

'Stinking, disease-spreading brutes' or 'four-legged landscape managers'? Livestock, pastoralism and society in Germany and the USA

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Abstract: *Comparisons between the Black Forest region of Germany and the Sierra Nevada foothills in the USA show considerable parallels in the relationship between livestock raisers and society. This becomes evident by sketching the historic course of interactions between society and pastoralism as well as the present situation. The authors emphasize that purely economic or ecological studies of pastoralism are not sufficient to explain the characteristic features of livestock farmers. In both countries a specific livestock farming culture can be characterized by team spirit, a desire for independence from the outside world, ranch fundamentalism, and a special relationship with nature. This set of values and attitudes should be considered whenever dealing with pastoralism, whether in a scientific, political or everyday context.*

Keywords: *attitudes; culture; ranching; values; Black Forest; Sierra Nevada foothills*

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Rangeland pastoralism is the world's dominant land use form, covering almost 50% of the earth's surface (Tivy, 1990). Thirty to forty million people are believed to live from pastoral economies. Defined as 'social organization based on livestock raising as the primary economic activity', pastoralism depends 'on marginal lands, often lands from which alternative forms of agriculture are barred by aridity, elevation, slope, isolation from markets, or government action that precludes other uses' (Starrs, 1998, p 11). The focus of most studies carried out so far has been on developing countries, especially in regard to development aid (Sandford, 1983). The objective of this case study is to compare the relationship between pastoralists and society in the industrial nations of Germany and the USA. While there is substantial scien-

tific and extension work on economic and ecological aspects of range management, the social and political side has often been neglected in these countries (Khazanov and Crookenden, 1984). This paper focuses on family farms raising cattle in the Black Forest area of Germany and the Sierra Nevada foothills in the US state of California. The corporate dimension of livestock raising is of only limited significance in these areas, so that the role of feedlotting and global agrobusiness will not be considered.

We sketch the historical course of the interactions between society and pastoralists, and illuminate the current relationship between livestock raisers, society, government and markets. We study how this process has stamped pastoralists' perceptions of society and how

Table 1. Characteristics of cattle-raising family farms in the Black Forest and the Sierra Nevada foothills.

Parameters	Black Forest (Germany)	Sierra Nevada foothills (USA)
Mean head of cows (N)	27	341
Mean farm size (ha)	19	1,214
Mean stocking levels (N ha ⁻¹)	1.4	0.3
Main produce	Dairy products	Yearlings
Property form of pastures	Privately and cooperatively owned land	Mix of private and public lands
Grazing system	Pasture grazing in summer, barn husbandry in winter	Transhumance from summer mountain ranges to winter lowland pastures

Source: Sulak and Huntsinger (2002); Statistisches Landesamt Baden-Württemberg (2002). Data refer to the Breisgau-Hochschwarzwald district.

specific culture, values and attitudes have developed in response. Our hypothesis is that isolated and purely economic or ecological studies of pastoralism are not sufficient to explain the specific features of livestock farmers. Identifying the historical and social context can be helpful in understanding their behaviour and in the development of communication between pastoralists and society. This seems especially important in the ongoing controversy of grazing and biological conservation (eg Knight, 2002).

Farm characteristics

Although family operations prevail in both areas, farms in the Black Forest and the Sierra Nevada foothills differ significantly in key characteristics (Table 1). Livestock husbandry requires much larger areas and lower stocking levels in California because of the different natural settings and ownership structures. The predominant production target is yearlings in the Sierra Nevada foothills and dairy products in the Black Forest. Cattle are raised primarily on private lands and commons in the Black Forest. Sierra Nevada ranchers usually rely on privately owned winter pastures in the foothills and on summer ranges in the high mountains and deserts that are administered by the US Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

Society and pastoralism in history

Black Forest: livestock as a carrier of light into wilderness

The unspoiled, apparently impenetrable landscape of dense woods in the Black Forest was not accessible before extensive clearings during the ninth to the fourteenth centuries. The Black Forest was seen as an island of wilderness surrounded by land developed and cultivated by man. Of special importance in the acquisition of land by people were the monasteries and convents that principally initiated settlement: 'But it was mainly the cloisters which... did most to give the barbaric landscape a friendly appearance; both the monks and settlers attracted by them, who with untiring industry changed the stark wilderness into fields and meadows and laid the foundations for the slowly developing villages and towns' (Sponeck, 1817, p 7).¹

