

# Farming at the periphery of Europe – challenges and opportunities for livestock farms

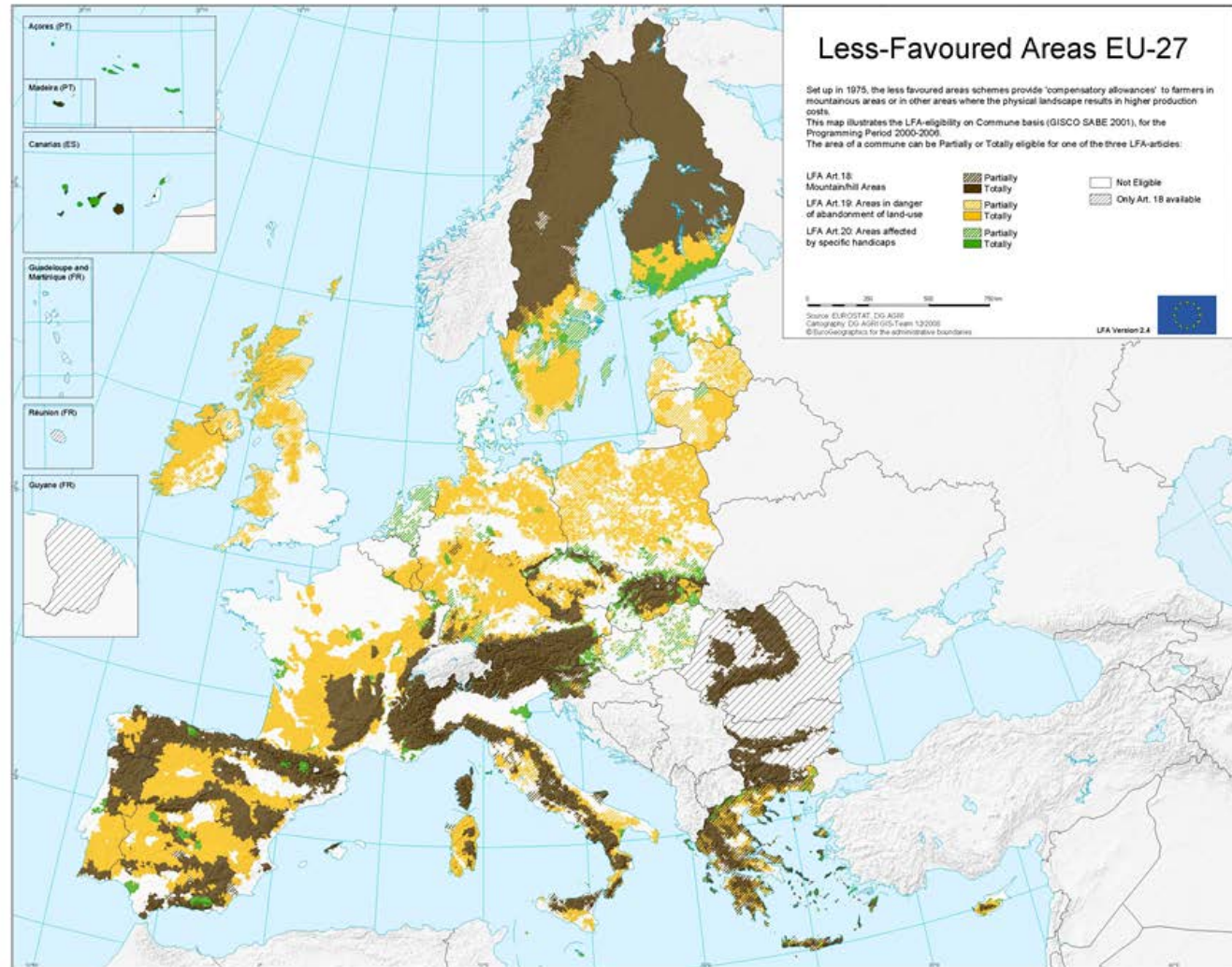


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**30 August 2016**

