Technical Sheet for Solution Implementation

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

Thematic area: Transversal.

Priority: How can issues related to agricultural land access be managed?

Need: Land pressure and competition with environmental projects (for example, solar or wind farms) or others: How can we promote the environmental benefit of horses in relation to wind and solar farms, or the establishment of non-native species?

Solution EU number: LA-01.

Content of the solution: Access to municipal, communal, and underused public land for equine farms to conduct low-impact grazing that maintains biodiversity and supports sustainable landscape management.

Reasons for Implementing the Solution

Improving access to municipal and underused land increases grazing areas, supports equine welfare, and provides a low-cost solution for sustainable farm management. At the same time, it enhances biodiversity, maintains open landscapes, and strengthens cooperation between equine farms and local authorities.

Description of Solution Strategies

Access to nature conservation areas enables equine farms and breeders to use municipal and public land for agroecological grazing in order to preserve biodiversity and maintain natural and semi-natural landscapes.

Key Components

- Land Access Agreements:
  - Collaboration with municipalities to use public meadows, communal pastures, roadside verges, marshlands, or nature conservation areas for seasonal grazing.
  - Use of short-term leases, grazing rights, or stewardship and occupancy agreements.

- Environmental Services by Equines:
  - Maintenance of open landscapes and prevention of shrub encroachment.
  - Reduction of wildfire risk through controlled grazing.
  - Support of biodiversity via low-impact grazing practices.
  - Ecological benefits used to justify access to protected or sensitive areas.

- Policy and Funding Tools
  - Use of rural development instruments such as LEADER and CAP eco-schemes.
  - Participation in local land-sharing or biodiversity management initiatives.
  - Cooperation with Local Action Groups (LAGs) to identify land and funding opportunities.

- Knowledge Exchange and Cooperation
  - Participation in training, advisory services, or citizen science initiatives related to land management.
  - Partnerships with environmental authorities, NGOs, and public infrastructure services (e.g. roads or green space management).

Funding possibilities

- EU-Level Support
  - CAP (Common Agricultural Policy) – Pillar II:
    - Rural Development Measures: Support for training, advisory services, and cooperation projects.
    - Subsidies for land access initiatives: Especially where public or communal land is involved.
  - EIP-AGRI (European Innovation Partnership for Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability)
    - Offers funding and networking for innovative land-use and cooperation projects.
    - Farmers can join Operational Groups to co-develop solutions with researchers and local authorities.
  - LEADER Programme:
    - Local Action Groups (LAGs) fund community-based rural development, including land-sharing and grazing access projects.

- How to Access These Funds
  - Register with EIP-AGRI: www.eip-agri.eu to join networks and find funding calls.
  - Contact your Local Action Group (LAG): They manage LEADER funds and can help with communal land access.
  - Visit your regional CAP office: They can guide you on eco-schemes and rural development measures.
  - Partner with NGOs or municipalities: Joint applications often have higher success rates.

Implementation Steps

1. Identify Local Needs and Opportunities

- Assess current land access challenges (e.g., lack of grazing space, seasonal limitations).
- Map nearby public or underused land (communal meadows, roadside areas, nature reserves).
- Engage with other equine farmers to understand shared needs.

2. Contact Local Authorities and LEADER Groups

- Reach out to your Local Action Group (LAG) or rural development office.
- Inquire about available communal land, seasonal grazing permits, or pilot projects.
- Ask for guidance on LEADER funding applications or existing equine-related initiatives.

3. Develop a Land Access Proposal

- Create a simple proposal outlining:
  - Type of land needed (e.g., grazing, trails, seasonal use).
  - Environmental benefits (e.g., fire prevention, biodiversity support).
  - Community value (e.g., tourism, education).
- Include maps, photos, and potential partners (e.g., NGOs, schools, other farmers).

4. Define legal arrangements

- Select contract type (rural lease, grazing rights, occupancy agreement).
- Ensure compliance with conservation and municipal guidelines.

5. Apply for Support and Build Partnerships

- Submit your proposal to the LAG or municipality.
- Apply for LEADER funding or CAP rural development support.
- Partner with local authorities (e.g., environmental, highway, construction services) to co-manage land.

