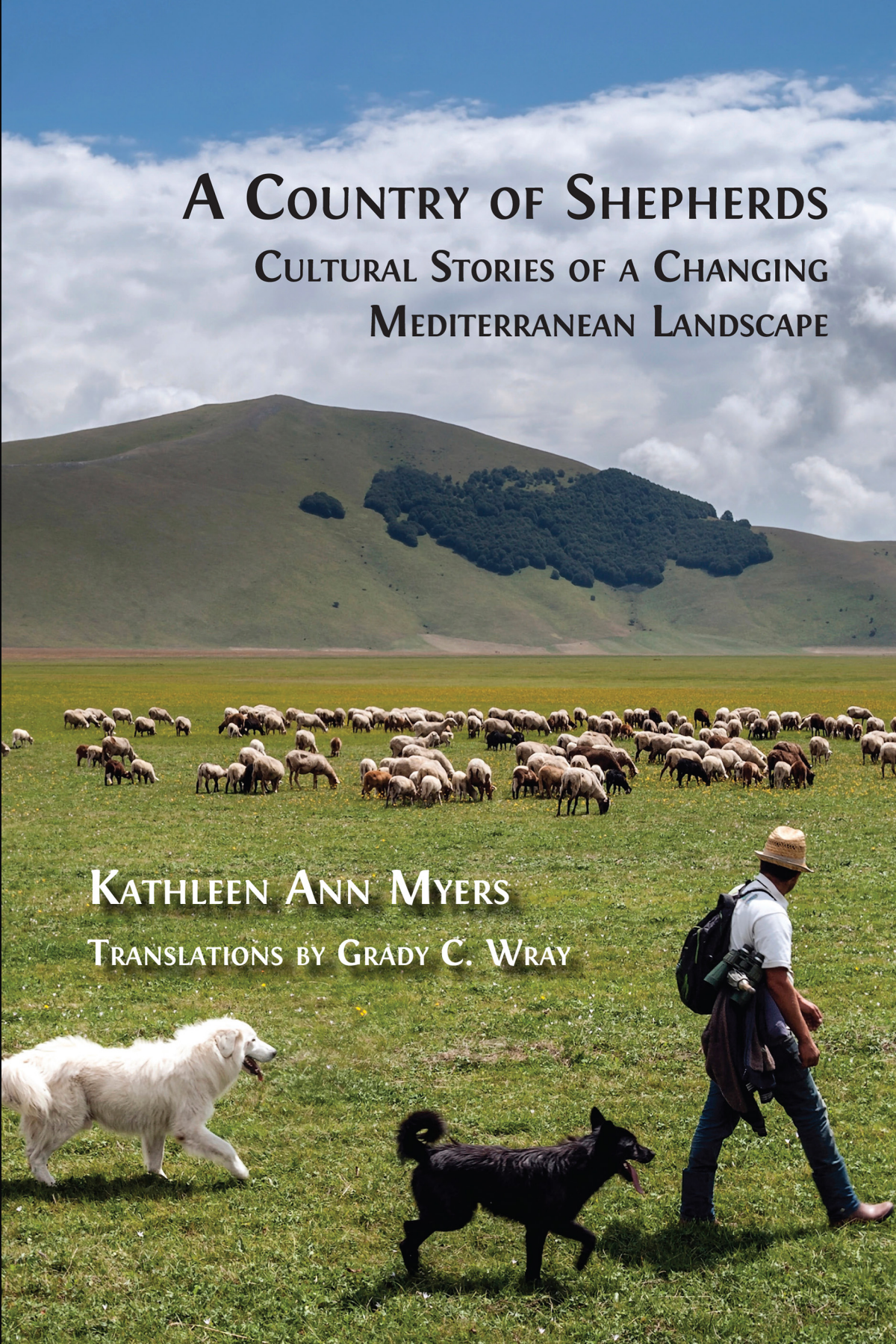
A Country of Shepherds

Cultural Stories of a Changing Mediterranean Landscape



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https://www.openbookpublishers.com

ISBN Paperback: 9 978-1-80511-206-8
ISBN Hardback: 978-1-80511-207-5
ISBN Digital (PDF): 978-1-80511-208-2
ISBN Digital ebook (EPUB): 978-1-80511-209-9
ISBN XML: 978-1-80511-210-5
ISBN HTML: 978-1-80511-211-2
DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0387

Cover image: photograph by Costagliola (purchased from Deposit Photos, ID: 266971314)
Cover design: Licia Weber and Jeevanjot Kaur Nagpal

5. New Initiatives within Tradition: Ernestine Lüdeke and the Dehesa San Francisco and the "Fundación Monte Mediterráneo" (Santa Olalla del Cala [Huelva])

> Every consumer, everyone who eats, needs to understand the cost to humanity of mass production of food sources at low costs and how they fail to support a viable future; society has to pay a lot to make up for the harmful effects to the environment.
>
> The fragile, biodiverse *dehesa* is one of the last defenses Andalusia has in the face of the encroaching Sub-Saharan desert system, which is slowly but surely creeping north. It is up to us to be sure the younger generation understands and accepts this challenge.
>
> I think the main problem in Andalusia is that the people who have owned land have never worked on the land.
>
> Ernestine Lüdeke

Overview

From the first week of my research on transhumance and continuing through follow-up interviews five years later, people I met in Andalusia often brought up the name of Ernestine Lüdeke, the German woman" ("la Alemana"). Although she did not fit into my initial profile of traditional shepherds and their families, I soon discovered that many other Spaniards and foreigners alike are finding innovative ways to change and reinvest in traditional practices of pastoralism. In contrast to the generational knowledge that shepherds like Juan Vázquez (see Chapter 1), Fortunato

 https://doi.org/10.11647/OBP.0387.05

Guerrero Lara (see Chapter 2), or Pepe Millán (see Chapter 3) inherited from their ancestral community, the story of Ernestine Lüdeke is that of an outsider who has become very much an insider in her efforts to conserve and revive pastoralism, as both extensive grazing and transhumance, and to promote the viability of western Andalusia's valuable natural resource, the *dehesa*. She works actively to integrate quality food production, biodiversity, and social change at local, regional, national, and trans-European levels.