# Marginal Areas and EU livestock production

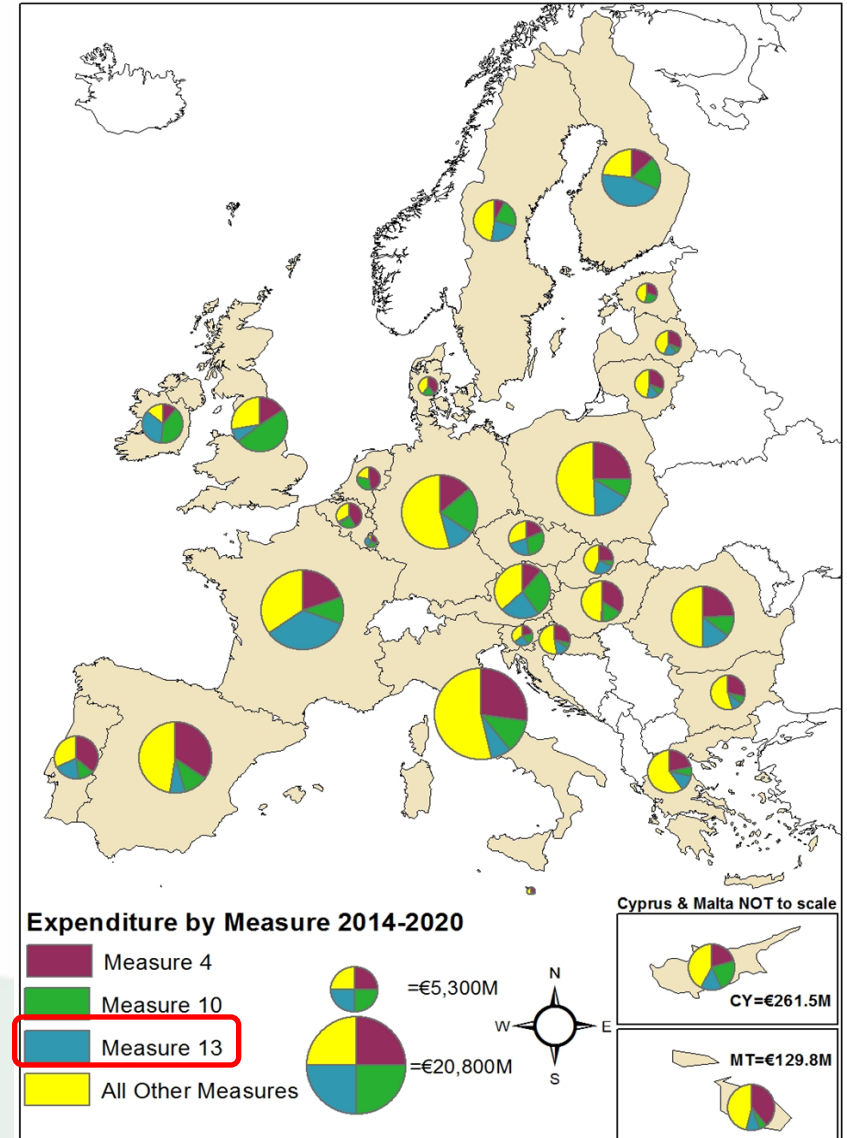
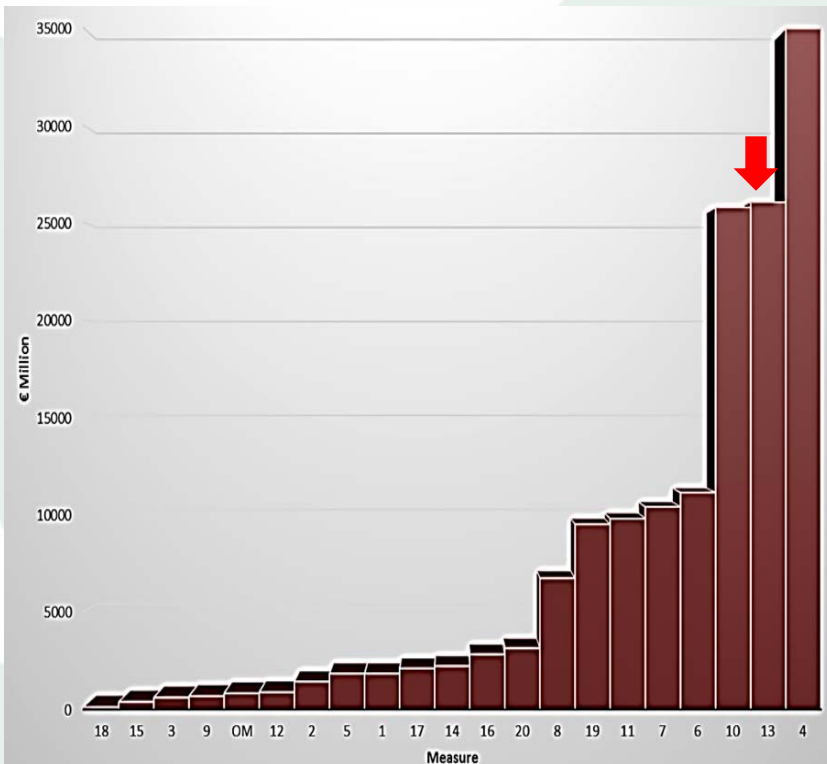
Many areas pastoral and/or with other permanent cover