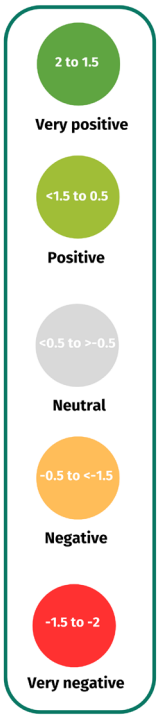
6. Implement and Monitor the Project

- Begin grazing or land use according to agreements.
- Respect stocking rates, grazing periods, and maintenance rules.
- Keep records of environmental impact and community engagement.
- Share results with the LAG and local community to encourage future support and expansion.

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

How Will this Solution Impact the Performance of your Farm?

TOPIC	SCORE
Social	0.67
Economics	0.58
Welfare	1.17
Health	0.21
Environmental	0.92
Pasture access and management	2.00
Global	0.83



Traffic light explanation

Socioeconomics: This solution will support the social performance of the farm because access to nature conservation and communal grazing areas enhances the public image of the equine farm by visibly linking horse keeping with biodiversity conservation and responsible land stewardship. Horses grazing in open, natural landscapes are generally perceived positively by local communities, authorities, and visitors, reinforcing trust and social acceptance. This visibility can strengthen relationships with municipalities, conservation bodies, and citizens, provided that animals are well managed and land is properly maintained. While quality of working life can be mixed—due to longer travel distances, monitoring requirements, and uncertainty of continued access—the more natural, extensive management system can also reduce daily stable work and increase the meaningfulness of tasks, resulting in an overall supportive but context-dependent social effect.

This solution will support the economic performance of the farm because increased access to grazing land improves fodder self-sufficiency and reduces the need to purchase feed, which represents a significant operating cost for equine farms. Although additional expenses may arise from transport, fencing, or land development, these costs are generally offset by savings on fodder and, in some cases, by access to subsidies, agri-environmental schemes, or ecological service payments linked to conservation grazing. While the land does not contribute directly to farm capital since it remains publicly owned, lower operating costs and improved financial stability can indirectly strengthen the farm's economic position over time.

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

Health & Welfare: This solution has no direct effect on the farm's health performance; however, both positive and negative health outcomes may arise depending on the quality of preparation of the areas available prior to the release of animals. Horses may be at risk if toxic plants or hazardous elements, such as old machinery or swamps, are not removed or adequately fenced, thereby jeopardising their physical safety. Fencing and additional protective measures, if allowed in nature-protected areas, are also necessary in areas where large predators are present. Conversely, allowing horses to select preferred plants not regularly included in human-provided diets, including health-promoting or anthelmintic herbs, together with opportunities for free movement that benefit the musculoskeletal system, may have positive effects on equine health. This solution will support the farm's welfare performance because it ensures long bouts of forage feeding during grazing and browsing, opportunities to perform comfort behaviours in freely chosen locations, environmental exploration during extended periods of free movement, use of natural shelters, and the ability to form and engage in social interactions. These conditions are close to those under which horses evolved and were commonly used in many countries before the intensification of rural production. Mixed grazing, including with other species such as cattle, has been practised without causing problems for the daily handling of habituated animals during release to and return from pastures.

