**Mongolian Pastoralism, Food Sovereignty and the Future of the Nomadic Herding Way of Life (2026)**

**BADAMSUREN Ailtgui from Mongolia**

Good afternoon!

Warm greetings to all of you. My name is Badamsuren. I am a herder from Dornogobi Province in Mongolia. I live with my husband and our four children. Today I am here together with my husband, Byambyn Erdenejargal. He is sitting over there.

I am a mathematics teacher by profession and teach maths to the pupils at the school in our sum, our local district. I have been familiar with livestock herding since I was a child. I learned how to look after animals from my parents and from everyday life. We Mongolians have been a nomadic people since ancient times. We have raised the five kinds of livestock, horses, camels, cattle, sheep and goats, and moved with them from pasture to pasture.

When we were children, the pastures were rich, the plants grew densely, there were many different species, and the climate was stable. The animals were well fed and of good quality, and people kept relatively few of them. Nomadic herding was the foundation of Mongolian life, and the life of a herder is inseparable from the knowledge of animal husbandry, from culture and from tradition.

We women herders learned how to care for livestock side by side with the men, and we have always worked just as hard as they do. Herding, raising, feeding and watering the animals: we women do all of this work no less than the men.

In Mongolia, it is mainly we women who prepare meat for storage and turn milk into dairy products. I, too, take care of my family's food. I milk our mares and make airag, fermented mare's milk. I milk our cows and goats and make aaruul and eezgii from the milk, dried and roasted curd. In autumn and winter I prepare our dairy products so that we have supplies for the rest of the year. Whatever is left over, I sell, and that adds to our household income.

This is a typical example of the lives of many women herders. Herding households do not only provide for themselves. They sell meat, milk and dairy products and so contribute to the food supply of towns and cities. What a herding family produces also helps their children who live in the city get through the winter. In this way, the work of one household is connected to the lives of many families and supports the food supply.

Meat, milk and dairy products are important sources of the nutrients we need for our health. Meat contains protein, iron and vitamin B12, while milk and dairy products provide protein and calcium. That is why they are important for children's growth and for meeting the nutritional needs of the whole family. Combined with vegetables, fruit and grains, and eaten in the right amounts, they form the basis of a balanced diet.

At the same time, it is our responsibility as herders to keep our animals healthy, to process milk in clean conditions and to store food properly. So when pastures degrade and the animals yield less, this does not only affect our income. It also affects the family's food supplies, the milk our children drink and the nutrition of everyone in the household.

Today, however, Mongolian pastoralism faces many new challenges. In some years there is drought, less grows, the animals lose strength and weight, and this increases the risk of dzud, a winter disaster, during the harsh winter and spring. The animals do not find enough to eat, they go hungry and cold, and many even die. As a result, there really is less meat, milk, dairy products, wool and cashmere.

That is why it is so important for us herders to live in harmony with nature and to keep only as many animals as the pastures can carry. We use the pastures wisely, plan our seasonal migrations carefully, protect water sources and improve the quality and productivity of our animals. We put our whole heart into keeping the pastures healthy.

In recent years, however, many mining projects have been set up. The larger the mining licence areas become, the scarcer and poorer the pastures get. Mining and climate change are also causing the groundwater level to drop. In this picture you can see how close to a herding family's pastures a mine is operating.

When the ground is dug up for months and years, huge amounts of dust are released. The land becomes drier, water becomes scarcer, and all of this harms plant growth.

We are convinced that if we combine the traditional knowledge of Mongolian nomadic herding with modern science and technology, we can protect our pastures and develop herding in a sustainable way. It would also make sense to restore land where mining has ended, to plant trees there and to establish new plants, so that the pastures can carry more again.

For me, a herder's greatest wealth is not just having many animals, but having healthy pastures, healthy animals and a life in harmony with nature. The pastures we protect do not only belong to today's herders. They are the foundation of life for future generations.

I believe it is our important task to pass on nomadic culture, the herding way of life and traditional knowledge about living respectfully with nature to young people around the world.

I am very happy to be here today to exchange views with people from all over the world who practise pastoralism, and especially with women herders, about the problems that concern us. I have come as a representative of many, many women herders, and I hope that we can speak openly with one another and find new solutions together.

Vielen Dank! Thank you very much.

Thank you for your attention.