Generally low productivity, narrow range of land use opportunities, high nature, eco-services & amenity value, remote from consumers, but significant % output, overall  
Some very strong community identities



# Marginal areas and CAP

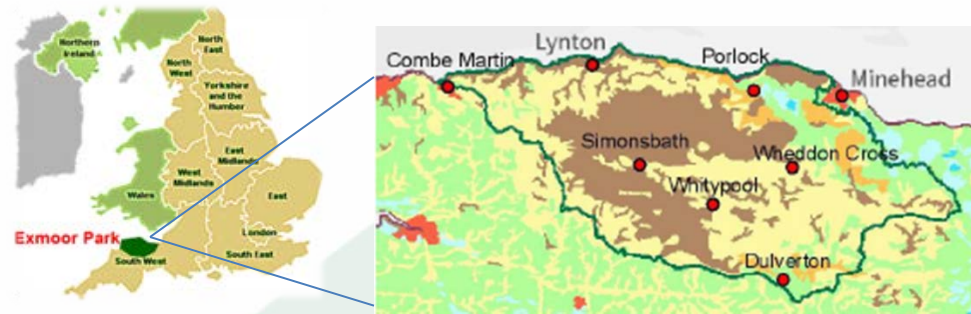
Support for targeted aid to these areas around 17% total P2, steady since 2000, 2nd largest spend in RDPs  
 Marked geographical concentrations (S France, Eire, Fin)





# Exmoor Studies, 2015

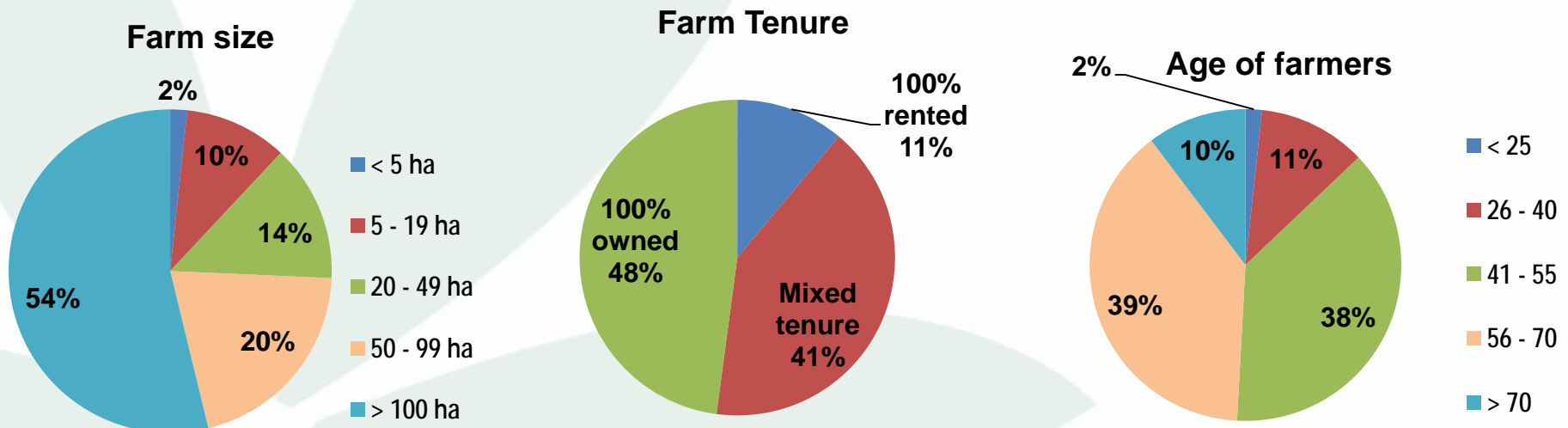
Examining the  
state of farming  
in this marginal  
area



