



Nature Conservation and Agrobiodiversity (summary)

Without anthropogenic influence, Europe today would be a relatively species poor, dark forest. Only the development of open spaces through crop cultivation and animal husbandry led to the diversity of landscape that exists today. When largely traditionally managed, they carry today the largest diversity of wild plants and animals. Thus, agrobiodiversity is an essential, integral part of biological diversity. This conclusion is reflected in the international agreement "Convention on Biological Diversity" signed in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro (CBD, Art. 2, ff). Not only are wild animals and plants worthy of protection and conservation, their domesticated relatives are equally worthy.



Small-scale farming in mountain region

Over centuries people have bred livestock and cultivated plants especially suited to their local environment. With the sustainable use of the natural surroundings, biologically valuable traditional agro-eco-systems developed within each regional ecosystem. Today these areas of high diversity belong to the most endangered ecosystems.

Yield increases, industrialisation and over-use in agricultural production lead to destruction of ecosystems and biodiversity, not only in the case of wildlife but also domesticated breeds and varieties. Relicts of once extensive regional ecosystems need to be conserved long-term in both sustainable and economically viable ways.

There are many fruitful synergies to be found between nature conservation and agrobiodiversity: The regional ecosystems worthy of protection can only be preserved in their full diversity with management. Old livestock breeds and cultivated plants, adapted to the locality, offer a low-cost alternative to elaborate technical solutions. Alternatives are:

- Grazing with old livestock breeds: robust and bred for sparse conditions they even eat mat-grasses and other rough grazing, usually need no more than a shelter. Light-footed and agile, with hard hooves adapted for harsh conditions, they keep even the most fragile areas open.
- Nature conservation with the conservation of old fruit trees: robust orchards, traditional hedgerows with fruit bushes are elements of the landscape worthy of protection. The richness of their structure serves a large community of wildlife as shelter, nesting space and nutrition.
- The cultivation of regionally typical grain and vegetable varieties can be used as a sustainable and environmentally compatible, pesticide free farming method in large nature conservation areas.
- Traditional agro-eco-systems, in which specifically adapted livestock and cultivated plants are used, conserve the functioning of ecological systems promoting soil fertility, regulation of pests and diseases and increase pollination.