

Host Report on

Dealurile Clujului Est Learning Area – Romania, cross-visit to Western Stara Planina Learning Area- Bulgaria

Visiting LA: Dealurile Clujului Est

HNV-Link partner: USAMV Cluj-Napoca Romania

Host LA: Western Stara Planina Region

HNV-Link partner: STEP Bulgaria

Period: 4th-7th of July 2018

1. Participants in the cross-visit:

Between 4th -7th July 2018, a group of 12 stakeholders from the Dealurile Clujului Est Learning area, Romania visited Western Stara Planina (WSP) Learning area. The group consisted of 3 researchers, 2 advisors and 7 farmers (Annex 1). The visit was hosted by the STEP team, farmers and NGOs from Western Stara Planina, some of which also attended the cross visit to Tarnava Mare region, Romania.



Fig.1 Participants in the cross-visit

2. The objectives of the cross-visit were:

- Exchange experience, knowledge and best practices, between HNVF farmers and processors from Bulgarian and Romania Learning areas;
- Promote the HNVF innovations from WSP LA and share ideas for their possible replication in Romania;
- Create partnership between Bulgarian and Romanian HNVF farmers and stakeholders.

3. The agenda of the cross visit is presented in Annex 3. A brief description of the HNVF innovations visited is presented in Annex 4.

Day 1: 4th July 2018

The first day was dedicated to travel to Western Stara Planina LA. After the arrival of the Romanian

team a short presentation of both teams was done, followed by a brief presentation of the HNVF values of Western Stara Planina.



Fig.2. Presentation of WSP LA and the participants in the cross visit

Day 2: 5th July 2018

The participants were divided into 2 groups.

The first group (mainly farmers) visited the Linbul farm, where the farmer Pavlin Antonov and his son took the participants to the HNV grasslands and explained about the farm and farm management technique. The farm is situated at 1400 m and currently has 65 grass fed Angus Aberdeen suckler cows. Pavlin explained his farming techniques for management of the HNV grasslands and the on-line marketing and sale of the meat. Tibor Kiss, a young farmer from Romania has a farm managing 500 ha of land. Last year they bought around 200 Black Angus cows. He was very impressed by the way Pavlin is managing the grassland and even discussed with him the possibility in the future he or someone from his farm to come for a few weeks/a month to Pavlin's farm and learn how to manage the grasslands and the cows.

"First of all I liked the farmer as a person and what he is doing on the farm. I was impressed by the management of the farm, the cows and the way the farmer is managing them. I discussed with him the possibility in the future to come to the farm for a few weeks and learn how to manage the farms"- said Tibor Kiss.





Fig. 3. At the Linbul farm

The second group (researchers and representatives of the LAGs) went to the municipality of Varshets, where a presentation of the activities of the “Local initiative for Varshets” NGO was done by Tatyana Petrova. The group was greeted by the Mayor of Varshets – Mr. Ivan Lazarov who explained the priorities of the municipality – development of tourism (the existing mineral water springs in Varshets made the city the first spa resort in Bulgaria) and development of nature friendly agriculture. They had had several projects together with the “Local initiative for Varshets” NGO to promote and develop both nature friendly tourist and farming activities. The NGO was fashioned to act as a Local action group in a pilot project before Bulgaria’s accession to the EU. The most successful project was the establishment of the Touristic Information Centre, created in 2005.

When Leader program started the municipality of Varshets alone was not to be supported like a LAG, since it has less 10000 inhabitants / Varshets municipality has 9 settlements (8 villages and the town of Varshets with a total population 7900 inhabitants , 5900 of which live in Varshets.. Although it did not receive EU funding, the NGO continued its work with farmers, local entrepreneurs, touristic organizations and NGOs for the development and promotion of the region. Currently it is one of the local STEP partners and together a project was submitted under the Crossborder cooperation programme Bulgaria – Serbia for extending the activities of HNV Link project on the Serbian part of West Stara Planina.