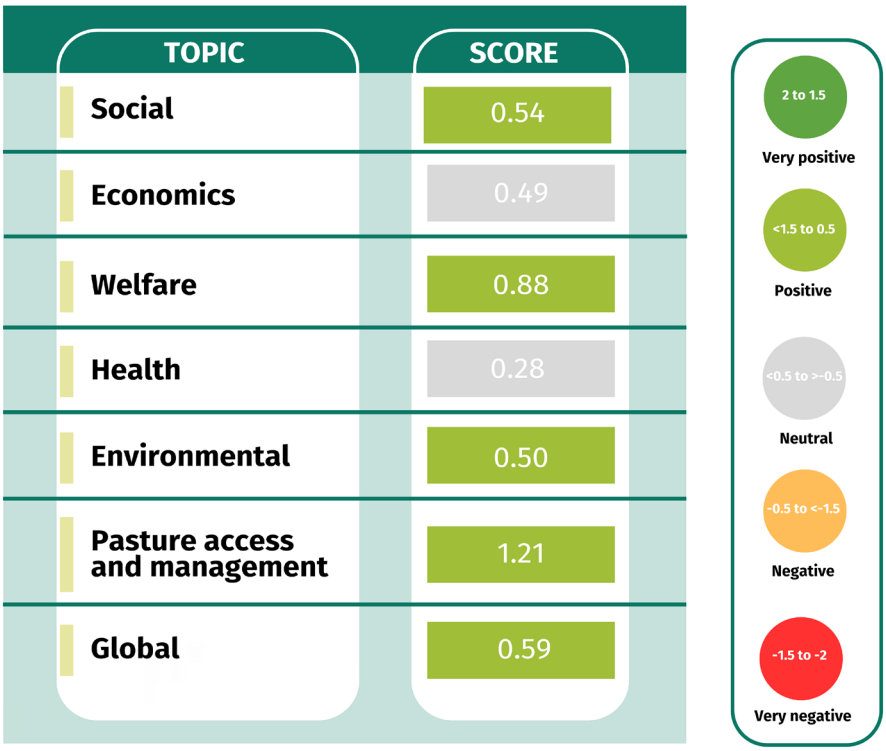
Environmental sustainability: This solution will support on the environmental performance of the farm because Equines contribute positively to the environment when grazing is managed extensively and sustainably. Access to communal pastures strengthens climate change adaptation by lowering dependence on imported feed and enabling low-input grazing systems. Although the direct climate-mitigation effect (such as reducing emissions) is modest, expanding grassland area increases the farm's potential for soil carbon storage and improves forage self-sufficiency.

Biodiversity benefits the most when these shared grasslands are traditionally or lightly managed. Targeted grazing can support native plant species, insects, and soil life—especially in high-nature-value areas—while also helping control invasive species. Equine's ability to eat not only grass but also a wide range of local flora helps maintain open landscapes by keeping bushes low and naturally dispersing seeds. This solution can also have a slightly negative effect on the loss of biodiversity, because without grazing, these communal areas would probably be left fallow or uncultivated, practices that could be more favourable to biodiversity. On the other hand, when mixed grazing is introduced and when grazing by horses takes place in very open spaces or natural areas, where they interact with several environments and several species. In this case, complementarity can have a positive effect. Grazing horses also influence water dynamics: their movement aerates the soil and can improve natural drainage and water balance, though excessive grazing may cause compaction and reduce erosion.

This solution will support the land access or management performance of the farm because it enables farmers to access land or grassland and increase their available surface area, enabling them to improve their management practices. Grassland access and management see a substantial improvement through structured communal use, which prevents abandonment if agricultural land, promotes rotational grazing, and preserves these landscapes from degradation or conversion. in addition, this solution promotes structured access to new or underused land possible.

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

How Will this Solution Impact the Resilience of your Farm?



Socioeconomics: This solution will support social performance of the farm facing external challenges assessed because access to communal and natural grazing land strengthens the farm's public image, reinforces community ties, and visibly aligns equine farming with animal welfare, environmental stewardship, and collective land management. During crises such as pandemics or periods of uncertainty, the ability to keep horses outdoors with limited human contact supports animal welfare, reduces pressure on staff, and maintains social legitimacy and trust, even when other activities are reduced or suspended. This solution will not impact economic performance of the farm facing external challenges assessed because although access to communal grazing significantly lowers feed costs and improves self-sufficiency—especially valuable under inflation—the land itself does not generate direct monetary returns, does not increase owned farm capital, and remains vulnerable to external constraints (e.g. drought, disease outbreaks, or access restrictions). Economic benefits are therefore mainly cost-avoidance and stabilization rather than true income generation, leading to an overall neutral effect on economic resilience in the face of external shocks.

Environmental sustainability: This solution will not directly support the farm's health performance, as it does not inherently reduce pain, mortality, or the need for medication under varying external pressures. However, it may potentially compromise animal health if, in response to external challenges, available grazing areas are insufficiently prepared to prevent health risks, or if animal handling during veterinary interventions becomes more difficult. Moreover, if health problems occur more frequently, for example, due to inadequate animal monitoring resulting from staff shortages or adverse weather events, animal pain and the use of veterinary drugs may increase as a consequence.