Ernestine's story is rooted in her nature and character, but also on the *dehesa* she has spent much of her adult life cultivating. She raises Merino sheep on the Dehesa San Francisco that she and her husband Hans bought for farming. The sheep spend the winter in Andalusia and the summer in Northern Spain on both public and private lands controlled by the regional government of Castilla y León. During the five years that I have known Ernestine, she has worked tirelessly and collaboratively to find the best way to move thousands of sheep twice a year. The Dehesa also serves as the headquarters for their NGO, the "Fundación Monte Mediterráneo" (FMM), which focuses on moving food systems toward long-term sustainable models by supporting a wide range of biodiversity and sustainability initiatives all centered on pastoralism.

Ernestine's story is also about her neighbors, the people of Santa Olalla del Cala, a small town of 2,000 near her *dehesa*. While Ernestine's passion is driven by both ecological and practical considerations, she is also a strong advocate for the partners who live and work alongside her in rural Andalusia. All of her meat and dairy are made fresh, either on the farm or by friends and neighbors nearby. Ernestine employs many people in the town, a boon in rural Andalusia, where any industry is greatly valued. She also maintains connections with many small-scale rural entrepreneurs, such as the baker who makes the dark bread that she had little access to outside of Germany. Ernestine understands the need to develop rural life and how this need connects with farming. Not surprisingly, when we visit the town, many locals seemed to assume that we are German and greet us warmly, as if to say, "any friend of Ernestine's is a friend of mine."

Ernestine is equal parts teacher, organizer, farmer, cultural interpreter, environmentalist, and spokesperson. "I'm really a little bit of everything," she comments, "you need to be really flexible here!" She works with farmers to combine tradition with innovative ideas, and with government bodies and NGOs to help them understand farmers' issues. She also hosts camps

and seminars to teach new generations about the countryside and food production. Her multifaceted approach has been featured in television shows, such as Canal Sur's *Tierra y Mar, Europeos, Destino Andalucía*, and *Europa Abierta*, as well as in newspaper articles and academic studies (e.g., Gordon and Holl, 2020). Her work models new ways to make the Andalusian *dehesa* sustainable. When Mar and I visit, we find that this mission to share her work with a broad audience includes keeping on hand a generous selection of coffee, wine, and beer. She has a deep desire to share not only her success but also her convictions. Toward the end of this chapter, in fact, we'll hear directly from her shepherd-manager, Daniel, who was trained in one of Ernestine's courses for new shepherds.

The Visit, the Farmhouse, and a Vision for the Future

When I first contact Ernestine, with no introduction other than her phone number from a journalist who had interviewed her, she immediately invites us out to see her farm. We set out the very next day from Seville. Following her directions to the Provincia de Huelva, we climb into the Sierra Morena, close to the Sierra de Aracena and los Picos de Aroche Natural Park, and wind past rolling hills, ravines, and *dehesa*s verdant with the onset of autumn rains after a scorching five months of record-breaking heat and drought. As another thirteenth-century frontier castle of Santa Olalla del Cala emerges on the horizon, we veer south before turning down a dirt road to the Dehesa San Francisco and drive through a trough that disinfects the tires; we continue four more kilometers through dry scrubland spotted with the characteristic oaks of the southwestern *dehesa*s. We continue along the bumpy terrain, past a giant oak on the left and forests of cork and holm oaks on either side. All along the side of the road, we see enclosures for a few cows and hundreds of sheep with mastiffs watching over them.

Entering the Dehesa, we first pass an old white farmhouse, called Vallebarco, which has been remodeled with the aid of EU funds for rural development to create a large educational center that can house twenty overnight guests. The road ends at a modern farmhouse that boasts elegant floor to ceiling windows and a swimming pool. When we get out of the car, a blond, blue-eyed German woman in her fifties energetically greets us (along with two somewhat suspicious guard dogs). Ernestine Lüdeke has just finished a day's work with a handful of shepherds

involved in a local version of transhumance that she spearheaded. Inviting us into the large, modern living room while she prepares coffee and biscuits for us in the adjacent kitchen, Ernestine talks easily about her life and work. In any interview with Ernestine, the question about her origins and motivations soon comes up. Why Spain? Why pastoralism?

Fig. 5.2 Ernestine with a hawk on the *dehesa* (2021).

Born in Germany and trained as a teacher, Ernestine found the German educational system too rigid. She left her home country at age twenty-eight and took a teaching position in Spain. Instead of teaching as planned, however, the multilingual German was soon hired by the government of the Spanish Socialist party (PSOE) as part of the project to "modernize" Spain's image at home and abroad in the decade after the transition to democracy. The Ministry of Culture drew on Ernestine's knowledge of the European Union and appointed her as both a cultural interpreter and a public relations spokesperson for major concerts and theatrical productions in the capitol. By the early 1990s, the German Minister for Culture hired Ernestine to help create a pavilion for the recently unified Germany in time for the opening of the 1992 World's Fair in Seville. There

she met her husband, German CEO Hans-Gerd Neglein. Together, they began to realize a shared vision, first by buying and restoring the Dehesa San Francisco as a working farm. Unlike Marta Moya, who inherited a successful *dehesa* from her parents (see Chapter 4), Ernestine and her husband bought their *dehesa* from a Sevillana family that had owned it since the early 1800s but who no longer kept it up.

