



CORE organic Cofund



Photo: Louis Echampard/INRA ASTER

Dairy cattle meet their natural needs through grazing, dam-rearing and health support

GrazyDaisy



Photo: Jesper O. Lehmann



Aim of the project:

Encourage grazing and improve grazing management, rearing cows and calves together and minimize medicine use.

Introduction

Organic animal farming focuses on allowing animals to meet natural requirements, whilst considering the whole farming system. There are still many areas where common organic animal farming does not match the organic principles fully, for example separating cow and calf just after birth.

GrazyDaiSy investigates how to manage mixed age groups of cows, including rearing calves with their dams, whilst maintaining a high level of health and a constant effort to minimize medication. Furthermore, we focus on implementing resilient grazing strategies to improve animal performance and decrease impacts on the surrounding ecosystem. However, we also address the special challenges of keeping older and younger animals together on grass. We cover most European climate zones, from the coldest North to the hottest South.

Background

Specialized dairy production even on organic farms relies on imported concentrate feed and the possibility to use antibiotics and anthelmintics. Most calves are removed from their dam within the first 24 hours after birth. All this happens despite emphasis on naturalness and letting animals meet their natural needs and become robust and resilient.

Main activities:

- ▶ Identifying and improving relevant organic grazing strategies under different European conditions.
- ▶ Researching on farm level, together with farmers, advisors, and stakeholders.
- ▶ Developing resilient animals and management systems to decrease medicine usage.
- ▶ Considering animal rearing in a farming systems context and taking a holistic systems approach.
- ▶ Exchanging knowledge and learning between European regions and countries.
- ▶ Investigating the motivations and perceptions of farmers and their advisors.
- ▶ Developing ways how cows and calves can bond, spend weeks of the milk-feeding period together, and de-bond gently afterwards.



Expected results

By the end of the project, we expect to have reached results with regard to the following:

1. Innovative, regionally adapted, robust and productive grazing systems, suitable for organic dairy farms across the different regions.
2. Strategies to reduce parasite burdens, in particular when rearing animals of different age groups together.
3. Strong dam-calf bonds to ensure maternal care of the calf at pasture, and ways of gently facilitating the necessary de-bonding process at weaning.
4. Analyses of animal health, welfare and diseases based on well-documented benefits and consequences of rearing different age groups together in grazing-based organic dairy systems.
5. Farmers' perceptions, visions, barriers, as well as the social and daily practices related to dam-calf rearing, innovative grazing systems and medicine-reducing strategies.
6. Aspects of sustainability of the systems, e.g. the environmental and economic impact of rearing calves with their dam.



Societal and long term benefits

We take a participatory approach at all stages of this project with involvement of farmers. This supports not only the efficiency, feasibility and context relevance of the project, but also contributes to the ethical consistency of this project. Involvement, participation and dialogue with different actors including advisors, companies and consumers, means that we meet potential societal concerns regarding human, intellectual, cultural or societal development.

Our strategies are quite innovative and focus on resilient animals and surroundings. This is a needed angle to societal, rural and food systems development.

We develop new indicators to assess sustainability particularly targeted cow-calf-systems in dairy herds.

We conduct high-scientific-quality studies, which help the ground-breaking focus.



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How to reach target groups

- ▶ Each participating country reaches their networks of farmers, organizations, advisors, colleagues and/or students.
- ▶ Our dissemination products are widely diverse – from video-clips to reports, online-presentations, scientific publications and a PhD-course. All the before-mentioned groups are targeted through multiple relevant material.
- ▶ All results are available to all in English and free to translate and use in national, local and regional contexts.
- ▶ All countries conduct stakeholder meetings, and the on-farm research approach helps securing that all processes and results are commonly owned.

Photo: Mette Vaarst

Further information

This transnational project is funded via the ERA-net CORE Organic Cofund based on funds from participating countries and funding from the European Union.

CORE Organic Cofund is a collaboration between 26 partners in 19 countries/regions on initiating transnational research projects in the area of organic food and farming. CORE Organic Cofund has initiated 12 research projects. Read more at the CORE Organic Cofund website: <http://projects.au.dk/coreorganiccofund/>