment.

## CONCLUSION

In short, in the region of Los Pedroches there are more than 1200 sheep and goat farms, most of them extensive and organic, with breeds adapted to the ecological conditions and which are integrated spatially and functionally in the *dehesa*, labor and olive farms. The production of meat, milk, and its derivatives, as well as hides and wool from Los Pedroches has an excellent quality and therefore a great potential under the protection of possible PDO and PGI. It also plays a beneficial role in the forest areas of the Cardeña and Montoro Natural Park, taking advantage of natural pastures and reducing the risk of fires.

We are therefore at a crucial moment: Los Pedroches, and Sierra Morena as a whole, have sufficient endogenous resources to lead or reinvent their own rurality through sustainable economic growth that reverses depopulation, being sustainable livestock one of the pillars of these purposes. It is plausible and necessary to alter the unstoppable evolution of the rural world, but in a sustainable way, because only in this way will it be able to continue maintaining the beauty of its landscapes and preserving its heritage and signs of identity. The sheep and goat sector is, therefore, strategic in the region from all points of view: economic, environmental, social and cultural, but equally important in the context of Sierra Morena, from the consideration of the revaluation of mountain areas, the structuring of the territory and the population and settlement of rural areas.