FarmBioNet

Farmer-focused biodiversity and agricultural knowledge network

Preserve, maintain, and restore old dry-stone walls

Authors:
Sonja Karoglan Todorovic (sonja@ecologica.hr), Antonio Santoro, Federica Romano, Francesco Piras, Mauro Agnoletti

Keywords:
Biodiversity, dry stonewalls, terraced landscape agriculture, traditional knowledge

Geographical location:
Mediterranean/alpine regions and other areas with dry stone walls

Photo credit: Sonja Karoglan Todorovic

Drystone walls characterise many cultural landscapes across the EU, both as terraces and as divisions between fields. Many traditional drystone walls are deteriorating due to land abandonment, high costs of cultivation on terraces, lack of labour, and loss of traditional skills especially among young farmers, and use of inappropriate materials. When drystone walls collapse, farmers face soil erosion, terrace instability, and unclear parcel boundaries. Poorly maintained slopes lose fertile topsoil and water more quickly, reducing productivity. Collapsed drystone walls lead to loss of habitats and shelter for different species of plants, bees, and birds.

Well-maintained drystone walls reduce soil erosion, and improve water retention, supporting better crop yields. They serve as natural barriers for livestock and provide habitats for reptiles, insects, spiders, snails and small mammals.

Preserving drystone walls and terraces maintains landscape and cultural value, creating opportunities for added income through subsidies or agri-tourism. Using traditional techniques and materials is recommended when preserving and restoring drystone walls. Allowing drystone walls to remain permeable will facilitate water percolation, prevent water pressure buildup, and protect crop roots. Regular inspection and repair will prevent collapses and preserve both the ecological and functional role of drystone walls.

Practical Recommendations

- Use local stones of different sizes, avoid cement and prefabricated blocks.
- Check and stabilise foundations before rebuilding the above-ground structure.
- Cooperate with neighbours or local walling groups to reduce labour, save time and share expertise.

Further Information on farmbionet.eu

This project receives funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe Framework Programme under project No. 101082102. Grant agreement ID: 101182942. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Research Executive Agency. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Swiss Confederation

Federal Department of Economic Affairs, Education and Research EAER
State Secretariat for Education, Research and Innovation SERI

Funded by the European Union