

ITALY

Agri-food chain integration & quality

Location
Pontinia

Programming period
2014 – 2020

Priority
P3 - Food chain & risk
management

Measure
M14 – Animal welfare

Funding (EUR)
Total budget 72 536
EAFRD 31 263
National/Regional 41 273

Project duration
2015 – 2020

Project promoter
Demetra farm

Contact
Antonio.degregoris@degregoris.com

Website
n/a

Animal welfare support enabled a farmer to improve the living conditions of his buffalo herd and at the same time improve the quality and quantity of milk produced.

Summary

The De Gregoris family farm “Demetra” is a 100-hectare (ha) family farm located in the Agro Pontino area in Lazio, approximately 110 km away from Rome. In 2013, the farm owner decided to move into the niche market of buffalo’s milk, which is linked to the production of the famous buffalo mozzarella cheese.

Rural Development Programme (RDP) support enabled the farmer to improve the living conditions of the buffalos by constructing a stable that is well ventilated and can comfortably accommodate 500 animals. The farmer also improved the monitoring and treatment of key animal diseases. The animals’ diet is monitored by a veterinarian, while spacious pens have been built for the calves.



Results

Thanks to the RDP support, the animal welfare has improved. This can be demonstrated by the increased milk production (+25%), a reduction in death during births and overall mortality, as well as a significant reduction in the use of veterinary medicines.

The public and commercial image for the farm has improved, and the milk is sold at a profitable price to a dairy that offered them an exclusivity contract with favourable payment conditions.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ RDP support greatly helped the farmer to proceed in developing the buffalo herd under healthier conditions. As a result, the farm is soon going to increase its livestock.
- ❑ This experience confirms that accessing profitable niche markets can be supported by RDP measures apparently focused on other topics, e.g. animal welfare.
- ❑ The entrepreneurs stated that it is very important to carry out frequent controls on farms receiving RDP funding, in order to ensure that the funds are used for innovative projects, and to prevent fund misuses.

Context

The De Gregoris family farm “Demetra” is a 100 ha family farm located in the Agro Pontino area, in Lazio, approximately 110 km away from Rome. The farm is run by Alfredo and his sons Martina and Antonio. The area is fertile as it used to be a wetland until the 1930s. The farm was used to cultivate mainly sugar beet and vegetables, however, the financial crisis and the low profit margins associated with growing vegetables forced them to reflect on the future of their farm.

In 2013, they decided to move into the niche market of buffalo’s milk, which is key to the production of the famous buffalo mozzarella cheese. They acquired a small herd of buffalos from a nearby farmer who was closing his business and swiftly changed the farm to accommodate the breeding of buffalos. They set up large and comfortable spaces for the animals and ensure that they are provided with good quality food.

Objectives

The main objective of this project was to improve the living conditions of the buffalos. The farmer also wanted to improve the monitoring and treatment of key animal diseases, improve the animals’ diet and especially improve the living conditions of the young calves.

Activities

The farm invested in the construction of a large stable with a maximum capacity of nearly 500 animals. The construction of the stable allows the air to flow efficiently allowing for better ventilation in the hot summer climate.

Large open paddocks were installed granting every buffalo at least 35 m² of space. In addition, showers were installed both inside the stable and in the paddocks. The larger amount of space allows for a stronger flush for cleaning the animals. The showers in the paddocks have a softer water flow, helping the animals to keep a thin layer of mud on their skin, which is very useful for insulating their body from flies and extreme temperature, both low and high. These showers also create muddy ponds where the animals enjoy relaxing and playing.

Inside the stable, the pens where young calves grow have been set up in a way that enable them to move around, allowing them to socialise with one another.

The water quality, the feed used, as well as common diseases (e.g. mastitis) are monitored carefully.

Wooden drinking troughs were introduced, replacing the usual metal ones.



Main results

Thanks to the RDP support, the animal welfare has improved, demonstrated by the increased milk production (+25%), a reduction in death during births and overall mortality, as well as a significant reduction in the use of veterinary medicines.

The overall image for the Demetra Farm has improved and the milk is sold at profitable prices to a dairy that offered them an exclusivity contract with favourable payment conditions.

Key lessons

RDP support greatly helped the farmer to proceed in developing the buffalo herd with healthier conditions. As a result, the farm is soon going to enlarge its herd and related paddocks.

This experience confirms that accessing profitable niche markets can be supported by RDP measures apparently focused on other topics, e.g. animal welfare.

The entrepreneur stated that it is very important to carry out due controls on farms that receive RDP funding, in order to ensure that funds are used for innovative projects, and prevent the misuse of funds.

Additional sources of information

<https://youtu.be/wKHqmjuaJ1g>