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

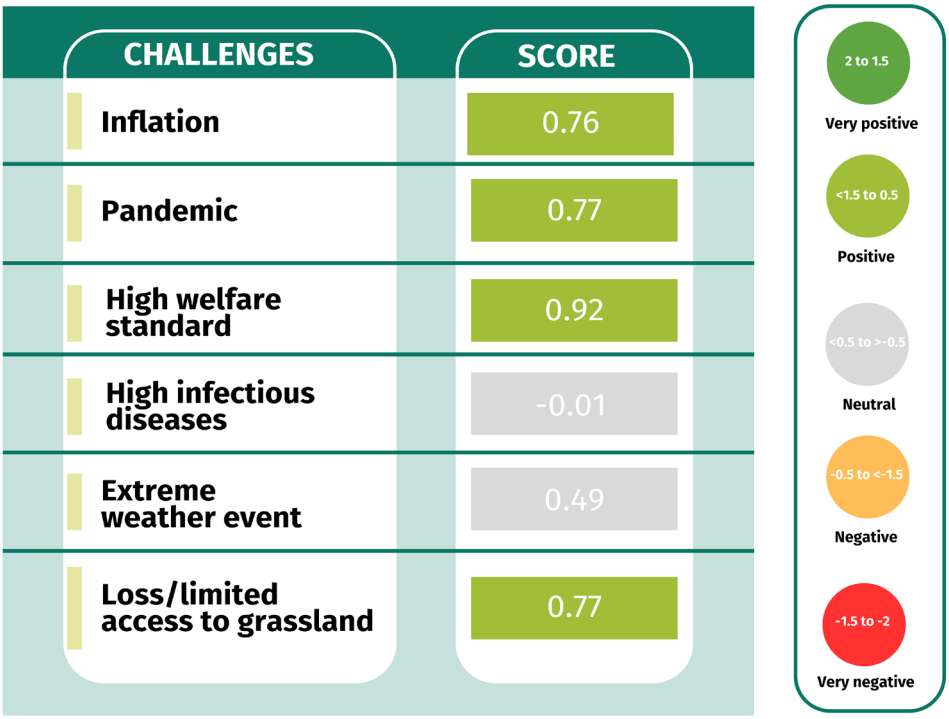
However, this solution will support the farm's welfare performance, as it directly enhances housing in welfare-friendly conditions, including prolonged forage feeding, free movement, comfort behaviour, social contact, and the promotion of positive emotional states, even when exposed to external pressures. A high level of welfare satisfaction resulting from the fulfilment of horses' basic psychological needs may help offset challenges arising from socioeconomic or environmental factors, as horses, as demonstrated by feral or semi-feral populations, are relatively resilient to such pressures when allowed to select optimal responses in conditions close to natural.

Environmental sustainability: This solution will support environmental performance of the farm facing external challenges assessed because local or communal grasslands for grazing consistently were evaluated to have positive environmental benefits, especially for climate change adoption and mitigation and halting biodiversity loss. It was beneficial because grazing on local pastures reduces the need for imported feed, transport emissions, and energy-intensive feed production. Traditional marshes and semi-natural meadows support rich flora and fauna. Managed grazing prevents habitat abandonment and aligns well with biodiversity conservation goals. Effect of water management was somewhat neutral, as the system does not include specific water-saving innovations. However, in some cases marshes and pastures improve water retention, reduce erosion, and buffer drought impacts, giving a positive score. During disease outbreaks, environmental impacts are mostly neutral because environmental functions are not directly affected.

This solution will support land access or management performance of the farm facing external challenges assessed because it is well-suited to overcoming land-access challenges and has positive effects across nearly all assessed challenges. It has a strongly positive impact on land access and management, which is the central obstacle it aims to address. The solution can provide secure and reliable access to land, even when individual farms face land shortages or restrictions. The solution helps breeders who lack large private holdings by offering affordable, shared grazing areas. The solution also provides flexibility and resilience in land use, allowing grazing pressure to be distributed more sustainably and maintaining productivity during dry seasons. Solution supports also cooperative land stewardship, encouraging sustainable management practices.

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

How can this solution help your farm to face specific external challenges to be more resilient?



