

## Submitted Abstract

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<b>First Author</b> First Name Last Name	Michail (1) Amanatidis
<b>Submitting Author</b> First Name Last Name	Maria-Anastasia Karatzia
<b>Correspondence</b>	karatzia@rias.gr
<b>Co-Authors</b> >> E-Mails will be not listed	Karatzia, Maria-Anastasia (2); Basdagianni, Zoitsa (3); Mitliagka, Paraskevi (1); Kasapidou, Eleni (1)
<b>Organisations</b>	1: University of Western Macedonia, Greece 2: ELGO-Dimitra, Greece 3: Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece
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## Abstract

Goat breeding is one of the most important sectors of animal production in Greece and the Region of Western Macedonia in particular, as it is instrumental in the development of its mountainous and disadvantaged areas. The contribution of goat farming to the protection of the local natural environment is equally essential, through the conservation of natural pastures, which are not suitable for the breeding of other productive animals or for the cultivation of plant species, under the pressing effects of climate change.

Traditionally, dairy goat farming is based on summer transhumance, where the animals utilize the pasture by converting it into products of high nutritional value in a sustainable way. Transhumance is practiced as a form of pastoralism that first appeared in Greece in the 15th century as a seasonal activity (from early May until late October) along steady, predefined routes.

Approximately 154 thousand indigenous, undeveloped goats are managed in farms located in Western Macedonia, a predominantly mountainous area with over 47000 hectares of natural pastureland, with a significant number of them practicing medium distance transhumance (50-100 km distance from their wintertime location), utilizing pastures of unique biodiversity and producing grass fed traditional cheese and yoghurt of high quality. Although dairy products from summer pastures are well sought after by consumers, transhumant goat farmers face an array of challenges, including the degradation of pastures, shortage of water, limited product distribution network and increased expenses.

At the same time, Western Macedonia region, once the most carbon-intensive area of the country, has entered a delignification process. Supported by the Just Transition Mechanism as a guiding principle of economic transformation, lignite phase-out plan includes the creation of livestock zones in the region, as well as actions on the restoration of degraded land. All the above, create a future changing landscape, through which both opportunities and challenges for goat transhumance, arise.

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