The significance of pastoralism was twofold: on the one hand, it was the first sign of human culture in sur-

roundings that appeared barbaric. Pastoralism thus symbolized the victory of Christian civilization over heathen unbelief and disorder. On the other hand, livestock raising was essential for the farmers to support themselves. As the organized clearings slowly spread, the woods were used for grazing: 'The farming enterprises could not have existed without the help of the woods' (Brückner, 1980, p 160). Pressure on the pastures and especially on the forest land grew with the increasing population. Recognizing the importance of timber for their livelihoods, people began to worry about the renewal of the woods.

Driving the livestock out of the woods

So, little by little, the appreciation of livestock farming changed fundamentally. An outlook focusing increasingly on returns and usefulness contrasted with the seeming carelessness and wastefulness of the peasants' way of farming. This was especially true of the woods, which were the main source of energy for the developing towns and industries. Finally, in the second half of the eighteenth century, great efforts were made towards a general reform of agriculture and forestry, which introduced the end of the pre-industrial type of landscape. A central aim was to break up the diverse uses of the same ground and to allocate one single use to one place. Forests as sources of wood, especially for energy supplies, and pastures for the farmers' livestock to secure food for the people, should become strictly divided (Bayerl, 2000). Thus, livestock and peasants were driven out of the woods. Draconian penalties were commonly used in the implementation of this measure, which often led to bitter resistance by the peasants (Schmidt, 2002). At the heart of the matter was the intention to carry through new ethics into which the rural population was expected to fit (Beck, 1996). The checkered pattern of clearly divided uses became the ideal of a higher order, meeting aesthetic, ecological and economic needs equally and symbolizing a general upturn in civilization. 'So the aim of the agrarian reformers was not only to bring higher yields to fields and meadows, but also to do away with the disorder evident in nature and to install a 'natural order'' (Beck, 1996, p 38). These changes in agriculture were expressions of a new epoch of human ideas covered in the term 'enlightenment'. Whereas livestock had previously been seen as 'carriers of light' into the forest wilderness, they were now judged as the opposite: 'Livestock, or rather their grazing habits, from now on became the synonym,

the primary cause, of all wasteland and wilderness recognised by the modernizers' (Beck, 1996, p 31).

Sierra Nevada foothills: pastoralism as a tool for the development of the New World

The history of livestock husbandry in California began in 1769. With the aim of converting local Indians, 300 Spanish colonists settled in San Diego and Monterrey during the land expedition of Rivera–Portala–Fages and released horses, mules and cattle into California's landscape (George and Fulgham, 1989). Later livestock husbandry provided missions and military presidios with food and thus was a keystone for the development of California. A second function of livestock raising at that time was to secure territorial claims on Russia and the USA for the Spanish crown, a strategy that had proved successful in frontier areas around the world (Starrs, 1998). After Mexico's independence from Spain in 1821, food subsistence as a function of pastoralism was replaced by commercial interests in overseas trade in hide and tallow.

Expulsion due to agriculture and conservation interests

Contemporaneously with California's transfer to the USA following the Mexican War in 1848, the discovery of gold in the Sierra Nevada and the construction of the Transcontinental Railroad brought hundreds of thousands of people into the state and provoked a huge demand for beef. Disorganization, speculation and climatic extremes caused a period of largely uncontrolled grazing even in remote areas of California like the forests of the Sierra Nevada. Livestock raising increasingly lost its appeal. An 1897 report of the National Academy of Sciences assessed the economic importance of grazing as 'certainly insignificant to the injury it inflicts on the country' (Rowley, 1985, p 28). Two sides pressed hard on the livestock sector. On the one hand, a prosperous agriculture pushed pastoralists out of the fertile lowlands of California. A change in legislation formalized the changed priorities. In the Trespass Act of 1852, farmers were obliged to build fences around their fields to keep livestock out. In the 'no fence' law of 1872, however, pastoralists themselves were made responsible for crop damage caused by their animals (Bartolome, 1989). Hence livestock raisers emigrated to the foothills and the Sierra Nevada massif, where shallow and eroding soils, steep slopes and water scarcity made cultivation impossible.

