



Florian Weber says sheep farming has low environmental impact, and the lowest returns of any farming activity

## Going on a wander

Today, farming contributes less to Luxembourg's GDP than space activities. But its impact on the country's future is just as important, particularly if you're a wandering shepherd. Drive from Luxembourg City to Lieler, near Clervaux and, as motorways melt into calm country lanes, if you are lucky, you might encounter Florian Weber and his sheep out wandering. The 32-year-old is Luxembourg's last wandering shepherd, a role he acquired in 2012 when he and wife Myriam took over a herd of 600 ewes (today, they have 700 ewes and a dozen rams).

Starting the sheep farm consumed vast amounts of time and energy, mostly because shepherding had long since gone out of fashion in Luxembourg. "We were confronted with a lot of questions," Myriam recalls. Pertinent questions for cattle farmers, like how to dispose of animal waste, were less relevant to the Webers, who had to bound countless administrative hurdles to build a farm.

"My father bought the land the farm is on a year before he passed away," a bearded and soft-voiced Weber recalls. One of

six children, Weber's parents were street performers in Germany before they moved to Luxembourg in 1984, "to avoid their sons doing military service". They began a smallholding, which included sheep and sparked Weber's love of nature. Standing on a hill with breathtaking views of Oesling valleys, today Schäferei Weber is a monument to that passion. When I visit on a frosty February morning, around 30 lambs gambol with their mothers in a barn. For much of the year the herds are taken wandering, mostly to nature →



reserves in Luxembourg. Here, they “work” by picking up seeds in their wool, between their hooves and in their digestive tracts and transporting them to isolated areas where they can contribute to the genetic diversity of plant life.

### Conservation

Human activity through intensive chemical use in farming and construction has destroyed the conditions some plants need to survive and fragmented the landscape for others, in the worst case leading to extinction. According to the 2005 Luxembourg red list of threatened plants and species, some 8% of vascular plants were regionally extinct and 9.2% critically endangered. These subsequently impact the birds, animals and insects that feed off or rely on these plants to reproduce. The risk is that regional extinctions, if left unchecked, spread to larger areas and ultimately continents. Since the Webers cannot live from the sale of meat and wool alone, they receive biodiversity contracts to work with conservation organisations including Sicona, Natur&ëmwelt and the forestry administration. They plan the wanderings months in advance so that the herd can move from one place to another on foot. The locations can be anywhere in the country and in the past have even included Kirchberg.

Working in pairs and with dogs to herd the sheep, once they reach their destination, one of the team will fence off a makeshift field so the sheep can graze for as long as needed. Almost eight years into the project, and the father-of-two is proud of his work. “We work with nature, and we work in nature. And by working, we do something for nature. It’s the complete package,” he says. For Myriam, the most rewarding part of the job has been working with the dogs—they currently have eight border collies, one of which recently had a litter. She also enjoys the public education aspect. “It’s something living that we see, and the sheep explain how it works. [...] You have to take people with you and explain and show them,” Myriam explains. “They can be part of the family. The sheep mafia,” she laughs.

Check their Facebook page to join the Webers and their sheep on a family wander.

f Schaefer Weber

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WORDS Jess Bauldry  
PHOTO Mike Zenari



Licia Zappatore adding the final touches to a birthday cake in her studio

## The icing on the cake

**Licia Zappatore's steady hand and talent for art restoration** led to her training Colin Firth how to paint for his role as Johannes Vermeer in the film “The Girl with the Pearl Earring”. In fact, most of the painting reproductions in the film were possible thanks to Licia’s technique involving special resurfacing of printouts, which were then glued onto canvas. Licia was well versed in ancient painting, having studied art restoration in Florence, Italy, and the work paid off: the team was nominated for an Oscar for Best Art Direction and Set Decoration.

“It was an amazing experience,” says Licia, but she has also delighted in others. Her last restoration project, for instance, was a painting from the 1700s at the Italian embassy in Brussels. It depicted a family, although some of the details

were unknown until her restoration brought them to light. “When I cleaned it, I found a village which had been painted over.” She also discovered not only the name of each boy and girl in the painting, but the family name on a sceptre. “After they saw the name of the family, they uncovered another little painting similar to the [larger one], it was a shock. Restoration is unbelievable because you discover a lot about the painting, what happened to it.”

Licia has lived in Luxembourg for 20 years, apart from a 2011-15 stint in Brussels. It was while she was in the Belgian capital that she first began cake decoration, at the request of a friend asking for some help. She enjoyed getting back into three-dimensional work which, she says, reminded her of her school days: →