During the first years on the *dehesa*, Ernestine secured funding for a handful of shepherds and flock owners to carry out transhumance by foot. A few years later, they hired trucks and have been practicing transhumance this way ever since — like Fortunato Guerrero Lara (see Chapter 3), taking advantage of being able to have extensive grazing year-round but avoiding the many difficulties of transhumance by foot. In fact, each year they have more sheep being transported back and forth, reaching 13,500 in November 2021. When it comes to shepherding, Ernestine is not driven by nostalgia. Her interest and commitment to transhumant shepherding is very practical: after carrying out an ecological and economical calculation, she saw the benefits of exporting the sheep for a season to summer grazing sites, as opposed to importing water and feed to semi-arid Andalusia. The traditional practices allow the *dehesa* to rest and regenerate and the mountain pasturelands up north to be put to use. The future of transhumance, she asserts, "must be practical, must be strategic, and we must choose our priorities."

Ernestine and her husband have also created the "Fundación Monte Mediterráneo" (FMM), housed in the Vallebarco farmhouse. The mission of the organization is to promote sustainable management of the *dehesa* ecosystem and to educate policy makers, farmers, shepherds, and even school-age children in its on-site educational center. Hans and Ernestine run the foundation as an NGO together, as President and Vice President, although they have distinct roles. While Hans contributes to the Fundación's longevity through funding, the day-to-day work is primarily in Ernestine's hands. She works hard, gets dirty, and is tireless with her chores and the care of their land. Ernestine takes little time for holidays or vacations but prioritizes her other passion outside her job by participating in spiritual retreats. What began as a love affair with her adopted country has turned into decades of work on multiple fronts to save Andalusian ecosystems, landscapes, and lifeways she is so passionate about.

As we share coffee and biscuits, Ernestine continues to talk about her life, the *dehesa*, and the work of the "Fundación Monte Mediterráneo", and it becomes clear to me that the very skill the Spanish and German governments found useful in the early 1990s — her ability to interpret rapidly changing nations and their places in the world and find innovative ways to educate the public — has been invaluable to her work at the FMM and the *dehesa*. When she and her husband bought the Dehesa San Francisco, it had been owned by the same family for over 200 years and had fallen into disrepair. The family lived in Seville and visited just a few times a year. "The last generation of brothers and cousins didn't have any idea about farming or animals," she remarks. "They couldn't care less." Only recently, and after twenty years of conservation work and repair, is the *dehesa* approaching its rich natural-life capacity. To accomplish this, Ernestine and Hans have re-introduced traditional farming methods for sustainable land management, including cork cultivation, extensive grazing, and even protection of animal species that had disappeared from the *dehesa* (primarily rabbits and vultures, along with certain amphibians). With the help of a manager, Ernestine oversees the daily operations of the *dehesa*, but she also works actively to integrate quality food production, biodiversity, and social change at local, regional, national, and trans-European levels.

Today, Dehesa San Francisco and the "Fundación Monte Mediterráneo" are a Spanish, and indeed European, reference point for educational programs and summits on biodiversity and the unique contribution that the *dehesa* system and extensive grazing practices can make to sustainable food practices in Andalusia. One example of this work is the day's work she has just finished with shepherds who are practicing transhumance with her. At the all-day meeting, she reports, they decided to pool resources to pay for grazing rights in public lands in Palencia, up north in Castilla y León, hire local shepherds there to tend the flocks, and rent a truck to transport their sheep in a modern-day transhumance. Ernestine observes that this system, while not ideal, still provides economic and environmental stability to both Northern and Southern Spain:

> We can neither be pure romantic ecologists and historians nor ignorant, stubborn farmers continuing five hundred years without change. We need to face the facts nowadays and find a way to reinstall transhumance in a new way as part of live organic husbandry. We need to get to a point where it can be part of a more global system.

When I ask Ernestine about transhumance in general and how this system looks moving forward, she recognizes that traditional practices (as well as public awareness about them) are always shifting but sees establishing good ecological and economic structures as key. Her deep commitment to transhumance and extensive grazing includes applying for funds to help offset costs, organizing farmers, negotiating stringent laws about licenses and blood tests for animals, and bidding at auctions to rent public-land pastures in the north. For this system to work, Ernestine explains, she must re-apply annually for transhumant funding to cover the difference between what farmers must pay (twelve euros/sheep) and the real cost. Sheep just don't bring enough at market to pay for this practice, but the benefits to the environment by far offset the costs, she explains. In addition to easing these costs, Ernestine has helped with logistical issues by successfully advocating for a change in testing laws. For example, transhumant livestock no longer need blood tests in the rockier pasturelands up north before returning to Andalusia. They are now quarantined and retested for diseases upon their return to the Sierra Morena each fall.