In the Sierra Nevada, on the other hand, livestock raisers were soon rejected by recreationists, conservation-

ists and aesthetic groups claiming that grazing harmed the growth of trees, increased the threat of fires, and endangered water supplies. Rigorous measures for livestock control were demanded, eg by John Muir: 'One soldier in the woods, armed with authority and a gun, would be more effective in forest preservation than millions of forbidding notices' (Bartolome, 1989, p 21), and later soldiers were indeed used to keep livestock out of reserves such as Yosemite National Park. Starting with the installation of a system of forest reserves with President Theodore Roosevelt's Creative Act from 1891, the open land frontier was closed. The uncontrolled grazing of public lands was finally stopped with the establishment of the US Forest Service in 1905 and the Grazing Service (later renamed the BLM) in 1934.

Society, government, markets and pastoralists today

Society

There are distinct parallels between the historical interactions of pastoralism and society in Germany and the USA. First used as a tool for the development of unexploited areas, pastoralism later fell into disrepute as a blockade to modernization (Table 2). Finally, parts of society discovered new values for pastoralism: in Germany, this process followed a massive intensification of uses. 'Modernization' led to overproduction and often turned out to be ecologically unsound. After having enjoyed cheap agricultural products over a long period of time, society became increasingly aware of these problems.

The triggers for this reorientation were the BSE crisis and the spread of foot-and-mouth disease in Europe in 2001. Meanwhile the German government and its highly popular Minister of Agriculture from the Green Party are trying to pursue a general shift in agriculture and a fundamental reorientation of agricultural policies. More extensive, small-scale land use is being promoted, which gives more consideration to the needs of nature conservation and environmental protection and provides quality instead of quantity for consumers. The core of attention is focused on livestock farming, which, especially in the Black Forest, is seen as the main pillar for naturally sound land use. Cattle are considered to be 'four-legged landscape managers' who guarantee the region's typical landscape pattern of alternating pastures and forests. This is highly appreciated and often romanticized, especially

Table 2. Markers in the relationship between society and pastoralists over time.

Period	Black Forest (Germany)	Period	Sierra Nevada foothills (USA)
800–1400	Opening of wilderness through farmers as symbolic victory of Christian civilization over unbelief and disorder	1770–1850	Development of the New World and securing of territorial claims
1750–1900	Displacement of livestock out of the woods on behalf of modernization	1870–1940	Expulsion of livestock through rival agricultural and conservation interests
1980–today	Discovery of landscape and conservation benefits of pastoralism	1980–today	Ambivalence of hostility and cooperation

by tourists and city dwellers. In everyday life, however, there are severe conflicts over farming practices, especially with the urban population. A typical matter of dispute is, for example, mountain bikers being obstructed by fences. While farmers used to enjoy high prestige among the local population, nowadays they feel discriminated against in comparison with other professional groups (Mrohs, 1981; Pongratz, 1992).

In the USA, people have become sensitized to the problems of modern agriculture as well (eg Rifkin, 1992). Nowadays many people perceive beef production as socially and environmentally destructive. Both industrial feedlot agriculture and extensive rangeland grazing are considered to be responsible for these problems. People associate extensive ranching with heavy resource consumption, low productivity and a waste of taxpayers' subsidies. These arguments are supported by conservation biologists who suggest that livestock ranching leads to a dramatic loss of biodiversity, interrupts nutrient flows and causes soil erosion leading to desertification in the arid and semi-arid rangelands of the West (Fleischner, 1994; Noss, 1994). Other arguments are aesthetic, eg Abbey's (1986, p 53) description of cattle as 'ugly, clumsy, stupid, bawling, stinking, fly-covered, shit-smearing, disease-spreading brutes'. However, as the debate about grazing and conservation is overlaid by a massive conversion of rangelands to housing and industrial areas, more sophisticated voices are emerging. In this context, ranching is now viewed as beneficial by open-space activists, eg by a rising number of land trusts that pay ranchers for continuing their business (Huntsinger and Hopkinson, 1996).