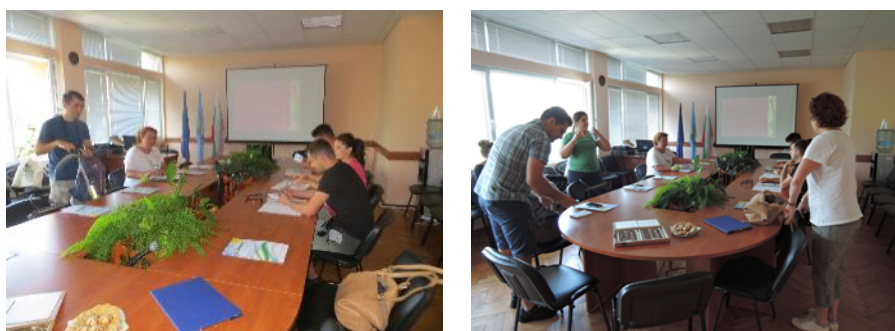


Fig. 4 Presentation of the NGO ‘Local initiative for Varshets’

The next visit was at the local dairy “Varshets”. The dairy was established 2 years ago and produces yogurt , yogurt with honey, different types of cheese and kashkaval /yellow cheese/and sells its products directly in its own shops: 20 shops in Sofia, 1 shop in Varshets, 2 shops in Vratza, 1 shop in Godech. The labels of Varshetz dairy are “Varshets”, “Topila”and Kom. The dairy process from 10000 to 20000 liters/day (sheep and cow milk) from local producers. They have a laboratory, where they test the quality of the milk.



Fig. 5 Local dairy “Varshets”

Anka Gaspar from LAG Tarnave shared her impressions: “I was impressed by the farmers from the region that are trying to add value to their products by selling them directly to final consumers. I was also very impressed by the actions of the NGO (Local initiatives for Varshets), that although they didn’t get funding from the RDP, they started building activities, identified other financial sources and they have done a great job”.

The final visit for the day was at the goat breeding farm Caryana in Yagodovo village, where the two groups met. The farmer is a member of the “Food from the mountain” NGO. The farm was established 3 years ago with 12 goats. The farmer quitted his job 5 years ago and spent 2 years in Italy learning how to produce ricotta and caciotta and curd cheese. He found land in Yagodovo village and together with 22 friends invested in founding a farm and establishing a cooperative. Currently he breeds 45 goat-mothers and 33 young female goats. He is grazing them on HNV grasslands of Yagodovo village (he owns 1,2 ha of grasslands, rents 6 ha grasslands, but uses for free around 1000 ha. He has invested in the equipment and produces Italian type of cheese cacciotta and ricotta. This is a product innovation for the area, where mainly feta cheese and yellow cheese are produced. He sells 99% of what he produces on the Sofia open farmers market (each Friday). The farmer explained that the traditional feta cheese is not suitable for goat milk. He processes around 500 litres/week (around 80 litres/day with the help of his family). He produces 7 products:

- Fresh cheese (up to 10 days) – 9,23 €/kg;
- Mature cheese – around 12,82 €/kg
- Fresh milk – 1,54 €/ litre
- Yougurt – 2,05 €/ 400 g.
- Ricotta

He can sell at least twice as much on the open market. Currently the products are reserved mainly for the shareholders of the cooperative and a very small part is sold on the open market. He receives around 1538,46€/ha from direct payments and the Natura 2000 measure. During the winter he feeds the goats with maize, wheat, barley and hay. The farm was recently equipped with a visitors’ area for wine and cheese tasting, barbecue, etc.. His daughter made a demonstration with a pottery wheel – they are planning to produce clay cups for the ricotta cheese.



Fig. 6 Goat farm „Caryana“ , Yagodovo village

The 2nd day finished with a traditional folklore group from Slatina village.



Fig.7 Traditional folklore group from Slatina village

Day 3: 6th July 2018

All of the visits of the day were to members of the "Food from the mountain" farmers' association. The association represents a farmers group – initiated through BSPB project, already a formally constituted NGO. The farmers participating in the association are selling their products each Saturday in an open farmer's market in Sofia. Common Facebook and on-line advertising; realization of economy of scale when ordering packaging, such as jars, cheese containers, etc.

The first visit was to the wood carving and old crafts museum in Meliane, where the artist Chavdar Antov presented his collection of old agricultural tools and equipment gathered from the region.



Fig.8. Wood carving and old crafts museum in Meliane

Next visit was to the „Replianka“ demonstration farm in Chuprene with 670 sheep from Repliana autochthonous breed, grazing on 200 ha HNV and Natura 2000 grasslands very close to the border with Serbia. Repliana breed is a small breed with small lambs, but with very high milk and meat quality. The farm was established 12 years ago with 60-70 sheep. He processes around 100 litres/day. Two years ago a family dairy was built on the farm. It produces yogurt and feta cheese only from the sheep of the farm. The cheese is sold on the whole territory of Bulgaria through courier companies. The farm is registered for direct sales.

