

## **The role of new peasants and women in ecological knowledge exchange between livestock farmers in The Sierra Norte of Madrid**

Agroecology is an ecological approach to agriculture; it is concerned with the impact on the environment including the socio-economic aspects. The goal is to find sustainable production systems combining all resources of knowledge (traditional and scientific) to obtain ecologically the best possible agricultural practice for a specific ecosystem and society. In some regions of Spain, people have been returning to rural areas throughout the last decades. Among this “return to the land” movement, some people are interested in farming, where new peasants motivated to use agroecological practices when moving into rural areas, are settling there. It is discussing within social science that social interactions are an important factor in diffusion processes. The interaction between locals and new-comers can be influential in turning farming within the region into more sustainable agriculture through continuous knowledge exchange. The research I present here is a sociological study with the goal of understanding relationships and knowledge exchange among livestock farmers. The focal area of this study was the mountainous region called Sierra Norte, a rural area of the Community of Madrid which has seen an influx of new peasants. Sierra Norte being suitable for livestock farming has tradition in pastoralism as agricultural production system in the area. For the practical part 49 farmers were interviewed in seven selected municipalities of Sierra Norte. Using social network analysis (SNA), I give some insights on knowledge exchange between livestock farmers in the Sierra Norte region. The findings reveal to what extent new peasants may have an influence in the development of agricultural practises and expose some realities on the role of women in livestock farming in Sierra Norte. There were differences in the domains, and on the preferred sources of knowledge exchange between local and new peasant farmers. New peasants were more connected in the network and might have an impact on agricultural practices in the regions in which they settled. The SNA showed women with key positions in specific domains of the livestock farmers’ network in knowledge exchange.

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First supervisor	Prof. Dr. Claudia Bieling
Second supervisor	Dr. Elisa Oteros Rozas
External partners (if applicable)	Project „Reverdea“ ( <a href="http://www.reverdea.com">www.reverdea.com</a> )