Working on resilient dairy farming
German farmer exchanges with peers and researchers to learn, and to create sustainable on-farm solutions

Dairy farming is currently facing a number of challenges. On the one hand, the products have to meet high environmental standards and animal welfare requirements, on the other hand the market demands cheap products. Kirsten Wosnitza, who runs a farm of 120 dairy cows in Schleswig-Holstein with her husband Gerd Albertsen, believes in striking a balance between productivity and animal welfare: “Being a dairy farmer, I feel that sound and happy cows are the foundation for our economic and emotional success. I also feel that this is essential to keep the acceptance for our work as dairy farmers and for our product ‘milk’ in the society.”

Wosnitza elaborates on her approach: “On our farm, we try to run a system that suits the site, size and resources of our farm, the amount of labour we have available, our own preferences and the amount of risk we are willing to take. We try not to push the system to its limits, but we try to build in buffer capacity instead.” Wosnitza is working on resilient dairy farming. Resilience is the capacity of the farming system to cope with problems or unforeseen disturbances which arise while at the same time maintaining farm income. More resilient systems are prepared to withstand larger disturbances.

Concretely, this means that Wosnitza keeps the milk yield at a level of 10 000 kg per lactation. “Increasing this to a higher level would require an intensification of the cow’s ration,” Wosnitza says, “instead, we choose to keep the cows in a system that combines in-barn block calving and intensive grazing. This helps us to maintain health and results over the cow’s time spent on our farm, which is 7-8 years. In turn, this leads to a reduction in the number of replacement heifers, which leads to less work and lower production costs.” The end result is an economically viable system and less stress for Wosnitza, her husband and their animals.

Dairy farming, of course, can be done in many different ways, there are many solutions at hand and it is challenging to transfer those solutions from one particular farm to another. “Still,” she says “I find it important to look across the fence.” This is why she is part of an Operational Group and a European Focus Group. “In this cooperation I came across a French example of milking only 13 times a week during the summer grazing period – with no negative effect on the cow’s health. This could be a possibility for us in summer, when most of our cows are nearing the end of their lactation. As we do not have any other staff on the farm, it could improve our life-work balance.” Wosnitza believes in the positive effects of the exchange of knowledge amongst farmers, advisers and researchers: “If it is done in the right way, it can help farmers and their families to get not only a better economic result but also to find a more satisfying way to do their work.”
Working on resilient dairy farming

German farmer exchanges with peers and researchers to learn, and to create sustainable on-farm solutions

Dairy farming is currently facing a number of challenges. Kirsten Wosnitza, who runs a farm of 120 dairy cows in Schleswig-Holstein with her husband Gerd Albertsen, believes in striking a balance between productivity and animal welfare: “Being a dairy farmer, I feel that sound and happy cows are the foundation for our economic and emotional success. I also feel that this is essential to keep the acceptance for our work as dairy farmers and for our product ‘milk’ in the society.”

Concretely, this means that Wosnitza keeps the milk yield at a level of 10 000 kg per lactation. “Increasing this to a higher level would require an intensification of the cow’s ration,” Wosnitza says, “instead, we choose to keep the cows in a system that combines in-barn block calving and intensive grazing. This helps us to maintain health and results over the cow’s time spent on our farm, which is 7-8 years.” The end result is an economically viable system and less stress for Wosnitza, her husband and their animals.

Wosnitza believes that exchange of knowledge amongst farmers, advisers and researchers can lead to getting a better economic result and finding a more satisfying way to do her work. This is why she is part of an Operational Group and she has also taken part in a European Focus Group. “In this cooperation, I came across a French example that could be a possibility for us. That is why I find it important to look across the fence.”

Background information

Project information

- Kirsten Wosnitza is involved in the Operational Group ‘Nutrient Management in Grasslands’. Read the project factsheet on www.eip-agri.eu or www.eip-agrar-sh.de

- Kirsten Wosnitza was one of the 20 experts in the EIP-AGRI Focus Group ‘Robust & resilient dairy production systems’ that produced its report in April 2018.
  - Download the Focus Group report
  - Download the Focus Group factsheet

Pictures

Kirsten Wosnitza: “We choose to keep the cows in a system that combines in-barn block calving and intensive grazing. This helps us to maintain health and results over the cow’s time spent on our farm, which is 7-8 years.”

Pictures above are free for use. Click on the picture to download the high resolution version
More information on robust and resilient dairy farming

The **EIP-AGRI Focus Group ‘Robust & resilient dairy production systems’** produced its report in April 2018.