**Fig.9 Repliana farm**

The next visit and the home made lunch was to the jam and lutenitza producer („Sinevka“) in Prevala (gathering and processing of wild berries and fruits from HNV grasslands. The processor - Maya Angelova participated in the cross visit to Tarnava Mare, Romania. Miroslava Dikova presented the activities, the goals and the principles of the „Food from the mountain“ Association.



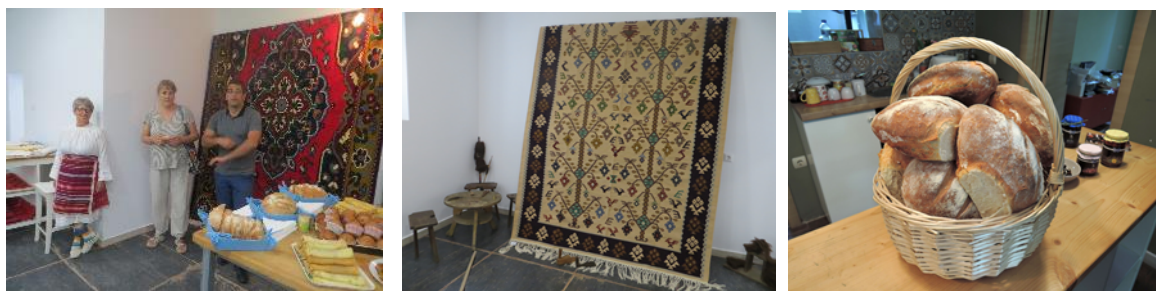


Fig.10 Sinevka processing enterprise



Fig. 11 exploring the HNV of Prevala village

After the lunch Miroslava Dikova made a presentation of the establishment and management of the Mobile advisory teams (MAT). MAT were set up mainly to consult farmers on the following issues: new knowledge and skills for HNV farming practices; funding opportunities; preparation of business plans; compliance with EU standards in the dairy sector (good hygiene practices; production practices, storage and use of manure; good agricultural practices, etc.); marketing activities (direct sales; advises on design and standardization of the jars' shape and labelling; linking farmers and consumers, organization of joint visits at fairs and exhibitions, etc.). They have seized functioning due to lack of funding.

A visit to another farmer that participated in the cross visit to Romania was planned for the evening. Due to bad weather conditions the visit was not done, and debriefing was carried out at the hotel.

4. Conclusions and lessons learnt

The cross-visit objectives were met. Connections between farmers and stakeholders were created and the debates and exchange of the ideas were very fruitful. The stakeholders that participated in both of the visits did benefit from peer learning and exchange of opinions for the situation in the two Learning areas and discussed the possible future actions and partnership for conservation and maintenance of the HNV farming systems in the LAs.

Andrei Crisan, a custodian of Natura 2000 site Dealurile Clujului Est shared his opinion about what he learnt from the cross-visit: "I have learnt a lot of stuff and I took notes for a lot of things, especially positive things. I met farmers that were positive when it comes to nature, but also for their profession. The innovation that we found here were very interesting and we

will try to implement them as soon as possible in our region, but the most interesting one was the one about the Mobile advisory teams, which were really great. ... What we found here is that there is a clear link between the proper management of the permanent meadows and pastures and the biodiversity conservation and also from the policy perspective, in Bulgaria exists the measure Natura 2000 payments, that in Romania is not still applied.”

Mugurel Jitea, the HNV Link coordinator for Romania, also shared his impressions: “During the visit we found several interesting innovations. The first one was about how a person can properly manage HNV meadows and pastures in the mountain area. Based on a very vigorous programme of grazing the person can graze 35 Angus cows and also is very inventive how he is selling his products - using 12 cows/year he can obtain enough money to sustain his family. Then we visited several innovations for milk processing and this is very interesting for our farmers, because by using not so big investment, they can process in a sustainable way their products. And finally, we saw a cooperative that developed a brand, a local brand and they are selling jams using a symbol for HNV pastures – the blue butterfly. So what I am suggesting is to visit our website where you can see all those innovations presented in more detail and also if you want more information about it, you can contact us using e-mails, Facebook and other social media.”

One of the lessons learnt for the BG host team is that the fruitful visits to the farms depend to a great extent on weather condition, and it is important always to have a backup (second) plan.