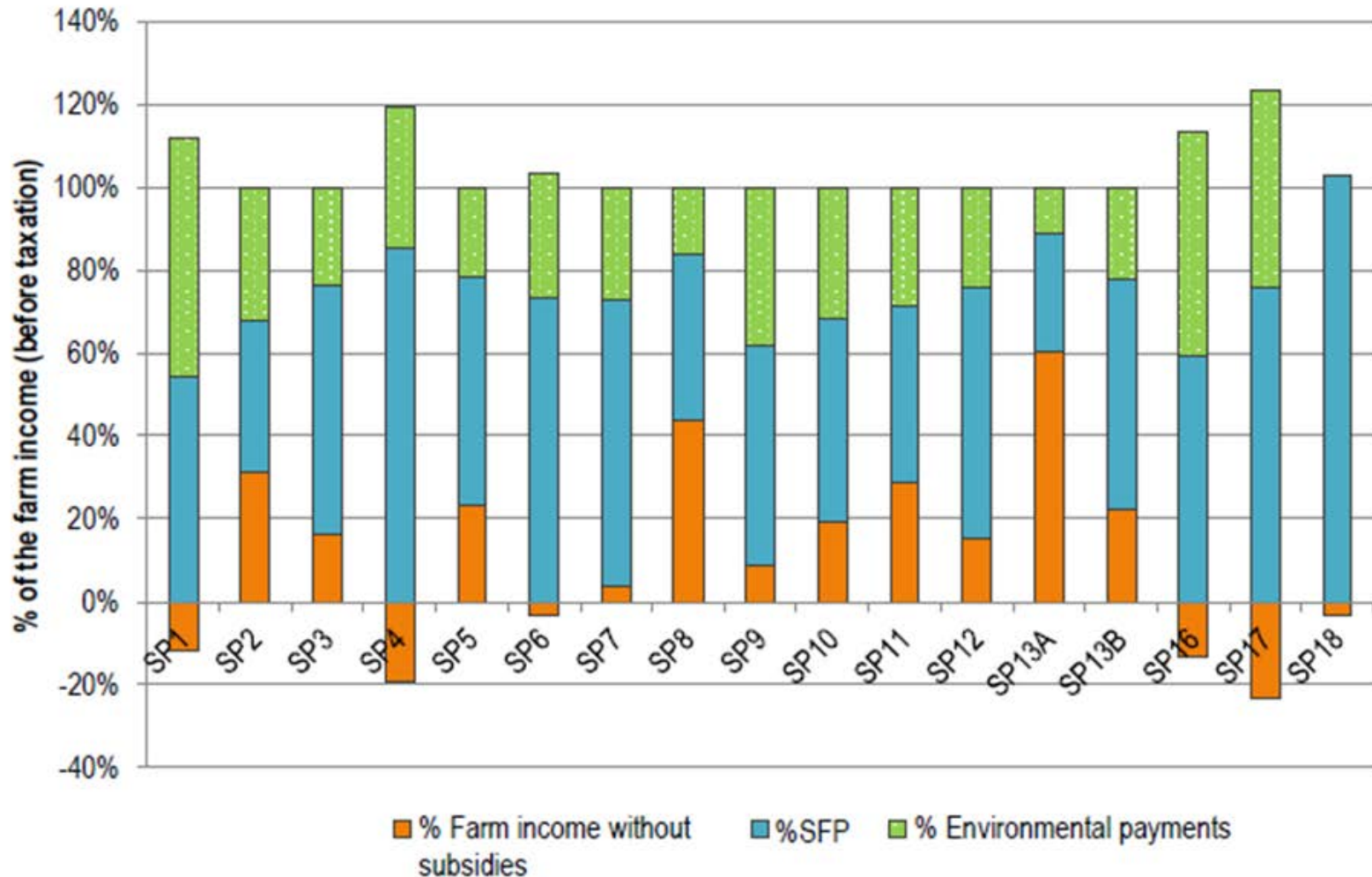
- Analysis of farm structures, FADN state and trends since 2005
- Survey of all commercial farmers in Exmoor, **117 responses (c.30%)**;  $\frac{1}{3}$  of commercial holdings & 36% of farmland in the National Park
- Telephone survey (25 farmers) exploring reasons & ideas behind survey patterns
- Detailed farming systems analysis
  - students from AgroParisTech, France: ‘agriculture comparée’,
  - 18 different systems in Eastern Exmoor, evolution and prospects
- Presentation and discussion with farmer network members, National Park, NFU, others

