

# Mitigating conflicts between farmers and wolves: results from the use of LGDs and fences in the MedWolf in Portugal

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## Abstract

Coexistence between livestock and wolves is essential for this predator's survival, even more when wild prey is scarce, as in most of the Portuguese wolf range. The recent recovery trend witnessed all over Europe, with wolves recolonizing areas where they had been absent in the past decades, brought additional challenges, since farmers were no longer adapted to its presence and an open range production system had been established. This represented less effort-costs and higher income for farmers, important for the livelihood of most of the farming community. The numbers of cattle farms and of heads per holding also increased, raising the costs of potential losses to predators. Since 2012 the wolf started to increase its presence in the municipalities south of the Douro River, along the border with Spain. This is an important area for wolf conservation, enabling the connection of the Portuguese and the Spanish wolf populations south of the Douro, since in Portugal this river is a barrier for wolf movements. Following the wolf recovery in the region, the number of damages on livestock increased, and so did the social conflict.

In the scope of the LIFE MedWolf Project (LIFE11NAT/IT/069), a total of 31 livestock guarding dogs, of the Estrela Mountain Dog breed, and 34 permanent metal mesh fences were donated, reaching a total of 31 farmers. Preliminary results show that such measures can be an asset by reducing the number of attacks in the range of 60-90%; despite limitations and difficulties of implementation, in such open range systems of production and by farmers with less experience in using them. Since the social dimension has a major influence on the success of such actions, an analysis of the attitudes and satisfaction of the farmers was also performed. The main results, constraints and best practices on the use of these damage prevention tools will be discussed, as well as their contribution to wolf conservation in the project intervention area and general implications in wolf management.

The implementation of prevention measures in areas recently recolonized by wolves is challenging, due to sociocultural, economic and technical constraints. Such changes may take several years to be accepted and properly used, since they are dependent on the experience gathered, the trust built and the economic incentives available. The possibility afforded by the LIFE Program to promote such concrete actions is a good opportunity to start the process towards a better coexistence with endangered predators, such as the wolf.

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