Annex 1**HNV-Link CROSS-Visits (Western Stara Planina, Bulgaria)****04-07 July 2018****Cross-visits participants list from Romania**

No.	Name and surname	Professional orientation	Organisation
1	Anca Gaspar	Advisor	LAG Târnave
2	Andrei Crisan	Researcher	LPS NGO
3	Atila Fodor	Advisor	LAG Somes Aries
4	Cuibubus Gheorghe	Farmer	Borşa, Cluj Eastern Hills
5	Florin Burzo	Farmer	Țibles Association
6	Ionut Lavinia	Farmer	Somesseana Association
7	Matei Razvan	Farmer	Chinteni, Cluj Eastern Hills
8	Mugurel Jitea	Researcher	HNV-link; USAMV Cluj
9	Petrica Leon Rus	Farmer	Țibles Association
10	Radu Pop	Farmer	Panticeu, Cluj Eastern Hills
11	Tibor Kiss	Farmer	Vultureni, Cluj Eastern Hills
12	Valentin Mihai	Researcher	HNV-link; USAMV Cluj
13	Driver		



Annex 2**HNV-Link CROSS-Visits (Western Stara Planina, Bulgaria)****4 – 7 July 2018****Cross-visits participants from Bulgaria**

No.	Name and surname	Organisation
1	Yanka Kazakova - Mateva	STEP
2	Vyara Stefanova	STEP
3	Mariya Peneva	STEP
4	Evdokia Georgieva	STEP
5	Iva Haramliiska-Tzenkova	STEP
6	Miroslaba Dikova Zervoudakis	NGO "Food from the mountain", member of HNV Link advisory boards
7	Pavlin Antonov	Farmer, Linbul Farm
8	Tatyana Petrova	NGO "Local initiative for Varshets"
9	Maya Angelova	Food processor, Sinevka company
10	Petar Denkov	Farmer



Annex 3

Visit in LA Western Stara Planina, Bulgaria

Agenda

4 – 7 July 2018

Day 1: 4 th July 2018	
	<p>Arrival and accommodation Chateau Slatina, Slatina village https://chateauslatina.wordpress.com/</p>
	<p>Depending on the arrival Short presentation of the LA 'Western Stara Planina' and existing HNVF innovations</p>
	Networking and dinner in Chateau Slatina
Day 2 : 5 th July 2018	
9.00 – 14.00	<p>1st group Visit to Linbul farm (7participants+ STEP representative) HNV Innovation: new farming systems (beef grass-fed cows), farming techniques for management of HNV grasslands (rotational grazing) and on-line marketing and sale of the meat (EFNCP HNV video) and participation in HNV AE measure and Natura 2000 measure. https://www.facebook.com/LinbulFarm/ http://efncp.org/publications/videos/farming-nature-english/ https://petrohan.wordpress.com/</p> <p>2nd group (6 participants + STEP participants) Presentation of the activities of the NGO „Local initiative for Varshets”</p>
	Lunch on the farm (1 st group) and near Varshets (2 nd group)
14.00 – 15.00	Visit to Klisurski monastery (optional)
15.00 – 16.00	Visit to Varshetsz dairy – Degustation of local products and wine from a local producer
17.00 – 20.00	Visit to a goat farm in Yagodovo village (very close to Slatina). The farmer has 60 goats grazing on HNV grasslands and produces Italian type of cheese caciotta and ricotta. The farm was recently equipped with a visitors' area for wine and cheese tasting, barbecue, etc.
	Degustation of different cheeses and dinner on the site (includes variety of cheeses produced on the farm; grilled meat, salad, dessert, wine and beer)
	Briefing and reflection
Day 3: 6 th July 2018	



