



This farmer profile is part of a campaign to raise understanding of the role certain farmers and farming system play for maintaining a living countryside, preserving a rich biodiversity and producing tasty food.

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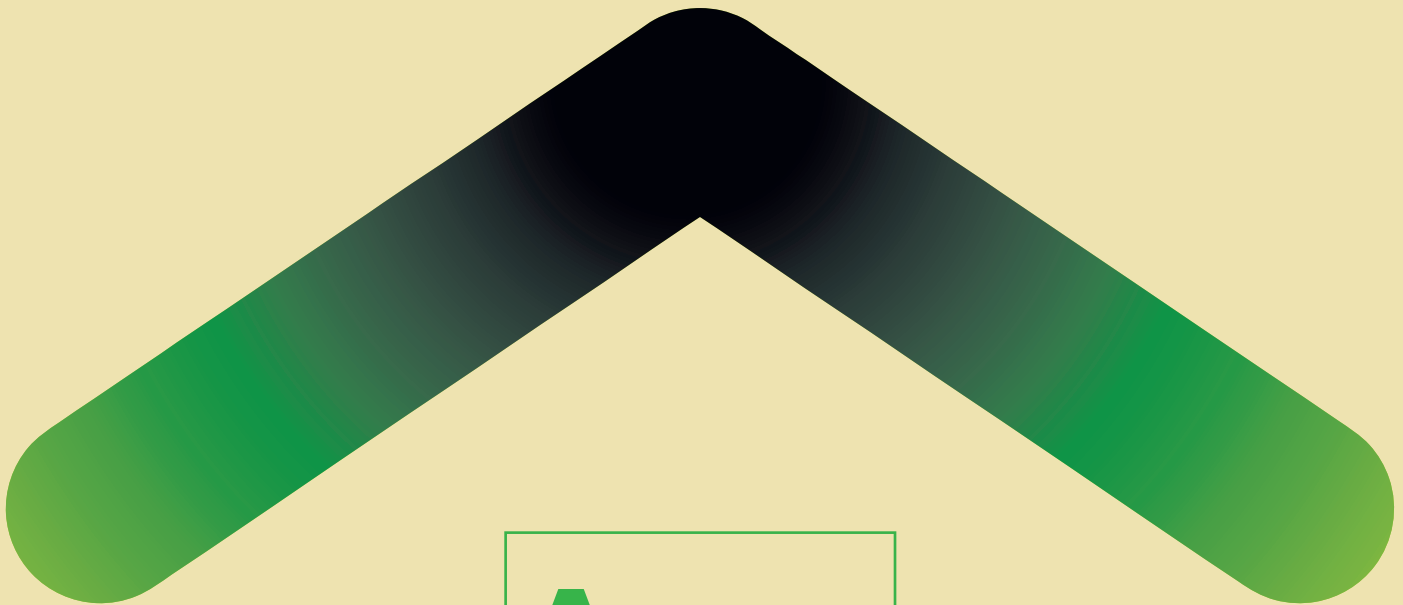


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for a living planet



**A man
without land
is a man
without home**

Petre (55) Țiplea from (Ocna Șugatag), Maramureș (Northern Romania) became an innovative livestock farmer in 2007. Together with his family he manages a herd of Bruna de Maramureș cattle, grazing year round on mountain pastures. The production of organic beef is as important as maintaining the traditional mosaic landscape of open grasslands and closed forests, and both products are offered to tourists visiting his guesthouse.



keeping on the summer pastures in the area. “The so much admired landscape and related biodiversity are dependent on agricultural use which is hard work for the farmers involved. The economic reality is that many of them can hardly make ends meet. With the EU accession of Romania this became even more difficult because most dairy farmers of Maramureș are not able to meet EU standards on hygiene and animal welfare”. Petre Țiplea received a start-up herd funded by WWF of 22 cows, 4 bulls and 9 calves. The animals are all from the local Bruna de Maramureș breed and were purchased from different semi-subsistence farmers in the village of Săpânța in Maramureș. In June 2007 the herd went up to the Răchita mountain pastures for the first time. Most of the cattle had never been taken out of the village of Săpânța and some of them even lost their social behaviour as they always stayed in the farmer's backyard. Quickly the animals got used to the new conditions on the plateau, and social interactions and internal hierarchy were redeveloped.