Inflation & Social Crises: Social challenge: This solution will support the global performance of the farm facing pandemics because access to communal and natural grazing areas allows horses to be kept outdoors with limited human contact, maintaining animal welfare and routines even when activities, staff availability, or client interactions are restricted. This reinforces the farm's social legitimacy, preserves a positive public image linked to welfare and sustainability, and supports community cohesion through shared land use at a time when social and economic systems are under stress. Economic challenge: This solution will support the global performance of the farm facing inflation because access to low-cost or free communal grazing significantly reduces dependence on purchased feed, one of the main cost drivers under inflation. By improving forage self-sufficiency and stabilising basic operating expenses, the farm can better absorb rising input prices, preserve cash flow, and maintain acceptable production costs, even though the solution does not directly increase owned capital or generate new revenue streams.

Welfare & Diseases: Health challenge: this solution may negatively affect the global performance of the farm across socio-economic, health, and environmental areas when facing an infectious disease challenge. Common grazing of horses from different farms may contribute to faster transmission of pathogens to a larger population of animals. Therefore, daily monitoring of notifications about veterinary epidemiological hazards and the health status of horses is necessary before and during the common release of equines.

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

Welfare challenge: this solution will support the global performance of a farm when faced with high welfare-standard legislation, because access to areas environmentally similar to natural conditions strongly promotes behaviours related to self-care, feeding, locomotor activity, and social interaction, all of which are emphasised in high welfare legislation. Therefore, grazing horses in such areas, provided that their health status is regularly monitored and the environment is controlled to eliminate potential hazards, may significantly contribute to global performance by enhancing the positive states of horses through the provision of adequate keeping conditions.

Climate Change & Access to Land: Environmental challenge: this solution will not impact the global performance of the farm facing abnormally high or low temperatures, draught, excessive raining, windstorms and/or flood, because although it offers multiple social, economic, environmental, and welfare benefits, but also comes with limitations during extreme weather. Social and economic benefits include improved networking and cooperation, reduced stress and workload for staff and farmers, and improved profitability thanks to lower feed costs when natural grazing is available. However, feed may still need to be transported to remote areas, adding energy l and labour costs, and overall farm capital impact remains neutral unless infrastructure investments are required.

Horse welfare benefits can be significant: natural environments support the 3Fs , promote positive emotional states and may reduce injury and heat-related risks and decrease reliance on curative medication. More movement and environmental variety also contribute to better overall well-being, though heat extremes still pose dangers. Environmentally, the system provides modest climate mitigation and supports biodiversity. Water management can be a strong advantage because marshes retain moisture, stay greener in droughts, and reduce irrigation pressure. Participation in environmental projects also strengthens public image and communication.Land access and resilience receive high benefits communal management distributes grazing pressure, increases flexibility, and keeps land productive during dry periods.

Negative effects include increased difficulty working during heatwaves, cold weather or drought, challenges locating horses on large, unfenced areas, and limited workload reduction due to extra organisation needs (water points, feed, coordination). Extreme heat or drought can also reduce the value of natural resources and raise health risks. Land access/management challenge: this solution will support the global performance of the farm facing loss or limited access to agricultural land because it is effective for addressing land loss and restricted access, improves horse welfare, supports biodiversity, can enhance economic efficiency, and even strengthens political support through its environmental benefits.

Moving horses to new communal grazing lands requires upfront investments (such as troughs, fencing, and feeders), making it costly at first, though more cost-efficient in the long term. The solution has broad positive impacts, especially on social cooperation, land access, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability. The solution supports land access and management; it is crucial especially when l when private agricultural land is restricted—and help counter land conversion and urban pressure.

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

Cost-benefit Analysis

Costs

Socioeconomics:

- Administrative and bureaucratic effort (LEADER/CAP applications, reporting, coordination).
- Time investment for identifying land, negotiating agreements, and maintaining access.
- Potential rental costs (depending on agreement).
- Investments in infrastructure on non-owned land (fencing, electrification, water points, shelters).
- Increased workload due to municipal constraints and monitoring requirements.
- Logistical costs (distance to land, transport of equines, mobile infrastructure).
- Risk of damage or misuse due to public access to some plots.
- Uncertainty linked to short-term or non-renewed agreements.
- Social tensions related to land use visibility and shared access.