	<p>Visit to 4 members of the "Food from the mountain" farmers' association (https://bg-bg.facebook.com/hranaotbalkana/)</p> <p>HNV Innovation: Farmers group – initiated through BSPB project, already a formally constituted NGO. The farmers participating in the association are selling their products each Saturday in an open farmers market in Sofia. Common facebook and on-line advertising; realization of economy of scale when ordering packaging, such as jars, cheese containers, etc.</p>
9.00 -11.00	Visit to the wood carving and old crafts museum in Meliane. Guided tour from the artist Chavdar Antov
11.00-13.00	„Replianka“ demonstration farm in Chuprene (500 sheep from Repliana autochthonous breed, grazing on HNV and Natura 2000 grasslands; traditional production of yogurt and cheese; direct sales). Degustation of the farm products
13.00-16.00	<p>Visit to jam and lutenitza producer (“Sinevka”) in Prevala (gathering and processing of wild berries and fruits from HNV grasslands; guidelines for nature friendly fruit collection and personal conduct in the mountain; direct sales)</p> <p>Meeting with producers from the “Food from the mountain” association</p> <p>Lunch on the site</p> <p>Presentation of the establishment and management of the Mobile advisory teams (MAT) will be done by the project coordinator Mira Dikova. MAT were set up mainly to consult farmers on the following issues: new knowledge and skills for HNV farming practices; funding opportunities; preparation of business plans; compliance with the EU standards in the dairy sector (good hygiene practices; production practices, storage and use of manure; good agricultural practices, etc.); marketing activities (direct sales; advises on design and standardization of the jars’ shape and labelling; linking farmers and consumers, organization of joint visits at fairs and exhibitions, etc.).</p>
	Reflections and networking
17.00 - 20.00	<p>Visit to a sheep farm (Zanogene village).</p> <p>Dinner on the site</p> <p>Meeting with a shepherd (traditional practices from the past for common livestock grazing)</p>
Day 4: 7th July 2018	
	Departure



Annex 4**Brief description of the innovations to be visited during the cross visit
in Western Stara Planina
4 – 7 July 2018****1. Linbul farm**

The innovation is a combination of introducing new farming systems (beef cows), farming techniques for management of HNV grasslands (rotational grazing) and on-line marketing and sale of the meat.

The farm is situated in Petrohan area at 1400 m and the nearest village (Gintzi) is 8 km away. When creating the farm, the farmers (Sonya and Pavlin) decided to raise free range beef cows in a country and area where the majority of the cows are dairy one and the consumption of veal and beef meat is limited (not traditional). The farm was created in 2010 and the first year they were finishing dairy bulls for slaughter to explore the climate and the grass and their effect on the cows. Their main aim was to create a herd of beef suckler cows by finishing the offsprings. They bought their first 30 Aberdeen Angus cows in the autumn of 2011. Currently they have 63 beef cows and manage 40,5 ha of HNV grassland. The farmer is applying rotational grazing system and believes that this makes the cows happier and improves the value of the grassland and the quality of the meat. They are processing and selling on-line the meat to many customers in the near capital city of Sofia.

The farm has his own blog (<https://petrohan.wordpress.com/>) and facebook page where they also share their active position on the continuous changes in Bulgarian legal acts and procedures that have negative impact on the HNV grasslands systems.



<https://petrohan.wordpress.com/>



For Bulgaria living and working in a farm outside the settlement is an innovation. The farmer believes that it is innovation for Europe to rear young beef fed only by grass without corn. The farmers think that they succeeded to motivate other young families to try their lifestyle and way of farming.

The main initiator of the innovation were the farmers themselves that decided to lease municipal grasslands and to rear beef cows. Currently they are managing their farm alone. All of the grasslands that they manage are in Natura 2000. The farmer was one of the first participants in the Agri-environmental scheme for maintenance of HNV grasslands. He suffered from the improper functioning of the LPIS system and the implementation of the famous eligibility rule of '50 trees and bushes per ha'.

One of the enabling factors for the innovation was the marketing of the meat. Before starting with the direct sales in 2013 they started to promote the beef meat together with chefs, bloggers and magazines. They were trying to convince the people that the beef meat is cock-able and eatable. At that time only dairy breeds meat was offered on Bulgarian market and the consumers were convinced that this meat is not good for cooking and eating.

Another problem was the lack of trained butchers in the processing industry, knowing how to prepare steaks form the meat. The farmers were the first one on the Bulgarian market that produced and offered aged meat. Each year they are training one butcher. They are also one of the few ones in Europe that produce 100% grass fed Angus beef.

One of the key lessons that can be drawn from this innovation is that the farmers' commitment, skills and personal belief are crucial for maintaining a HNV farm and farming systems. Pavlin really works in harmony with the nature and does not save his efforts to change the existing legal framework toward nature friendly grazing practices.