Ernestine shares a basic goal with Jesús Garzón — whom we met at the Festival of Transhumance in Madrid (see the introductory chapter) — to revitalize transhumance. He has worked to grow the total number of sheep that make the journey by foot along one of the main vías *pecuaria*s. If at least 20,000 sheep do a biannual transhumance, he believes, it would reestablish a green corridor — clearing droving roads from encroaching vegetation and fostering biodiversity. The practice would then be sustainable, benefiting the animals, land, and local communities. As of 2021, Jesús Garzón and others he works with had thousands of sheep and hundreds of goats. On the other hand, Ernestine, like Fortunato Guerrero Lara (see Chapter 3), says that doing transhumance by foot is not viable because so many of the trails have been paved or grown over, and there is so little access to water and shelter along the way. She gives the example of doing transhumance by foot this year. When a retiring shepherd asked Ernestine for help to return one last time along a transhumance route he had done for decades but stopped about ten years ago, she agreed. It took thirty-four days, and they found there often was not sufficient access to trails or water. Yet, she argues, it is critical to keep transhumance going to ensure that sheep are not overusing land in the south but also helping to clear lands in the north. Every year, Ernestine continues working, despite

the many "headaches and hassles", to increase the number of sheep involved in seasonal migration. She has succeeded by using new forms of transportation, which is the only way to ensure many of the benefits of transhumance to the environment and nearby communities.

For this work, the primary consideration right now, Ernestine believes, is to ensure that there are people who want to continue in the profession; the number of young people wanting to become shepherds has dropped dramatically since the turn of the twenty-first century. She observes:

> It doesn't make sense to fight for trails when we don't have shepherds to take care of the sheep. We need to be practical and first fight to attract young people to shepherding. We need scholarships for shepherds, training, a new management system. In twenty years, it will be too late.... Everything needs to come together. We don't want to fall back into this romantic view of walking with two or three thousand sheep with no telephone and no nothing. But it doesn't make sense either to say "well, it's not a good idea so we'll produce lambs in factories." We are trying to find a way to ... create a new consciousness for the real ecologic structure. Because a good ecological structure is a good economic structure. And a good economic structure is producing meat without any harm to society and creating biodiversity in the north and the south.

Besides offering scholarships, other practical, concrete aspects of creating a new management system are needed. Ernestine notes just a few. First, there need to be new labor conditions that provide quality-of-life guarantees and access to modern amenities now considered essential, such as access to Wi-Fi and a pool of substitute shepherds who travel to give people a day off each week. Second, there needs to be a center to organize logistics. According to her vision, there would be one center located in the north and another in the south that would help coordinate transport of livestock, ensure land access, and train shepherds for work in each of the regions.

The Dehesa San Francisco: Reestablishing a Sustainable System

After coffee, we leave the farmhouse, and Ernestine shows us around the *dehesa* itself, a multifunctional entity with traditional Merino sheep at the center but also includes other livestock, including cows, pigs, and

goats. Traditional farming with sheep on Andalusian *dehesa*s needs to be understood as part of a larger system, she explains:

> Sheep are the perfect landscape architects in Southern and Northern Spain! And they need to be used in conjunction with a philosophy that each geographical area can make a contribution to a global system of food production and preserving ancient landscapes and biodiversity. We all know about how sheep and goats clean the fields, fertilize the soil, ensure reseeding of native flora, and keep brush from growing and causing vast forest fires. But it is the more global system and how different geographies work together with different roles in food production that needs to be recognized and instituted as well.

She drives us up dirt roads through oak, Portuguese holm, and cork trees, allowing us to view different pastures where the five hundred Merino sheep in her flock are separated according to life cycles and roles in maintaining the flock. Like the flocks of Fortunato Guerrero Lara (see Chapter 3) and Marta Moya (see Chapter 4), Ernestine's flock is separated into different groups with newborns kept close to the barns under the watchful eye of the mastiffs; the yearlings separated from their mothers now; the sheep selected for breeding another year; and others that are now ready for market. Although we are tempted to get close to a handsome two-year-old mastiff, Ernestine reminds us that these are not ordinary house dogs. The dedication of the "Fundación Monte Mediterráneo" to the ancient landscape and shepherding practices influenced their decision to raise only Merino sheep, the foundation of the medieval wool trade. She has deliberately selected the prized Merino breed to raise because of its good quality meat and wool (which is now experiencing a revival due to its soft texture and warmth with artisanal co-ops, as well as global market changes that have benefited the price of Spanish sheep products).

The farm itself is not economically self-sustaining, Ernestine allows, but she and her husband Hans have a vision for the *dehesa* that is expansive and just part of a larger rural-development plan. Besides the Merino sheep, they also raise some cattle, Iberian pigs, chickens, donkeys, and horses; they also harvest cork and grow a variety of garden vegetables. As we drive through a grove of *alcornoque* (cork) trees, Ernestine points out that the harvest, always tricky, has been especially slight this year. The bark from cork trees can only be cut every nine years, and because of climate change and extreme temperatures, a new fungus (*Phytophthora cinnamomi*) has begun

to grow on some of the trees and create a dry rot, making it impossible to harvest the bark. If not checked soon, the trees will most likely die. This would not only affect the cork harvest but also the entire ecosystem of the *dehesa* since the trees also provide much-needed shade for livestock. Rather than dwelling on this challenge, though, Ernestine points with delight to a couple of rabbits running toward a ravine in the rolling hills of the *dehesa*. The property, she explains, had been overhunted, and there were no rabbits left by the time they bought the place. Since purchasing the property, they have successfully reintroduced rabbits, among many other animals.

The cultural geography of the *dehesa* makes it an ideal place to combine Ernestine's vision of sustainable food production and land management with hands-on experience and educational-outreach efforts. Traditional land-use and animal-production practices must be integrated with innovative structural changes. Producing meat on the land, for example, is not only viable but an essential part of a healthy ecosystem. It should be done in rural areas with agroecosystems that cannot produce anything but meat and milk, like they do in the Swiss mountains, she argues. Lower elevations should be reserved for appropriate crops like cereals and vegetables.

> It's crazy to occupy these lower areas for industrialized meat production; it should be done in areas not as well adapted for agriculture, in areas where grazing would help fire prevention, biodiversity. This arrangement might make meat more expensive, but at least it won't have a negative effect on us. Society has to pay a lot of money to make up for the harm of these industrialized companies and their meat production.

