

SHEPHERD TRAINING IN SOUTHERN FRANCE

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France, with its diverse ecosystems, has various forms of herding. Shepherds work most commonly on alpine pastures in the Alps, the Massif Central and the Pyrenees in the typical cycle of alpine farming. Some of the old transhumant droves, or drailles, remain in the Southern Alps and Provence where flocks cover large distances between summer and winter pastures. Several shepherd training courses are offered throughout France which are affiliated to the agricultural education system and are awarded with official degrees. One famous example is at the training centre Domaine du Merle in Southern France.



ORGANISATION

Designation

BPA Berger transhumant
(BPA= Brevet professionnel agricole).

Structure

Shepherd training is offered as a continued training and awarded with an official degree. It lasts for one year, starting in September. The time is divided between theory and practical courses at the agricultural centre and three internships in autumn (for lambing), spring and summer. Theory courses take 1,000 hours while the internships total 760 hours.

Location

Centre de Formation du Merle (Merle Training Center), Salon de Provence, France.
The agricultural centre in Merle is in the middle of an agricultural estate with 1,400 sheep and 150 ha of foin de Crau, a traditional hay made in the crau landscape. The agricultural estate serves as pedagogic support and practical work in real conditions.

Language

French.

Established

Training was initiated in 1931.

Degree

Participants receive an official diploma if they complete all courses and internships.

Focus animal species

Sheep, working dogs.

Average number of participants each year

18 to 20, roughly equal numbers of women and men.

Prerequisites for the training

At least 18 years old.

Partners

Agglopolé Provence (Public Institution of Intercommunal Cooperation), ASP (Service and Payment Agency), CAF (National Fund for Family Allowances), CAP EMPLOI (Handicapped Persons Employment Centre), Chambre d'Agriculture (Chamber of Agriculture), Chambre des Métiers (Chamber of Crafts), Conseil Régional (Regional Council), Directorate (Regional Directorates for Enterprises, Competition Policy, Consumer Affairs, Labour and Employment), Mission Locale (Youth Training and Employment Centre) and Employment Centre.

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OVERVIEW

Course content

1. Behaviour of the flock: lambing, reproduction, feeding, selection, herding in different surroundings;
2. Animal husbandry: anatomy, feeding, reproduction, animal behaviour;
3. Agronomy, pastoralism: ecology of landscapes and environment, plant biology;
4. Management of pastoral lands: prairies, Mediterranean transhumance - coussouls de crau (crau steppes), hills and mountains;
5. Training of working dogs: sheepdogs and livestock guarding dogs;
6. Damage prevention measures: behaviour of predators, damage prevention measures, laws and regulations;
7. Herd management on summer pastures: adaptation of herding on summer pastures, utilisation of pack animals, organisation of the personal life of a shepherd during this time;
8. Maintenance of equipment and material: driving a tractor, introduction to welding, clearing of scrub, sawing wood;
9. Other topics: animal welfare, introduction to shearing, marketing, labour laws, salaries, first aid, environmental conservation.

Three internships are available: mid-October till the end of November (lambing); mid-February to mid-March (between seasons); and mid-June to mid-August (summer).



Further information

Centre de Formation du Merle: www.supagro.fr/web/pages/?idl=19&page=233&id_page=199