So, as in Germany, the livestock sector in the USA is viewed by the public as: 'It's either love or hate' — uncritical enthusiasm or complete rejection (Starrs, 1998, p 19).

Government

The relationship between livestock farming and the state institutions in Germany is mainly marked by the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union, which concedes subsidies to the agricultural and livestock sectors. Area and headage payments need to be dropped as the EU becomes more open to the world market, but farmers will continue to receive considerable subsidies in future through a series of programmes (eg for high mountain farming in the Black Forest, or for environmentally sound production practices). Such close financial ties to the government cause strong dependence, which finally leads to a compulsory 'acceptance' of government regulations. The farmers interpret these payments, which are mostly independent of goods and services, as degrading alms that place little value on their work (Buhl, 2000; Maurer, 2000).

Ranchers in the USA similarly perceive dependence as the central factor in their relationship with the state. In contrast to the situation in the Black Forest, this dependence is not about government influence over markets and subsidies, but about access to the land. A land ownership structure with large areas of public lands and changing policies inhibits most US ranchers from securing access to the amount of land that is needed for ranching in an arid environment. The dependence on grazing rights on public

lands has led to strong tensions between ranchers and the government. Ranchers perceive the distant, Washington, DC-based federal government and its primary representatives, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the US Forest Service, to be fundamentally unable 'to comprehend, accept, or make concessions to the geography of the West' (Starrs, 1998, p 4). Ranchers' hostility towards government agencies has been intensified through changed professional norms and new agency missions towards 'ecosystem management' or 'management for naturalness', which has regionally brought about a complete end to livestock grazing (Fried and Huntsinger, 1998).

Markets and incomes

Since the 1970s, a process of concentration has been characteristic of livestock farming in the Black Forest. Small farming operations in particular went out of business; the rest specialized in dairy farming and tried to expand the size of their operations. Nowadays a decisive part of farmers' incomes results not from marketing products but from subsidies. It is well known that for certain types of operations, eg those with migrating sheep, there is hardly any income (Tampe and Hampicke, 1995). The once common supporting of prices through the European Union is being dropped so that farmers are confronted with an income reduction. The latest problem for the Black Forest farmers was the collapsing beef market caused by the BSE crisis and the threat of foot-and-mouth disease, which led to the most severe crisis of this sector since the end of the Second World War (Bruskowski, 2001).

Similarly, a clear rejection through market prices is a well known experience for ranchers in the American West (Field, 2002). Model income statements show that hardly any of the ranches in the American West make a profit: 'At any size, on virtually any combination of private, leased, or loaned land, with cow/calf-raising operations or with outfits raising steers on grass, in virtually any sort of livestock venture, costs were likely to overshadow profits' (Starrs, 1998, p 71).

Values and attitudes of livestock farmers

The historical responses of farmers in the Sierra Nevada foothills and in the Black Forest to a highly variable and influential social context, established values and attitudes that could serve as a durable basis and protective barrier for livestock farming.

Team spirit and dissociation from 'the outside world'

Part of this culture is a pronounced team spirit (Huntsinger, 2002). South-west German peasants, and especially socially isolated shepherds, are known for their 'sense of a common bond and solidarity' (Hornberger, 1955, p 31). Social expressions of this are to be seen in professional associations such as the farmers' associations or the shepherds' guilds in Germany, whose historical roots date back to the fifteenth century and who have created a rich cultural variety of celebrations, poetry, saints and traditions (Hornberger, 1955). American ranchers form close alliances with each other in cattle-men's associations and also foster their cultural heritage,

expressing it through traditions such as rodeo or roping techniques (Starrs and Huntsinger, 1998). The establishment of strong social ties emerges from their dissociation from the outside world. This emphasis on common values has often been exploited to push through professional interests. The picture of the hard-working cowboy *versus* the superiority of big government, external urban environmentalists, and ranchers presenting themselves as the 'true' westerners, has been effectively applied in influencing public opinion in the USA (Rudzitis, 1996).

