



## Pastures under fruit trees, a French example of regenerating fertility in an old orchard thanks to sheep.

[www.eurafagroforestry.eu/afinet/](http://www.eurafagroforestry.eu/afinet/)

A farmer in France introduced sheep inside his declining plum and apple orchard twenty years ago with the objective of diversifying his activities. His fruit production was becoming less and less profitable because of serious soil compaction and critical contamination of diseases.

However, after a few years of grazing by sheep, productivity of his fruit trees began to increase again and the newly planted trees that replaced the dead ones showed an unprecedented growth. Manure input from the sheep helps stimulate soil biota and structure, and their consumption of tree debris, such as fallen fruit, reduces tree pests.

Shropshire sheep do not consume tree bark, so they live amongst the trees without damaging them. Tree hedgerows were also added to the orchard providing medicinal forage for the sheep, improving health and reducing the need for veterinary treatments and food supplements (usually linked to the tannins presence with anti-helminthic activity).

This example shows association of activities at farm level with mutual benefits known as the agroforestry practice silvopastoralism. The orchard began to produce strongly again, sheep's nutrition was perfectly balanced and soil fertility was regenerated. This diversification strengthened the added-value with direct commercialization (everything is sold on the farm).

For more info:

A study on the same practice in a cider orchard (English):

[www.archiveofciderpomology.co.uk/ArchiveReports/SheepAndOrchards2011.pdf](http://www.archiveofciderpomology.co.uk/ArchiveReports/SheepAndOrchards2011.pdf)



Figure 1. Fruit tree planted with protection in a pasture grazed by Shropshire sheep. Crédit: Osaé

**Léo Godard**

Association Française d'Agroforesterie (AFAF)