Land and cattle, a farmers wealth

Farming in the area of Maramureș has created a land of impressive scenery and rich cultural heritage. The unique patchwork of forests, orchards, wetlands and grasslands forms the second largest protected area in Romania. This is a semi-natural landscape, the result of a long tradition of traditional farming and shepherding, and the source of income for many inhabitants today.

Petre Țiplea and his family are one of them. The family is involved in wood processing and runs a 7-room guesthouse in the village of Ocna Șugatag. Recently the family took the opportunity given by the WWF One Europe More Nature project and got involved in farming. Now the Țiplea family is keeping 26 cows, 1 bull and 5 calves on the Răchita mountain pastures on the Tătaru Plateau.

Petre Țiplea is a zootechnical engineer but only in 2007 got involved in farming as part of the One Europe More Nature pilot project of WWF. One of the activities started up by WWF with the aim to link nature conservation with local economy and communities was to introduce an innovative grazing system to maintain the mosaic landscape of grasslands and forests on the higher parts of Maramureș. This was initiated to counter the drastic decline of traditional sheep



Now the cows graze on about 40 hectare of pasture at an altitude of 850-900m. By grazing, they play a vital role in keeping the grasslands open for nesting birds like Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) and Ring Ouzel (*Turdus torquatus*) and migrating ducks and herons. "I own about 12ha, the other 28ha are communal land rented from the municipality of Giulești. By 2009, along with the growing herd, the grazing site will be extended to 80ha." In 2012, farmer Petre will have to return the same number of animals as in the start-up herd back to WWF in order to replicate the project with other business partners and induce a chain reaction.

The Țiplea farm is a true family farm, with every family member having his/her specific role. Petre Țiplea has the overall management of the farm and is in charge of technical issues and the marketing of the beef. His son-in-law Daniel takes care

of the daily management such as securing the winter fodder (hay) and contacting the veterinary. One employee is contracted who does the daily farm work such as guarding the cattle when grazing and removing manure from the shelter. In the summer Petre's wife Rodica, their three daughters Simona, Maria and Laura, and their grandchildren are helping to guard the animals when grazing.



Without farmers we have no identity

The motivation of Petre to keep cattle goes back to the old tradition of farmers as stewards of the land. **"We know how our grandparents have guarded the land, we know the value of it, we know we have to make wise use of its resources such as wood and hay as our livelihoods depend on it. Without farmers, the land will change, rural life will disappear and we would become a nation without identity. A man without land is a man without home."** In the eyes of Petre, the farmers of Maramureş are true custodians of local identity, and they have created much of the Maramureş heritage over time. Therefore, developing tourism cannot be disconnected from promoting farming in Maramureş.

Despite the rich traditions, farmers are increasingly looked upon as poor and indeed it is not too profitable to be a farmer. Also Petre's farm is not profitable yet. Direct and indirect costs of the farm and investments like building the winter shelter including a guesthouse for tourists (about 80.000 euro all together) are covered by his other businesses and a bank loan. The lack of profit from the farm business is a big issue for the family but Petre expects that creating the niche market for organic beef and promoting the guesthouse on the plateau will provide sufficient income in a couple of years.

In the mean time he is waiting to receive his first subsidies from the EU agri-environmental and rural development schemes (see box 3). "Subsidies are of great importance for farmers in mountain areas, without them farming would disappear. Unfortunately applying for subsidies is a long and tiring procedure, and requires a lot of documents and external assistance. So far the government has failed to actively support small-scale farmers, and if this continues many of Romania's typical landscapes will be lost."



