

From dialogue to discovery: Exploring Extremadura



Stefanie SZALACHY
Senior Project Manager, ELO

A much-loved feature of every Friends of the Countryside General Assembly is the opportunity to leave the conference room behind and discover the host region first-hand. This year, the "Saturday programme" offered four different routes through Extremadura. The Orange, Red, Blue and Green Tours introduced participants to family estates, farms, vineyards, rural businesses and historic towns. Each itinerary had its own focus, but all showed how closely agriculture, heritage, nature and family life remain connected across the region.

ORANGE TOUR Olive oil, wine and cheese

*Sonsoles ARMENDARIZ MILANS DEL BOSCH,
WE Project Officer - Regional Coordinator Spain*

The Orange tour focused on two family estates with strong links to Extremadura's food and farming traditions.

The first stop was the **Perales de Valdueza Estate**, where Fadrique ÁLVAREZ DE TOLEDO welcomed the group and introduced the family business. Participants visited the estate's centuries-old olive groves, followed the production process through the modern mill and bottling facilities, and learned how quality, sustainability and traceability are incorporated into every stage.

The estate also includes vineyards, which the group visited before enjoying a tasting and lunch featuring its olive oils and Marqués de Valdueza wines.

The tour then continued to **Pascualete Estate**, where the FIGUEROA family presented one of the region's best-known cheese-producing properties. A live cheesemaking demonstration gave participants a closer look at the traditional methods behind Pascualete's distinctive cheeses.

The visit also included the family residence, whose architecture and history reflect the long relationship between the family and the estate.

At Pascualete, the Orange and Green tours briefly came to-

gether, allowing members from both groups to share their impressions of the day.

BLUE TOUR Wine, horses and Trujillo

Stefanie SZALACHY, Senior Project Manager, ELO

The Blue tour brought together wine, horses and the historic town of Trujillo.

Participants visited **Bodegas HABLA** and **Dehesa La Torrecilla**, an estate known for its wines, hospitality and Pura Raza Española horses.

During the visit, the group learned more about the winery's approach and the work involved in producing wines with a strong identity. The estate's horse-breeding activities offered another perspective on rural enterprise and on the importance of the Spanish horse within the country's cultural heritage.

Although winemaking and horse breeding are very different activities, both require patience, specialist knowledge and long-term planning. At Dehesa La Torrecilla, they form part of a wider estate model built around quality and continuity.

The day ended in Trujillo, where participants walked through the Plaza Mayor and the surrounding historic streets. Its palaces, churches and stone buildings provided an impressive final stop and a reminder of the region's rich architectural past.



Group picture taken during the Blue tour - focusing on winery's approach and horse-breeding

RED TOUR

Life and farming in the dehesa

*Jehanne VERHAEGEN, Coordinator ELO,
FCS, ForumforAg Brussels*

The Red tour explored the dehesa landscape and the farming traditions that have shaped it over generations.

At **Azagala Estate**, Alonso ÁLVAREZ DE TOLEDO, Marqués de Valdueza, welcomed participants to a property that has been in his family for almost three centuries.

The estate brings together holm and cork oak woodland, livestock farming, forestry and wildlife management. Particular attention was given to its Avileña-Negro Ibérico cattle and to the tradition of transhumance. Each year, cattle move between the dehesas of Extremadura and the mountain pastures of the Sierra de Gredos. This seasonal movement, together with the estate's Merino sheep farming, reflects a system built around the natural availability of pasture and water.

The group then travelled to **Dehesa de Cañas**, in the Sierra de San Pedro, where Joaquín and Amelia PITARCH welcomed participants together with their three children.

After lunch in the courtyard, the PITARCH family introduced the estate's main activities, including Merino sheep, Iberian pigs and the management of its oak pastures.

The visit also led to an open discussion about the challenges faced by a young family managing a rural estate today. Maintaining the property means finding a balance between economic viability, environmental responsibility and the wish to preserve it for the next generation.

GREEN TOUR:

Traditions, livestock and rural resilience

Emmanuelle MIKOSZ, Director of Member States Affairs, ELO

The Green tour looked at the relationship between rural communities, livestock and the environment.

José María RAMOS, founder and director of **Learn from Bulls**, shared his experience of working with rural communities in Spain and Portugal.

Using fighting bulls and sheep farming as examples, he explained how traditional livestock systems have contributed to the management of Iberian landscapes and continue to support local economies.

The discussion also addressed some of the main pressures facing rural communities today, including climate change, depopulation and limited infrastructure.

Participants reflected on the difficulty of maintaining traditional practices when the people, services and knowledge that support them are gradually disappearing.

The tour showed that protecting rural landscapes involves more than conservation alone. It also depends on viable farms, active communities and people who are willing and able to continue working the land.

Four different views of Extremadura

Although the four tours followed different routes, they shared many of the same themes.

Participants met families who are preserving long-established estates while adapting their activities to new economic and environmental realities. They saw how food production, livestock farming, biodiversity, cultural heritage and tourism can form part of the same rural landscape.

Above all, the tours offered a chance to understand Extremadura through the people who live and work there. By opening their homes, farms and estates, the hosts gave members a personal view of the region and of the work involved in keeping its countryside active and alive.



Picture from the Green tour - focusing on traditions, livestock and rural resilience