As we continue touring the land, Ernestine tells us about the collective "Ceribeco" that she and others founded to process and market meats and organic lamb. The collective markets their own brand of pork, cold meats, and other meats, providing the support for direct sales and a system for ensuring the shelf life of products that Fortunato Guerrero Lara had earlier talked to us about (see Chapter 3). As she talks, I begin to appreciate the breadth of her understanding, vision, and energetic involvement in all the moving parts that must work together to bring about rural development and sustainable food systems. She and Hans have invested their life savings to revitalize a property, raise livestock through extensive grazing and transhumant practices, process the meat they raise, and finally market it through a local collective they helped to establish. For Ernestine, this is true

rural development: a practical way to reverse trends that have caused such harm to ecosystems and led to the countryside becoming depopulated.

From her life experience, Ernestine has gained an exceptional understanding of global systems. She clearly sees the roadblocks to developing opportunities for different regions in Spain to work together within European Union guidelines. Besides the challenges of grazing itself, there are many deeply ingrained structural impediments, including historical systems of ownership, social attitudes about modernity, and demands for lower food costs, and the more general lack of knowledge about the special conditions of the Andalusian *dehesa*.

First, and surely the most difficult to overcome, is a system of land-animal ownership-caretaking that goes back to Christian reoccupation of Muslim lands. Nobles received enormous tracts of land as spoils of war during the reconquest, and these became the foundation for large estates and farms whose legacies still shape the region today. In fact, the origin of the word "*dehesa*" comes from "defensa."

> I think the unfairness, the real socially very cruel system starts after the Muslim occupation. Christians split up community land, and of course the people who received the most land often weren't those who loved the countryside but greedy people who wanted to get out as much as they could from it. That's where I think this kind of insane relationship to the countryside starts. People who live on the countryside and work on the countryside are poor and have miserable living and working conditions. The people who own the land couldn't care less about it or the workers. They probably visit once, twice, or three times a year.

Local farmers still generally do not own land, and, as Juan Vázquez already pointed out (see Chapter 1), shepherds are not allowed to own more than four or five sheep or goats for their family if they do not have land to graze them on. Most of the owners live in the city and simply draw on the rents of the farm. As we saw with Marta Moya (see Chapter 4), some farm owners are trying to change this pattern of absentee landownership, but it is hard to do. A look at the genealogy of the ownership of Dehesa San Francisco itself reflects the ancient land-ownership system of large, landed estates specializing in agricultural exports. Originally established during Roman times, this land-use pattern persisted in Andalusia at least through the nineteenth century. In the case of Dehesa San Francisco, a single family owned more than

a half-dozen farms in the area, which were then passed down to two sisters. One of the sisters built the first farmhouse on the Dehesa San Francisco and owned several other farms. A descendent, who wrote a history of the family's farms, comments on the dismal living conditions for laborers:

> Life in rural areas was awfully hard until the seventies. But in the seventies, farm laborers began to have a chance to buy a house in town and live there. But before and right after the Civil War, they didn't have any other options except to live wherever they could: in some farm outbuilding on the land, like area barns or pigpens that were scattered around the *finca*s. The luckiest got to stay in guard houses in Nava, San Francisco, and Pan de Pobres, or in the bigger houses of El Risco of El Cuervo or Vallebarco. (Manuel Duque Álvarez, *Historia de la Finca*, Fundación Monte Mediterráneo, (n. d.), https://www.fundacionmontemediterraneo.com/img/upload/files/historia.pdf)

Centuries of sharp division between those who own the land and those who work it have maintained an enduring gap. Many owners do not understand — and sometimes do not even care — about the welfare of their land, animals, or workers. The workers, in turn, may not be invested in making good decisions about land use and animal production they do not own. Ernestine describes in more systemic terms how the historical land-work division has contributed to widespread rural poverty in Andalusia.

> The lack of respect for rural knowledge and rural structures and rural possibilities ... is also why in Andalusia the rural population lives extremely poorly and extremely badly. So, it wasn't really an asset to live on the countryside. Unlike other areas in Europe and often in the United States, the owner of the farm does not work on the farm; in Andalusia the owner of a farm lived in Seville or in Córdoba. The person who worked on the farm never owned anything, and if you are working constantly on something which is not yours, it's very difficult to feel identified with the needs of an agroecosystem ... you're being badly paid, badly treated, exploited and whatever. Or, if you have a nice income, you don't have to really be aware of the negative aspects of it, or even live them, so why should you?

As Ernestine talks, I reflect on the irony behind stories I have heard from Juan Vázquez (see Chapter 1), Pepe Millán (see Chapter 2), and Fortunato Guerrero Lara (see Chapter 3). As far back as Cervantes,

the shepherd has been idealized by urban elites as an exemplar of the balance between nature and human emotion. And yet, shepherds have been denigrated as ignorant and uncultured, presumed to be living in filth with animals. The class and land struggle over the centuries has only been exacerbated by recent cultural ideals of modernity as urban, mechanical, and technologically driven. Ernestine gives a compelling modern-day example. Sheep have recently been used as "firefighters" to clean under powerlines for the utility companies, but because of a whole modern infrastructure created to maintain these areas with machines, there are people with strong interests in ensuring that the mechanized process continues. Furthermore, workers would often rather use a machine and gas than walk around with sheep. She observes:

> The social status of working with machines is much higher than working with animals. The people working with machines don't use their knowledge, or the knowledge of farmers and shepherds, because cleaning the brush under powerlines with nice machines and using petrol for this work is viewed socially as much better than walking around with two thousand sheep to do the same work.