Future developments

Petre is convinced that his innovative beef farm will make him a successful business man while contribution to the beauty of Maramureş. The guesthouse in the winter shelter will generate income, as well as the other guesthouse in the valley and the wood processing. From June 2009 on, the Țiplea family will be proud to serve their guests organic beef from Bruna de Maramureş cattle. Most of the beef will come from 16-19 month old males, and they will get slaughtered in a certified slaughterhouse in the surroundings of Baia Mare. The beef is a high-quality, half-wild type of meat as the cattle are grazing freely on the pastures year round and only in the winter are fed with species-rich hay from the valley. To supplement their diet they will occasionally receive beet fodder and a bit of concentrates, all organically certified.

But Petre is already planning ahead. **"From the beginning on we will start selling beef to other local guesthouses in Maramureş. Later we will try to add value to the meat by producing traditional sausages.** On the longer run my idea is to extend the herd, manage more mountain pastures and market the beef in other regions in Romania or even abroad. **The system will remain small-scale so to maintain the traditional mosaic landscape of Maramureş with species-rich grasslands and forest patches. I hope I will pass on a successful farm to my son-in-law who will be the farmer when I retire."**



The nature of things

The mountain pastures on Țătaru Plateau are secondary grasslands, resulting from human interventions a long time ago. Clear cutting of forests continued until some 50 years ago, remnants of the railway used for timber transport are still witness to this. It is easy to suppose the removal of the forest cover caused great environmental destruction. But in fact by removing trees, the first farmers exposed what we have today – a fascinating and diverse open landscape with beautiful, species-rich grasslands as well as remaining single trees and forest patches. This landscape, profoundly shaped by man, is characteristic for the uplands of Maramureş. Grazing at low stocking densities is a crucial factor to retain this heritage.

The open landscape favours raptors such as the Imperial Eagle, and on the plateau there is a family of bears (mother with two cubs), a couple of wolves and wild boars. Not surprisingly, the area is part of the Natura 2000 network of protected areas in Europe. Human activities such as livestock keeping are allowed in the area, as long as they follow a set of rules and do not damage biodiversity.





Year calendar of the Țiplea farm

- May-October: Natural grazing of the herd, guarding the animals, removing manure from the winter shelter to the manure storage platform;
- May-September: Peak season for tourism;
- June and September: Securing hay for winter season – mowing meadows in the valley and transporting the hay up on the winter shelter on the Tătaru Plateau;
- November-April: Natural grazing as long as the weather it allows, feeding hay to the cattle, cattle stays in the shelter during the winter, looking for potential buyers of organic beef, participating in seminars and trainings;
- October-December: Busiest period of the year for the wood processing business.



Subsidies and future plans

Petre Țiplea is actively looking for subsidies to cover part of the costs he has to run the farm. It requires easily 2 months to hand in an application, but luckily he gets assistance from WWF, the regional agricultural administration and sometimes external consultants. He applied in 2008 for subsidies under the Rural Development Programme of Romania, got approval and is now waiting for the transaction to take place. From the agri-environmental measure (nr. 214) Petre will get compensation payments to properly manage his High Nature Value Grasslands by having not more than 1 cow grazing per hectare. Also he is not allowed to use chemical fertilisers, neither do ploughing, rolling or reseeding of the pastures. In addition, Petre applied for the Traditional Farming package, and will be compensated for not using machinery on his grazing lands. All together agri-environmental support is totaling 182 euro/ha (respectively 124 and 58 euro/ha) which Petre is receiving to conserve and improve the values of his grasslands, no matter he owns or rents them.



Petre plans to apply for the measure to support semi-subsistence farmers (nr. 141) in order to increase the competitiveness of his farm on a long term. He will need to draw up a business plan explaining how he will stimulate and diversify his farm, and could receive 1500 euro/year for a maximum period of 5 years. Probably the meat processor in Baia Mare will apply for rural development funding too as he has to make investments to comply with the standards of organically certified slaughterhouses.

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