Health & Welfare:

- Increased risk of injury due to uneven or unfamiliar terrain.
- Risk of disease transmission when equines from different farms graze together.
- Exposure to parasites, insects, or harsh weather conditions.
- Stress caused by proximity to public, passers-by, or uncontrolled interactions.
- Reduced supervision due to distance from the main farm.
- Risks related to predators (e.g. wolves) and fencing accidents.
- Potential nutritional imbalance if pasture quality is poorly assesse.

Benefits

- DImproved access to communal or underused land, especially in high land-pressure contexts.
- Reduced or low land rental costs through public–private agreements.
- Lower capital investment compared to land purchase.
- Increased forage area and improved forage self-sufficiency.
- Reduced feed costs through access to grazing land.
- Support for gradual farm set-up, particularly for young or new farmers.
- Improved economic resilience and farm viability.
- Opportunities for additional activities (e.g. equine tourism, education, therapy).
- Positive public image and increased visibility of equine farming in rural planning.
- Strengthened customer trust and loyalty through commitment to biodiversity.
- Contribution to rural employment (e.g. animal care, fencing, maintenance).

- Improved access to the 3Fs: Forage, Friends, and Freedom of movement.
- Increased outdoor time and natural grazing behaviour.
- Better social contact and herd dynamics (when well managed).
- Reduced stress levels and improved overall well-being.
- More varied pastures and improved feed quality.
- Potential reduction in parasitism through rotational grazing.
- Improved health status and resilience of equines.

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

Costs

Sostenibilidad medioambiental:

- Risk of overgrazing if stocking rates are not well managed.
- Short-term disturbance of sensitive habitats or species (e.g. nesting periods).
- Potential nutrient imbalance from manure concentration.
- Localised soil degradation in wet or fragile ecosystems.
- Slight risk of biodiversity loss if grazing is not properly adapted to site conditions.
- Need for biodiversity monitoring or corrective management measures.

Cooperation between farms

- Coordination and organisational effort (meetings, rules, agreements).
- Risk of competition for access to limited land.
- Potential conflicts over grazing schedules, stocking rates, or responsibilities.
- Social friction due to perceived unequal access or mismanagement.
- Costs for establishing governance structures or shared services.
- Lack of clear leadership may reduce cooperation effectiveness.

Benefits

- Maintenance of open landscapes and prevention of shrub encroachment.
- Support for biodiversity through extensive grazing.
- Preservation of semi-natural grasslands, marshes, and traditional ecosystems.
- Control of invasive plant species.
- Reduction of wildfire risk through vegetation management.
- Improved soil structure and aeration.
- Natural fertilisation through manure deposition.
- Improved water balance and reduced erosion.
- Reduced need for irrigation and cultivated fodder production.
- Contribution to EU and national biodiversity and agri-environmental objectives.
- Prevention of land abandonment and degradation.

- Shared access to communal land encourages cooperation between farms.
- Cost sharing for infrastructure (fencing, water points, feeders).
- Shared administrative workload and collective funding applications.
- Knowledge exchange and peer learning.
- Strengthened breeders' associations and cooperatives.
- Improved coordination with municipalities and landowners.
- Easier implementation through shared logistics and access planning.
- Enhanced trust and long-term collaboration among stakeholders.

Case Studies

Horse Grazing on Public Land in Occitanie, France

- **Project Name:** Equi'Rural – Occitanie Region
- **Objective:** Improve access to public land for horse farmers while promoting biodiversity and social inclusion.
- **Actions:**
  - Partnered with local municipalities to allow seasonal horse grazing on public meadows.
  - Used horses for vegetation management in fire-prone areas.
  - Included horse-assisted therapy programs for local youth and people with disabilities.
- **Results:**
  - Reduced fire risk and improved biodiversity on public land.
  - Strengthened cooperation between horse farmers and local authorities.
  - Created new income streams for small equine farms.
- **Furhter Information:**
  - https://leaderfrance.fr/en/the-leader-program/
  - https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/news/leader-success-stories-across-cap_en

Cotentin Marshes (Normandy)

- Traditional communal pasture management under a dedicated committee.

South Vendée

- Annual event releasing 400 animals onto municipal lands in a festive atmospher.