Ernestine talks about the contrast between how shepherds were viewed in the Middle Ages and the social stigma they fight today:

> The people who traveled with sheep, the sheep keepers who would walk up and down the droving roads, were people with a very high cultural standard. They would bring different fruit from the north to the south, they would tell stories and they would bring information. They were considered culturally educated and trained because they would travel to places where most people couldn't because they would just stay in their village. Nowadays anybody who works with sheep is considered the last idiot from the village.

As a self-proclaimed insider-outsider, Ernestine looks back a bit nostalgically to a time she views as the golden years, when the prestigious medieval organization La Mesta protected shepherds' rights (see the introductory chapter). She also looks toward a future with new pathways to food production, biodiversity, and sustainability. Just as La Mesta had core values with integrated structures and widespread societal respect, she believes that increased public awareness together with the development of an equal exchange between practicing shepherds, farmers, and government officials can lead to new structural

models that could not only revive pastoralism but also launch it into being more central to Andalusia. However, Ernestine argues, there needs to be much more support and encouragement for a dialogue between farmers, shepherds, landowners, and the government. These entities cannot remain in different camps, and they must work together to create an infrastructure and train the work force needed to save the *dehesa* and mountain pasturelands from further economic and ecological damage.

> It's very nice to have organic farms, and it's very important to have organic farms. But if we just talk about here an organic farm and there an organic farm, we won't make it. We need a more global system. We need something like La Mesta. We need people to understand that we must get back to structures. We need to help people in the south and in the north match their interests. We need people who breed dogs, people who have sheep, people who produce certain products that we need for the dogs. We need architects who can construct simple housing in the north where people can stay. And we need modern people to tell us how, with solar panels, we can make warm water and have cell phones work. We need a structure for all this stuff.

Training the Future: The "Fundación Monte Mediterráneo" Educational Center

After our tour of the farm, Ernestine invites us into the educational center she and her husband have built over the old farmhouse of Vallebarco. In harmony with local building traditions, it is tastefully finished with white-washed walls and terracotta floors. The ground level has several seminar rooms with tables long enough for about twenty people. Upstairs, there are dorm-like rooms with communal bathrooms for overnight stays that are often occupied with guests living there for days or weeks at a time. Taking a seat at the table, Ernestine offers us coffee and a delightful collection of local pastries. Without much prompting, she continues to describe an impressive range of initiatives and activities the center offers: education of trainees from the European Union, a base for researchers carrying out ecology studies on the *dehesa*, organic food-production seminars, workshops for shepherds, and, recently, a gathering place to establish a national association to advocate for a new status for the *dehesa* within the Spanish and EU landscape.

Fig. 5.3 Olive trees, cork trees, and Merino sheep are the key to a healthy dehesa and, in the distance, the conference space for the "Fundación Monte Mediterráneo" (2017).

Ernestine explains that every year the center offers a variety of programs to encourage people to make food choices that help biodiversity and social development. In addition, they host programs that research, implement, and put into motion additional biodiversity initiatives. She gives the example of a recent FMM offering: a "bioblitz," funded by a Swiss foundation. Around 120 volunteers identified over 750 species of flora and fauna on the *dehesa* in a single weekend. They presented the results to the EU and the Junta de Andalucía as further evidence in their petition to make the *dehesa* ecosystem a special category within shepherding regulations. The FMM also sponsors programs that focus on social development and the role food production can play. Working with a Catholic social-services organization in Seville and a six-acre plot, they hosted a three-month program for at-risk young adults. After completing classes in organic farming and marketing techniques at the organization's center, the group spent nine months working the gardens in Seville. Seven of the original ten participants, Ernestine reports, are now employed in

related fields. Next, there are knowledge share and training programs. FMM has applied for LEADER funds from the European Union to enable candidates from six countries to learn about the traditional shepherding practices, foods, and culture that Andalusian systems offer.

In yet another key initiative, the FMM addresses the critical shortage of shepherds. Ernestine created her own shepherd school when she found it difficult to get interns from Andalusia's *Escuela de Pastores*. Securing funds from the Swiss government, she trained four aspiring shepherds in the first year and has had great success in placing them: while she hired one as her new farm manager, two others participated in the transhumance to Palencia, and a fourth secured funds for her own *explotación* (large herd) of goats and now grazes them on public lands outside of Madrid. Ernestine seems to take in stride that this 100% successful outcome should be the norm for shepherd schools.

Wanting to understand better the current crisis in finding skilled, dedicated *ganadero*s and shepherds, I asked to interview Ernestine's shepherd-manager, Daniel, who trained recently at her own school for shepherds. He replied via email, and his story provides a glimpse of a new generation that did not grow up around livestock — or even in the countryside. Daniel's response was written as a single document with its own narrative cohesion. Although it is a contrast to the "walking around" farm interviews we have heard, his story illustrates well a promise for the future. Daniel articulates the attraction, hardship, and value of his new vocation — and he gives us hope that others will follow:

> My uncle, who passed away earlier this year, took care of goats when he was young. Although he had to stop, he always felt as if he were a shepherd, and he would have liked to have kept on doing it. I think about him a lot, and it motivates me to live out his dream.
>
> Shepherding is very special because it has gone from being a rather common profession in earlier times to the way it is today, with less people wanting to dedicate themselves to it and its tradition of preserving a part of our history and customs. Also, it demands you understand the animals, in this case the sheep, and the great psychological commitment it takes to spend hours alone, exposed to the weather. But it also has great value, for the way it cares for nature and the environment: taking care of a flock of sheep and moving them around the mountain lands benefits and regulates the growth of vegetation, soil preparation, and seed planting. Besides, the concept of a shepherd is one of a person who perfectly understands nature and its cycles. In many cases there's a

