

Young Italians pick cows over clubbing in Italy



Vanessa Peduzzi with her cows at her farm called 'Fioco di Neve' (Snowflake)

AFP | Schignano, Italy

While her friends sleep off hangovers, 23-year-old Vanessa Peduzzi is doing a dawn check on her livestock, one of a growing number of Italian youths ditching the fast lane for a farmer's life.

"It's a tiring, demanding job, but I like it," she told AFP as she walked through the wood-lined pastures high above Lake Como in northern Italy to show off the building she is slowly restoring and transforming into a farmhouse.

"I chose this life. This is where I want to be, surrounded by na-

ture and animals," she said.

Peduzzi is a trained chef, but has downed her ladles to become a donkey and cow breeder instead in Alpe Bedolo, some 813 metres (2,600 feet) above sea level, near the border with Switzerland.

"I started last year with two little donkeys. I didn't have any

land or a stable, so I had a friend lend me a meadow," she said.

"The situation has got a bit out of hand," she laughed. She now owns some 20 donkeys -- 15 of which are pregnant -- as well as about 10 cows, five calves and five heifers.

'Not an easy choice'

Jacopo Fontaneto, of Italy's main agricultural union Coldiretti, said after years of mountain life being out of favour among Italians, "we have seen a good return of young people in the last 10 to 20 years".

There has been a 12 percent

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rise in the number of people under 35 at the helm of agricultural businesses in the past five years, Coldiretti said in a study of data from last year.

It said women make up almost a third of the total of new entries to farming.

The sector was seen as "ripe for innovation" and working the land "is no longer considered the last resort of the uneducated" but something parents would be proud of.

Nonetheless, Fontaneto admits: "It's not an easy choice."

Instead of computer screens or checkout tills, those on remote pastures stare at "the most beautiful countryside you can dream of", but it is also "a life of sacrifice", with little opportunity for wild nights on the town, he said.

Youngsters can also help modernise the profession by bringing in new technologies or investing in online sales.

Though it can be a lonely existence, Peduzzi has made friends on the job: all of her donkeys and cows have names, she said fondly, as she introduced Beatrice, Silvana, Giulia, Tom and Jerry.

"I've had this passion since I was a little girl," she said, stroking a black cow with dramatic white-ringed eyes.

"My grandparents, who had an inn, had dairy cows. They

made butter, cheese. And as a child I used to accompany my father when he took his cows to the mountain pastures," she remembered.

'A goddess'

Peduzzi, wearing a colourful bandanna and striding through the long grass, says her father was not pleased with her new career choice at first because he knows the challenges involved -- but he has since come around.

She rises early. From 6:30 am (0430 GMT) she is with her animals, checking that they are well and giving them water.

"It's not a walk in the park. Sometimes you have to call the vet, help the animals to give birth," she said.

"When people my age are getting ready on a Saturday to go out for drinks, I'm getting ready to go to the barn," she added.

But she's not alone. Her 34-year-old partner is helping restore the farmhouse. And Peduzzi said she would much prefer to spend any day of the year in the fields than to have to face a shopping trip in town filled with noise, traffic and smog.

"Here, I feel like a goddess," she said smiling.

For now, she sells animals and meat, but is hoping to expand soon to milking her cows and donkeys and making cheese.



Peduzzi, at her farm called 'Fioco di Neve' (Snowflake) in Schignano, in Alpe Bedolo, Italy

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VANESSA PEDUZZI



Peduzzi's farm is in Alpe Bedolo near the border with Switzerland

Rare Javan Rhino captured on hidden camera in gleeful mudbath

Reuters | Jakarta

A rare Javan rhinoceros has been captured on camera gleefully rolling around in the khaki, tropical waters of a national park, on the western-most tip of Indonesia's Java island.

The video of the critically endangered Javan rhino, one of only 72 left in the wild, was posted on Twitter by Indonesia's environment minister, Siti Nurbaya Bakar, and offers a rare glimpse into the life of one of the world's largest land

mammals.

The footage, captured by a hidden camera at Ujung Kulon's national park has been shared more than 12,000 times and shows the rhino, a male estimated to be seven years old, rolling around on his back in the muddy waters at the base of a waterfall.

The minister said that a rhino mud bath helps to regulate their body temperature and protect their skin from parasites and insects.

Javan rhinos, which once lived



Still image from video of a seven-year-old male Javan rhinoceros enjoying a mud bath in Ujung Kulon National Park in Banten, Indonesia

throughout northeast India and Southeast Asia, are among the most threatened of the five rhino species.

There are only 72 Javan rhinos left in the wild, including 39 males and 33 females, according to Bakar.

"Let's keep watching and loving the rhino," Bakar wrote in her viral Twitter post, "Looking after and loving them is the same as looking after and loving Indonesia."

Conservationists and researchers from the World

Wildlife Fund and the World Resources Institute in Indonesia told Reuters the government should increase monitoring of Ujung Kulon National park, and reinvigorate efforts to develop a second habitat for the critically endangered species.

The population of the herbivorous mammals has declined mainly due to illegal poaching and excessive demand for rhino horn and medicine, which fetch high prices on the black market.