

New organic slaughterhouse and organic butchering plant

Twenty jobs created by new organic meat facilities prioritising product quality from livestock welfare.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Unterweissenbach, Austria

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P2 - Competitiveness

Focus Area: Farm performance, restructuring & modernisation

Measures: M04 - Investments in physical assets

Funding:	Total budget	7 942 828 (EUR)
	EAFRD	494 300 (EUR)
	National/Regional	505 700 (EUR)
	Private	1 000 000 (EUR)
	Other funding sources	5 942 828 (EUR)

Timeframe: 09/01/2018 - 08/09/2019

Project promoter: Sonnberg Biofleisch GmbH

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Summary

Sonnberg Biofleisch GmbH was founded in 2004 and is Austria's leading 100% organic slaughterhouse. Transparency and animal welfare have always been top priorities of the family business and when a new slaughterhouse was needed to keep up with demand, the idea of implementing the gentlest approach possible to slaughtering was prioritised. A further ambition was to demonstrate more effectively the high animal welfare standards of the company to its customers, suppliers and visitors.

In 2019, the new 'glass' slaughterhouse was opened providing an education and tourism service where visitors can follow the slaughtering process and see for themselves that high animal welfare standards are always maintained.



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Project results

- The project has created 20 new jobs. In 2022/2023, the company employed around 105 staff and had a turnover of around EUR 29 million, exclusively processing 100% organic meat.
- The volume of animals processed per year nearly doubled.
- The company now operates in a climate-neutral manner.
- Improved animal welfare standards and stress-free handling of animals were obtained through building design and staff training.
- A network of 1 100 organic farmers was strengthened and new business connections were made and reinforced in retail, wholesale and with institutional kitchens.
- New activities can now be offered on-site, including workshops about cattle slaughtering and food production.
- The opening and launch of the new building attracted around 3 000 visitors. It offered a good opportunity to re-connect with customers and suppliers.



Key lessons and recommendations

- Specific technical learning was gained regarding the creation of a slaughterhouse where stress in animals is reduced including techniques of how to construct the building and what methods to use for calming the animals as much as possible.
- Visiting similar showcase facilities provided useful insights for the design of the project's rural tourism and education facilities.

Context

The family business Sonnberg Biofleisch GmbH was founded in 2004. It is Austria's leading 100% organic butcher that only slaughters and processes animals from certified organic farms. Research has shown that animal welfare and meat quality are interrelated. Convinced of this fact, the family has always aimed to achieve high quality product standards in this respect.

When the existing slaughter and butchering plant reached the limits of its capacities, a new facility was needed to continue serving demand for the company's products.

The family agreed that transparency and animal welfare should continue to be top priorities for the new slaughterhouse in line with the company's principles and that this should also be demonstrated more effectively to customers and visitors. The idea was born to build a 'glass' slaughterhouse with the possibility of over-seeing the slaughtering process through large glass panels. In that way, clients and visitors would be able to follow the slaughtering process and see for themselves that the animals were treated as gentle and stress-free as possible and that high animal welfare standards were pursued at all times. It was important that these aims were fully taken into consideration during the planning, design and construction process of the building.

The family understands this as an obligation to their customers, farmers and, first and foremost, to the animals. It was crucial that the new construction would fulfil the high expectations of customers while upholding the dignity of the animals.



Objectives

The main objectives of the project were to:

- Increase the competitiveness of the company and improve product quality.
- Reinforce animal welfare.
- Improve the job offer for local people.
- Enhance the working conditions in the slaughterhouse.
- Obtain expert support from consultants regarding animal welfare regulations during transport and slaughter, and implement their recommendations.

Activities

The project implemented a stress-free approach to slaughtering in the new environment to guarantee high-quality meat. For this purpose, an animal welfare officer supervises all steps of the process to ensure that humane approaches are prioritised, including during transport, unloading, stunning and slaughtering. This involved the following activities:

- The first steps were meetings and brainstorming sessions to clarify the financial framework of the construction project.
- Commissioning consultants to conduct assessments of other slaughterhouses and obtaining their expert opinions for the design and construction of the new facility. This was very important for the implementation of the project.
- Planning, submitting, and implementing the construction and financial execution of the project.
- Launching the new cattle slaughterhouse in 2019.



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Main results

- The project created 20 new jobs. In 2022/2023, the company employed around 105 staff and had a turnover of around EUR 29 million, processing exclusively 100% organic meat.
- The volume of animals processed per year was nearly doubled.
- The company now operates in a climate-neutral manner sourcing its energy from regional small 100% renewable energy power plants. A photovoltaic system with 280 kWp and an environmentally friendly wood chip heating system has been installed.
- Improved animal welfare standards at the new slaughterhouse and stress-free handling of animals were obtained through building design and staff training.
- Greatly improved slaughter line cycle performance, as well as impeccable hygienic results were achieved.
- Improved working conditions were created.
- A network of 1 100 organic farmers was established and new business connections were made and strengthened in retail, wholesale and with institutional kitchens.
- New activities can now be offered on-site, including workshops about cattle slaughtering and food production with customers, suppliers and schools.
- Individual animals can be tagged through an electronic data acquisition system. This allows the product to be traced back to the farmer.
- All managers (and all under 40 years old) were trained, several of whom completed the master craftsman's examination.

- A good level of equality improvements was achieved with women being hired as 'Slaughter Manager' and 'Animal welfare officer', along with several apprentices and new administrative positions being also filled by women.

Key lessons and recommendations

- Up-front know-how gathering and visits to showcase facilities were very useful and worthwhile activities.
- There was noticeable interest from the population. The opening and launch of the new building was a good opportunity to re-connect with customers and suppliers - around 3 000 visitors attended.
- Specific technical learning aspects were included.
- Through high walls, visual contact can be avoided with rival cattle.
- Cattle like to follow straight lines. Therefore, avoid corners or sharp edges following the Temple Grandin method.
- Cattle like to move from dark to light areas.
- Wooden doors ensure that loud noises are muffled.
- The concrete floor is roughened so that the animals have a safe step.
- Animals like to orient themselves uphill, so the waiting area rises from the delivery to the stunning area by 1.6 m.

"In addition to the best quality, my priority is responsibility for people, animals and the environment."

Manfred Huber

"Sustainability can never be fashion. It is a way of life."

Manfred Huber

Additional information:

www.biofleisch.biz

www.zukunftsraumland.at/projekte/237

www.youtube.com/watch?v=qDj13uijeml&t=25s



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