Education and knowledge sharing is a key factor and driving force for the innovation described above. Pavlin and his family invest and continuously improve their knowledge about the HNV farming, marketing and cooking. They are open minded and participate in projects with researchers, they take part in different field visits and discussions with farmers. They are not afraid to share this knowledge and to educate the others along the food chain – even consumers, chefs, butchers and local farmers with different opinion. Their efforts contribute to change the society perception of farming and farmers toward more respect and appreciation.

2. 'Food from the mountain' association

The association of farmers and small business operators from West Stara planina mountain region named « Food from the mountain » was established in 2016. The association has 9 founding members with the following profiles:

- Farmer, raising Replyana sheep (local breed in the list of breeds supported as rare breeds), managing HNV pastures under agri-environment measures and producing sheep cheese and yogurt, lamb and sheep meat; the sheep are grazing in the fields from April until December;
- Farmer raising cows in HNV grasslands area; extensive grazing; forthcoming production of hard cheese, cream and butter;
- Farmer raising goats, extensive grazing, HNV pastures management; production of pressed cheese caciota type and white Bulgarian cheese;
- Farmer raising sheep and cows – extensive grazing; production of cheese and yogurt;
- Farmer raising cows extensively; production of several types of kashkaval;
- Goat farmer; extensive grazing; production of pressed goat cheese French style;
- Honey producer – in transition for organic honey;
- Producer of jams and marmalades from forest fruits;



- Wine producer; small quantities wine from own vineyards in the region;

The association is aiming to promote the region as an area of alternative tourism offering clean food, traditional products, food tasting, wine tasting, guided tours, etc. The association also aims to preserve natural resources such as natural grasslands, pastures, wild berries and other wild fruit habitats, because their businesses depend on the availability of these resources and their sustainable management. The association also aims to organize learning networks among farmers, training courses, development and production of new products, facilitating new farmers to add value to their primary products, common marketing of goods and access to new markets. The association is in the process of establishing a «food and wine» trail linking farms, wineries, small shops and restaurants offering authentic local food.

Currently the members of the association participate together in weekly farmers' market in Sofia, national fairs and events this participation from individual became participation of the association – one or two farmers travel to the destination and sell the products of all farmers.

Mutual trust and knowledge of each others' products, production capacity and attitude towards quality have been essential for the association to happen. Each member is proud of what he produces, stands behind his product and does not compromise with hygiene and quality of production.

Unifying factors have been :

- Similar size of business;
- Similar attitude towards nature, good farming practices , good production practices;
- Same level of understanding what is a good quality product;
- To be proud of what they do and stand behind their product;
- Professional attitude towards their work;
- Cooperative, supportive and helping people.



Saturday farmers market in Sofia



3. Mobile advisory teams (MAT) (will be presented)

The MAT were set up and function under the BSPB GEF project „Conservation of globally important biodiversity in high nature-value semi-natural grasslands through support for the traditional local economy” 2007-2011. Two MAT were created and function in two pilot regions - Ponor SPA and

Bessaparski hills SPA. More than 200 farmers were consulted. 83 projects were approved to participate in the HNV pilot grant scheme developed by the project team.

The innovation of setting up MAT is a response to the farmers' needs for adequate and on-time advices, information and consultation in HNV areas (on biodiversity conservation and links between farming activities and nature conservation, funding opportunities, etc.) without additional expenses to visit services usually provided in the municipality/district centers.

MAT were set up mainly to consult farmers on the following issues: new knowledge and skills for HNV farming practices; funding opportunities; preparation of business plans; compliance with the EU standards in the dairy sector (good hygiene practices; production practices, storage and use of manure; good agricultural practices, etc.); marketing activities (direct sales; advises on design and standardization of the jars' shape and labelling; linking farmers and consumers, organization of joint visits at fairs and exhibitions, etc.).

"Face-to-face" contact and advices are required to effectively engage farmers and local authorities in conservation of HNV farming systems;

HNV mobile advisory teams have proved to be an efficient and respected partner both for the farmers and the regional Ministry of agriculture and Paying agency services and could an important part of the delivery mechanism of the future agri-environmental schemes.



4. Zanojene sheep farm

The farm is situated in Zanojene, near Varshets. It is a traditional family farm with 150 dairy sheep – Replyana and Karakachan breed. The farmer is managing 30 ha (common) municipal pasture and meadows. They are selling their products (lambs and cheese) directly to final customers in Varshets.



The interesting thing for the farm is that they are using the traditional common grazing of the sheep in the so called common herds "bilutzi". Several sheep herds are grazed together by 1 shepherd.