

Multiple issues

As the foremost promoters of the land, wine growers take the future of their work environment very seriously. *“The countryside ensures their sustenance and they, in turn, sustain the countryside”*, points out Manuel Ibanez, project manager for the Ecologistes de l’Euzière. Although increasing numbers of visitors are putting the woodlands at risk, mainly of fire, Manuel goes on to illustrate one of the ways in which vines protect the natural surroundings: *“Their canopy creates an effective barrier against the spread of fire.”* Vines also form a rampart against urban sprawl and encroaching woodlands. In fact, through the various natural functions they perform, vines symbolise the way the *garrigue* operates: for thousands of years, single actions have produced multiple beneficial effects, generating outstanding added value, some of which cannot be quantified. Joël Rochard, of the French Vines and Wine Institute (IFV), sums up the situation: *“Viticultural landscapes play a pivotal role in the life of appellations, and address multiple issues: managing urban sprawl, maintaining plant life, upholding an area’s rural nature.”* However, wine growing alone cannot solve every problem, particularly major issues such as the recurrence of dense vegetation.

Sheep make a comeback

“Horses are now the most common sight in the area but very often they belong to small-scale concerns which do little or nothing to safeguard the countryside,” explains Manuel Ibanez. *“Reintroducing flocks of sheep is one potential solution for managing rural areas. The economic viability of sheep farming therefore needs to be addressed and requires recognition of sheep breeding at European level.”* In the meantime, some wine growers are already using sheep or cows to keep grass levels down in the winter and fertilise the soils. Others are mulling over ways of broadening the ecosystem and creating a sustainable future for farming through diversification: olive trees, herbs, market gardening with a *“farm-to-fork”* approach, all of which are buoyant, consumer-driven niche markets.