> knowledge that you can't find in books. You can only acquire it through spending many hours in the mountains with the animals. It also has the value of freedom, of being away from all the everyday "pleasures" that can distract you.
>
> The truth is I am lucky that my family has always supported me. They are really happy I'm doing what I like and what makes me feel good, which is how I feel when I'm living as a shepherd. They consider it a good and necessary job. As far as my friends are concerned, the truth is that many of them admire me for what I am doing. I talk to them or send them pictures, and many of them say: "I wish I could change jobs with you and live where you are." However, it's also true that other people, not so much my friends, but people I know, have asked me if it wouldn't be better to find something more related to what I studied and with better work conditions.
>
> As to the future of farming, the forecast is not very good, due to the politics around agriculture and the lack of generational legacies in this sector. But yes, it's true that this new generation might produce some people who'll try it, and it could create a good base to preserve these professions. Things are going to have to change for people who work in agriculture as well as for the shepherds.

Daniel outlines for us the support he feels from family and his desire to leave the city to find meaningful work as a *ganadero*-shepherd, a profession crucial to a sustainable future, as we will see in the Conclusion to our book. He later underscores that while much more must be done to make it a viable, sustainable profession, the FMM has been a good place to start.

Ernestine is never idle. Increasingly frustrated by working with government agencies and programs sensitive to highly volatile politics of regional and national elections, she is also applying for EU funds under its climate-change initiative to establish her own program of firefighting sheep (see Chapter 6) while also working to develop nature tourism. She notes that, in Andalusia, after decades of Socialist government, a recent shift in political parties included a radical change: the *Ministerio de Medio Ambiente* (Ministry of the Environment) was merged into a much larger ministry, now called the *Ministerio de Agricultura, Ganadería, Pesca y Desarrollo Sostenible* (Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock, Fisheries, and Sustainable Development), where the focus on environment has been sandwiched in between other areas. With so much political reorganization, regional and national governments have not been able

to sustain initiatives for rural development and the protection of fragile cultural and economic agrosystems.

Although Ernestine's confidence in government at all levels, including the European Union, has waned in recent years, she believes there is still hope in engaging the private sector and encouraging consumers to make sustainable choices. One example she cites is local agrotourism, which she sees as critical for Andalusia. The coast is dangerously over-developed, but the interior holds great potential. Developing tourism here would go hand-in-hand with conservation of natural ecosystems and even the reintroduction of traditional natural zones and practices, such as working farms, transhumance and transterminance, artisanal cheesemaking, local food preparation, and weaving. As she talks about her vision, I recall Patricio Vázquez's new venture to establish a working goat farm and hotel outside of Constantina (see Chapter 1).

At the core of all Ernestine's initiatives is her belief that all citizens need to be educated on these issues, from the European Union officials in Brussels to the children who will be making decisions about where their food comes from in the future. To this end, every summer, Ernestine offers internships on the farm in organic food services, as well as youth camps. Offering instruction in the English language (which is seen as "modern") is a draw for the camp, where participants end up living, working, and eating as people traditionally have done in the countryside. Along with language skills, they learn that sustainability does not have to be a chore. All the food served is certified organic, and much of it locally produced. Many children leave the camp with a new-found appreciation for healthy organic food and sustainable lifestyles. Ernestine hopes they will return home to influence their families and remember this experience when they become consumers. She remarks: "Every consumer, everyone who eats, needs to understand the cost to humanity of mass production of food sources at low costs and how they fail to support a viable future; society has to pay a lot to make up for the harmful effects to the environment." On a personal note, my own research assistant Lara Hamburger, who is an American living in Madrid, met Ernestine and was quickly recruited as an English-speaking camp counselor one summer. She recalls that, on the first day, children grimaced over the sheep-milk yogurt, but, by the end of camp, they were fighting over the strawberry flavor, agreeing that it was the best yogurt they had ever eaten!

Beyond training a new generation of shepherds and children, Ernestine also works to modify EU guidelines that fail to take into account Andalusia's unique landscape and the advantages of ancient methods of extensive grazing. European Union requirements present so many practical challenges that many farmers cannot meet them. As we talk today, she is outraged by a recent policy established by CAP: the European Union's agricultural-subsidy program for *dehesa*s like hers will now prorate/adjust subsidy amounts based on aerial photos that determine the percentage of the total acreage of pasturelands that is not in shade. "That is pure craziness," she exclaims. Sheep and goats depend on the light shade provided by *dehesa* trees, especially the cork, holm oak, and olive trees. These trees allow vegetation to grow and are part of a staple diet for small livestock. The sheep graze around these trees and help prevent forest fires by reducing undergrowth, so the animals and trees depend on each other for balance. Fueled by objections to this policy change, Ernestine and others are working with an Association established in 2014 to defend and advocate for the *dehesa* system, FEDEHESA (http://fedehesa.org/).

We must wrap up the interview because the camp parents are coming. Parents of children who will be spending part of their summer at the *dehesa* have been invited out to the farm today to have a look around and ask questions. "The fragile, biodiverse *dehesa* is one of the last defenses Andalusia has in the face of the encroaching Sub-Saharan desert system, which is slowly but surely creeping north. It is up to us to be sure the younger generation understands and accepts this challenge," she remarks as we leave. As it turns out, the famous sustainable-systems activist who introduced me to Fortunato Guerrero Lara (see Chapter 3), Paco Casero, has a granddaughter attending the camp. Both he and Ernestine give us the same warning: if nothing is done to stem industrial agriculture and meat production, much of Andalusia will be a desert in fifty years. When I talk with Paco, he has a personal perspective: "I want my great grandkids to know what it is like to have green landscapes in their lives."