Striving for independence

This dissociation from the outside world is related to a striving for independence, especially from the government. Traditional American rancher values include individualism and self-sufficiency (Grigsby, 1980). This has resulted in the cowboy myth becoming a symbol of freedom, independence and boundlessness throughout the world. The outside world is seen as hostile; one has to seek protection from it. In a study in Tehama County (California) 91% of the farmers complained of over-regulation, and 73% perceived society as hostile to ranching (Liffman *et al*, 2000). Urbanization is seen as the intrusion of an alien value system. German farmers perceive the state, with its attempts at influencing them, especially in the context of nature conservation acts, as the central threat. It is common to characterize nature conservation legislation as a 'creeping expropriation' or 'incapacitation' (Kobylnski, 2000; Albert, 2000), and the government is often accused of over-regulation. The peasants' defence reactions often seem to be more a socio-psychological protection mechanism than factual disagreement. This can be explained by their perceived socially marginalized position, especially with regard to modernization: 'losers of modernization' (Pongratz, 1992; Wonneberger, 1995) and by a feeling of being helpless and overstrained in the face of the constantly changing demands of society.

Ranch fundamentalism

Farmers' readiness to continue livestock raising despite missing or low profits has been described in a seminal paper as ranch fundamentalism, ie 'the attitude that being a rancher leads to a higher state of total well-being than an alternative mode of making a living and way of life could provide' (Smith and Martin, 1972). Consequently livestock farming is not primarily a production entity, it is rather a consumer product of a certain way of life. Important reasons for continuing are the intrinsic value of owning a farm and the related rural family way of life (Bartlett *et al*, 1989; Wonneberger, 1995). Obviously, what is critical for farmers' behaviour is not economic rationality, but rather their socially and culturally characterized way of life. Striving for continuity via the ownership of property turns out to be of crucial importance, especially in the face of varying demands and appraisal by society. That is the reason why extreme conservation concepts that are seen as short-term fashions are rejected while traditional conservation practices and values are felt to give orientation.

Special relationship with nature

Another characteristic of livestock farmers is a special

relationship with nature. A proximity to nature is typically stressed in conflict with society. This particular closeness is understood as being far away from scientific knowledge and has the character of a 'right ethos' or 'cast of mind' (Geertz, 1993). As a result of this feeling, farmers tend to think they have an understanding that is superior to state-examined and scientifically trained 'experts' and believe that they comprehend the real essence of nature. Peasants have cultivated the land for centuries and know best how to preserve and care for it, so the argument goes (Bruskowski, 2000). A survey among South German peasants showed that they felt they were being criticized for environmental damage, mainly 'by those who have no idea about it' (Pongratz, 1992, p 213). American ranchers also believe that they are the 'true' environmentalists. While the concept of 'environmentalism' itself is rejected, a majority of interviewed ranchers cited 'improving wildlife habitat' and 'protecting scenic values' as important objectives for their operation (Liffman *et al*, 2000). So many environmental conflicts ostensibly seem to be conflicts with underlying cultural or communicational causes (Huntsinger and Hopkinson, 1996; same conclusion for Germany in Pongratz, 1992). Farmers consider human activity in nature as especially important. After all, according to South German farmers, their special closeness to nature results from their constant work in and with it (Pongratz, 1992). To farm the land has a fundamental identity-building effect.

Conclusions

There are numerous analyses of the economy and ecology of livestock farming. These perspectives, however, do not consider the most influential factors of livestock farming, and so make its practices appear irrational. The behaviour of livestock farmers is rooted in their social and cultural context. Livestock farming often implies a particular relationship with society, which can be similarly described for Germany and the USA.

A high level of functionalization and exploitation is characteristic of the relationship between livestock farmers and society. 'Society is interested neither in forests nor in water nor in livestock but in the use which can be made out of it. If this use seems to be in danger, then (and only then) forests, water, livestock and so on are put in the center of attention and get, at least verbally, highest priority' (Moser, 2001, p 14). Society's attention to livestock farming seems to have always been relatively high. Its appreciation varies over the course of time as well as for different groups, between the extremes of absolute rejection and highest estimation. Influenced by this roller-coaster of societal assessment, livestock farmers have developed a culture whose main pillars are long-term values, dissociation, and independence from society.

This specific culture has to be taken into account whenever dealing with livestock farming, whether scientifically or politically or in everyday life. The principles of intercultural communication can be helpful in this context (see Simcox and Hodgson, 1993).

Note

¹ All citations originally in German were translated by the authors.

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