Additional Resources

Websites

- French
  - https://www.cher.gouv.fr/Actions-de-l-Etat/Agriculture-et-developpement-rural/Gestion-du-foncier-baux-ruraux-fermage-structures/Baux-ruraux-fermages/Location-de-terrains-communaux
  - https://parc-cotentin-bessin.fr/les-marais-communaux
  - https://www.vendeedusud.com/nos-incontournables/evenements-festivals/louverture-des-communaux/

Funds

- Any EU-Language
  - https://agriculture.ec.europa.eu/common-agricultural-policy/rural-development_en
  - https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/329735/rural-development-and-the-cap
- French, English
  - https://leaderfrance.fr/en/the-leader-program/
- English, French, German
  - https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/index_en

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

Examples for Projects

- English
  - https://www.cam.ac.uk/stories/wild-horses
  - https://www.efncp.org/download/plan42.pdf
- English, French, German, Italian
  - https://www.agroscope.admin.ch/agroscope/en/home/about-us/snsf.html
- English, German
  - https://www.hccg.de/en/project-management/euregio-projects/
- French
  - https://aides-territoires.beta.gouv.fr/programmes/leader/

Online Clasess

- German
  - https://horse-consult-schmelzer.de/ueber-uns/blog/149-ueberblick-foerderungen-fuer-pferdebetriebe-in-deutschland

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Technical Sheet for Solution Implementation

Access to Nature Conservation Areas

Annex

Ideas to Animate a Workshop About the Solution

- Ask environmental advisors, rural development officers, or LAG coordinators to sponsor the workshop.
- Find a model equine farm or a nature conservation site where grazing and land management practices can be demonstrated.
- Complete practical tasks (e.g., mapping land, grazing planning, monitoring biodiversity) and let participants take part so they can experience how access and management works.

Proposed Structure for the workshop on Access to Nature Conservation Areas in Equines Farms

1. Introduction to Access to Nature Conservation Areas

- Overview of frameworks, opportunities, and practical considerations for accessing conservation land.
- Key features and components: municipal land, communal pastures, stewardship agreements, biodiversity objectives.
- Types of arrangements available: short-term leases, grazing rights, occupancy agreements.

2. Benefits of Access to Nature Conservation Areas in Equine Farms

- Environmental Benefit: supports biodiversity, maintains open habitats, reduces wildfire risks.
- Economic and Practical Benefit: low-cost access to additional grazing land, improved forage autonomy.
- Social and Policy Benefit: strengthens cooperation with local authorities, aligns with EU biodiversity and rural development goals.

3. Practical Applications on Equine Farms

- Seasonal grazing plans and rotational use of conservation areas.
- Integration with renewable energy or other land-use projects (dual-use areas).
- Monitoring grazing impact on vegetation and biodiversity.

4. How to Choose the Most Suitable Land or Agreement

- Assess land availability and suitability (accessibility, water, vegetation type).
- Determine farm-specific needs (herd size, grazing period).
- Evaluate contract options: lease, occupancy, stewardship.
- Consider environmental restrictions and local regulations.

5. Hands-On Demonstration

- Visit demonstration site with actual land parcels.
- Show how to implement grazing plans, measure impact, and manage the site.
- Let participants try simple tasks: mapping plots, calculating stocking rates, identifying plant species.

6. Maintenance and Troubleshooting
- Guidelines for maintaining pastures and managing overgrowth.
- Dealing with access challenges or conflicts with other land users.
- Adjusting grazing schedules based on environmental monitoring.

7. Case Studies and Real-World Examples
- Examples of equine farms successfully accessing conservation areas.
- Lessons learned from integrating grazing with biodiversity objectives.
- Discussion on dual-use land applications (e.g., solar farms, fallow fields).

8. Cost Analysis and Return on Investment (ROI)
- Low-cost access vs. purchasing additional land.
- Benefits for forage autonomy and equine welfare.
- Potential funding support (LEADER, CAP eco-schemes) and administrative savings.

9. Q&A Session
- Open discussion on legal, ecological, and management issues.
- Address questions about agreements, environmental monitoring, and operational challenges.

10. Wrap-Up and Resources
- Summary of key points: land access, biodiversity benefits, grazing management.
- Resources: contact points (LAGs, municipalities), guidelines, online communities.
- Information on potential funding opportunities or pilot programs.