# Exmoor: current & future plans

- **Farm income is a challenge**; >50% of farms have diversified income, but its contribution is very variable
- Younger farmers tend to have larger farms, plan more changes, have more ideas for adding-value / new enterprises
- Many are also keen to collaborate for business & environment gains
- Older generation is less likely to consider business changes, and more worried about prospects for the next generation
- Both identify the critical role of succession – positive of having a successor, and challenges of successful transfer – for the future



# These farms are very CAP-dependent



*Data thanks to Gilbert and Archambault, 2015*

# Exmoor challenges



- young people care about their places, but face poor prospects and difficult conditions (parents feel this.....)
- Dependence upon public money, heavy bureaucracy and uncertainty: encourages negative views, stoicism or cynicism
- How to make marginal farming a more attractive, fulfilling and viable career choice; & how to make it easier for dad/mum to go gracefully?
- Changes in farm size, particularly growth, can be challenging - high costs of acquiring land, competition from outside, non-farming interests
- Also - farms have enlarged > fewer opportunities for new entrants; a larger 'threshold level' required for anyone keen to buy; lack of outside capital or liquidity can prevent start-ups or handovers

# Exmoor views and concerns

*People tighten their belts to survive but lose quality of life as a result. This makes it more difficult to plan succession – there's no slack in the system*

*A generation ago, older farmers were 'worn out' and ready to stop at 65. Today they are most likely fit and well and may not be so willing to go*

*Implicit assumptions:*

*'My daughter wants to farm but I can't afford to pay her'*

*Wife is ready to retire, but says her husband 'couldn't cope without farming'*

*'Our son has a high paid, successful career in the oil industry travelling around the world. We are very conscious we are asking him to take over a very low income business'*



# Young farmer experiences

countryside and community  
research institute

*The B family run a farm with 800 ewes, eggs for a high-end supermarket from 12,000 hens , 200 acres of arable and from July 2015, 600 goats for milk and meat. The new venture has been steered by two sons, who plan increasing the herd in the near future.*

*Dave farms land rented from The National Trust and on returning home from college, his father offered him 'either wages or sheep'. He chose sheep, as with good management and hard work, he could develop the business. He improved the performance of his sheep and the grassland. The farm includes moorland as well as permanent pasture; all cliffs and moorland are protected. He brought together a group of younger farmers to promote improved performance, and now chairs the farmer network.*

*Geoff rears friesian calves on a small farm part-bought, part-rented from the local council. He says 'profit margins are less for smaller farms, but they are far more productive. It also gives younger farmers more of a chance; if larger farms are split up, the volume of people on the land will be multiplied and community spirit would improve.'*

# How to succeed?

- Significant growth in scale and cost-cutting strategies threaten the ultimate survival of these systems
- Other routes to enhance business success -
  - doing less/the same, better
  - doing something complementary
  - capturing more of the value-chain
- Most impressive family farms manage to combine elements of all these, providing employment and/or enterprise for several members
- Careful planning round a transfer point is important: realistic new enterprises or plans, a retirement strategy for the older generation, housing and pension/tax help – also courage to let go.....
- Those who control land can play a key role – owners, planners, agents



# Tactics elsewhere

- ‘Austrian model’ – pluri-active families and farmers an established alpine tradition?\*
- Massif central, Bulgaria – new entrants and returners, renewed values / commitment
- Collective approaches to governance: Scottish crofting, shared planning in S. Italy, Slovenia

\* see *Ruffini & Streifeneder: ‘Agriculture in the Alps: a Challenge for Europe and Society’*

[http://alpsknowhow.cipra.org/background\\_topics/mountain\\_agriculture/mountain\\_agriculture\\_introduction.html](http://alpsknowhow.cipra.org/background_topics/mountain_agriculture/mountain_agriculture_introduction.html)

# Concluding reflections

- Future marginal area farmers and families must be **multiple asset managers**, engaged in diverse markets and enterprises, building strong connections with wider public interests
- New forms of **collaboration and partnership** are needed between farmers, also with communities and other stakeholders, to foster better conditions for development
- There is a **younger generation more ready and able to grasp these opportunities** – the challenge for parents and communities is to create space and support for them to do so
- For policy, **structural or institutional help** may be as useful as grants (e.g. land banks, loan guarantors, better tenure security, groups to facilitate handover planning and foster new partnerships)
  - *A landowners' duty to provide start-up holdings / tenure?*
  - *A collective process to monitor and facilitate sustainable transfers*
  - *Targeted business skills & networking (Agriscôp model)*



# Thank you



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