

SHEPHERD TRAINING IN SWITZERLAND

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In the Swiss agricultural training system, sheep and shepherding do not hold a significant position. Most of the shepherds in Switzerland work on alpine pastures in summer; some also work in winter with transhumant sheep flocks. Nowadays, there are around 200

shepherds working on alpine farms in summer and 25 to 30 transhumant shepherds with migrant flocks in the Plateau and Jura Mountains in winter. The training was initiated due to a lack of qualified shepherds as well as a lack of adequate training.

ORGANISATION

Designation

Schweizerische Schafhirtenausbildung /
Formation Suisse des bergères et bergers de moutons.

Structure

The training is structured into a theoretical and a practical part. Theory courses are taught at agricultural schools and can be attended independently. Internships are completed with an experienced shepherd. They are divided into a summer and a winter internship. The summer internship takes place on a farm and lasts for about two months while the winter internship takes place in a barn during lambing. After completing all the courses and internships as well as presenting a five-page report about the summer internship an examination is carried out in the form of an interview.

Location

German courses: Agricultural schools in Landquart and Visp.
French courses: Agricultural school in Châteauneuf.

Language

German and French.

Established

German courses initiated in 2009; French courses in 2013.

Average number of participants each year

15 to 20 for each language version of the course, with a total of 42 graduates (28 German and 14 French).

Partners

AGRIDEA, Agricultural Schools (Landwirtschaftszentrum Visp; landwirtschaftliches Bildungs- und Beratungszentrum Plantahof, Landquart; École d'Agriculture du Valais, Châteauneuf), Swiss Sheep Breeders Association, Swiss Sheepdog Society.

Degree

The diploma is not an officially recognised degree nor is it a prerequisite to work as a shepherd in Switzerland. It is merely supposed to provide interested persons with knowledge and skills. At the same time employers know that holders of a Swiss shepherd training certificate have some knowledge and skills about sheep and herding.

Prerequisites for the training

No prerequisites are necessary to participate in the training. It is organised in such a way that no prior experience in farming or with animals is necessary.

Focus animal species

Sheep and working dogs.

Profile of the participants

Generally more women, about two thirds, and people with no agricultural background participate in the training. Concerning age and educational background it is very mixed.

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OVERVIEW

The training consists on the following 3 modules, comprising a total of eight days:

Module 1

General introduction (three days): introduction to alpine farming, rights and duties of shepherds, pasture management, plant identification, fences.

Module 2

Sheep husbandry and summering (three days): overview of sheep anatomy, breeds, behaviour, animal welfare and health, first aid, animal welfare ordinance.

Module 3

Overview of working dogs and livestock protection (two days), plus moving and herding of livestock with a dog (two days): breeds, dog maintenance and costs, working with dogs, damage prevention measures, large carnivores, field trips and demonstration with livestock guarding and herding dog, cognitive behaviour of dogs, overview of sheepdogs, practical exercise with own dog.

There are two types of practical training: one in the summer and the other during the lambing season in spring or winter. Additional training for work with dogs is offered by the Swiss Sheepdog Society in winter.



Further information

Livestock protection Switzerland: www.herdenschuttschweiz.ch > Hirten > Ausbildung