Knowing our time is short as we say goodbye, I ask Ernestine for a thumbnail summary of what is needed for the future she envisions, and she lays these needs out once more: steady work in rural areas, new innovations linked with traditional knowledge, more investment from the private sector (governments are too mercurial), more attractive conditions for a new generation of *ganadero*s, and the reintroduction of

transhumance both to develop the rural interior and to support tourism. But the fundamental building block for all of this is a broader change in consumer preferences. Ernestine concludes, "there isn't much time left; this way of life, this natural world is disappearing fast.... I want to believe ... step by step people will change."

Walking back to our car to head into town, Ernestine makes us promise to return soon for a social dinner to taste the farm's products, but for now she suggests we go to the town restaurant for a local Sunday meal. We are not disappointed. The owner spots us from the doorway into the kitchen and sends out a few local olives and acorn-fed *ibérico* ham to tide us over while we wait for a table to open. The place buzzes with local diners and people having an *aperitivo* at the bar. Once seated, we savor tender grilled lamb with rosemary and a vegetable soup made with the early spring harvest. Ernestine's farm is not only reviving the traditional *dehesa* and transhumance while training local, national, and European Union youth, farmers, activists, scholars, and government officials; it is also a catalyst for rural re-development in Santa Olalla. I can easily envision this area, with its proximity to Seville and beautiful landscapes, as a base for Ernestine's vision of rural tourism that includes farm and pastoral activities.

The long-term contribution of Ernestine and the "Fundación Monte Mediterráneo" on the local and national level is hard to quantify or project, but their work has already contributed to the changing of laws, developed funding opportunities, and supported practices related to traditional grazing in Andalusia. Perhaps most importantly, it has changed minds. Ernestine has turned her one-time status as an "outsider" to tradition and place to her advantage. She has a unique experience with global systems, as well as an understanding of smaller-scale social development possibilities. From school-age children to EU officials, she — along with many collaborators — is making an impact as a conscientious farmer-landowner, educator, and a visionary. As we return to Seville, winding back through *dehesa*s, mountainous pasturelands, and rural villages, we carry with us the hope that Ernestine's vision of slow but steady change throughout society (one she shares with Juan Vázquez (see Chapter 1), Pepe Millán (Chapter 2), Fortunato Guerrero Lara (see Chapter 3) and Marta Moya Espinosa (Chapter 4)) is possible — and that it will happen before it is too late.

Conclusions and Update

When I check back in with Ernestine in Fall 2021, her practical ideas and extensive collaborative efforts remain strong despite the deep financial losses of the Educational Center after a year and a half of pandemic-enforced inactivity. At the forefront of her work today is the culmination of a three-year project with Goovinnova (www.goovinnova.org), a collective that is working to make transhumance viable, as well as with the European Union group "LIFELiveAdapt", devoted to making extensive grazing sustainable throughout Southern Europe. The final meeting with the latter group just took place in Córdoba, bringing *ganadero*s together with other specialists and officials. As Ernestine describes the meeting, I soon realize how interrelated the world of pastoralism in Andalusia has become: when Fortunato Guerrero Lara (see Chapter 3) could not take my phone call earlier, it was because he was at this very meeting providing his valuable experience as a *ganadero*.

Along with other projects, Ernestine has once again prioritized training new shepherds and helping to establish new norms for their living and working conditions. "Once we have enough shepherds wanting to be in the profession, enough workers for the sheep and goats, and living conditions to keep them in the profession, then we can focus on trails," she argues. She nevertheless remains grateful to Jesús Garzón and all he has done for transhumance (see the introductory chapter), stating emphatically: "If it weren't for Jesús, we wouldn't even be talking about transhumance today!" In fact, Ernestine argues, transhumance can grow. In 2022, her collective once again sent over 10,000 sheep up north, and the move ended up being vital for the well-being of both the *dehesa* and her animals. As one of the hottest, driest summers on record, water became a problem for many people working with livestock in Andalusia. Now people are inquiring about joining her collective transhumance next summer. She explains:

> The problem is: people now understand and appreciate the service pastoralism performs for the eco-system, but the practice is still not fully remunerated. The government only pays two-thirds of the cost for transhumance because the government is afraid farmers will take advantage of subsidies, but there is no way to cheat! Each animal has a tag or a chip, is registered in a database, and must have a transport certificate. It is easy to track the animals and make sure they exist and are moved from south to north and back again. *Ganadero*s don't have time

> to find funding every year for the other third of the costs, and the final market price for the meat does not cover it.

If *ganadero*s received full support for transhumance, she argues, many more would do it and thus benefit more ecosystems and produce higher nutritional value in foods purchased by consumers.

While Ernestine sees great strides in a growing awareness of the importance of pastoralism to Spain's future, she says there have also been huge setbacks at the level of government — namely, the Junta de Andalucía's closure of its separate ministry devoted to the environment. In addition, the European Union's new draft of CAP funding for 2023, with its recalculation of subsidies for pastoral practices, will most likely hurt the very people, the *ganadero*s, that make it all possible.

Ernestine's case illustrates how practitioners and supporters of traditional pastoralism face both the complexity of the system and the many unresolved threats to it in the twenty-first century. Yet her story also highlights how small, collective initiatives are seeking to reestablish extensive grazing and transhumance in a modern setting with stronger support networks. Ernestine herself combines the role of landowner, *ganadera*, and leader who is helping to create the scaffolding for pastoralism in Andalusia and beyond.