- Download the Focus Group report
- Download the Focus Group factsheet

**More related EIP-AGRI livestock topics**

- [EIP-AGRI Factsheet Profitability of permanent grassland](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Factsheet Reducing emissions from cattle farming](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Focus Group Grazing for carbon](#)
- [EIP-AGRI Focus Group Reduction of antibiotic use in the pig sector](#)

**Horizon 2020 Thematic Networks on dairy farming:**

- [EuroDairy (MAA)](#) - A Europe-wide thematic network supporting a sustainable future for EU dairy farmers: [website](#) - [CORDIS](#)
- [4D4F (MAA)](#) - Data Driven Dairy Decisions 4 Farmers: [website](#) - [CORDIS](#)

Thematic networks are multi-actor projects which collect existing knowledge and best practices on a given theme to make it available in easily understandable formats for end-users such as farmers, foresters, advisers etc. More information on [www.eip-agri.eu](#)

**EIP-AGRI Inspiration from your country on robust and resilient dairy farming?**

Here below you find a list of topics that have been covered in one of the EIP-AGRI events and / or EIP-AGRI publications.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Idea</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czech Republic</td>
<td>Selling dairy products from a milk van</td>
<td>Press article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Improving welfare for cows...and farmers</td>
<td>Inspirational idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>Changing the menu in the cow barn</td>
<td>Inspirational idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>From great soil comes great food – a farmers’ story</td>
<td>Inspirational idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany</td>
<td>Online videos to bring consumers and farmers closer</td>
<td>Inspirational idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>Greek dairy farmers bring fresh milk to customers with vending machines</td>
<td>Press article</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>Decision support tool for dairy farm management</td>
<td>Inspirational idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Netherlands</td>
<td>Sports apps for dairy cows</td>
<td>Inspirational idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Netherlands</td>
<td>Concrete solutions for sustainability and animal welfare</td>
<td>Inspirational idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the Netherlands</td>
<td>Amazing Grazing- going back to the roots</td>
<td>Inspirational idea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Improving feed intake in cows, sheep and goats</td>
<td>Inspirational idea</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Operational Groups on dairy farming in your country?

At the beginning of April 2018, the EIP-AGRI Operational Groups database on the EIP-AGRI website included 30 Operational Group in the EU working on dairy:

- Belgium: 1
- Germany: 10
- Italy: 15
- Lithuania: 2
- UK: 2

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups

EIP-AGRI Operational Groups are groups of people who work together in an innovation project funded by Rural Development Programmes (RDPs). Operational Groups are the EIP-AGRI’s main tool for turning innovative ideas into real solutions for the field.

An Operational Group consists of several partners with a common interest in a specific, practical innovation project. The people involved in the Operational Group should bring in different types of practical and, where necessary, scientific expertise. They may include farmers, scientists, agri-business representatives and many others. Every country or region has the possibility to define specific national demands or restrictions on how to put together an Operational Group.

- Visit the Operational Groups page on the EIP-AGRI website
- EIP-AGRI Brochure on Operational Groups: Turning your idea into innovation (update 2016)
- EIP-AGRI Brochure Operational Groups - Collaborate to innovate shows examples of successful collaborations in Portugal, France, Estonia, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands. It provides Operational Groups with inspiration and tools for further knowledge exchange within the EIP-AGRI network.

More information on Operational Groups in your country

If you would like to cover a story on an Operational Group in your own country, you can find following information on the EIP-AGRI website:

- Check if your country will/ has set up Operational Groups
- Check if your country has set up a website where you can find information on the OGs which have been selected for funding
- Contact the Managing Authority in your country to find out more
- Check the EIP-AGRI meeting point for Operational Groups in your country
- Contact the EIP-AGRI press officer to help you further: ina.vanhoye@eip-agri.eu

EIP-AGRI

The European Innovation Partnership ‘Agricultural Productivity and Sustainability’ (EIP-AGRI) is one of five EIPs which have been launched by the European Commission in a bid to promote rapid modernisation of the sectors concerned, by stepping up innovation efforts.

The EIP-AGRI aims to foster innovation in the agricultural and forestry sectors by bringing research and practice closer together – in research and innovation projects as well as via the EIP-AGRI network.

EIPs aim to streamline, simplify and better coordinate existing instruments and initiatives, and complement
them with actions where necessary. Two specific funding sources are particularly important for the EIP-AGRI: the EU Research and Innovation framework, Horizon 2020, as well as the EU Rural Development Policy.

- **EIP-AGRI Brochure on the EIP-AGRI Network (2015)**

- **EIP-AGRI Brochure on Thematic Networks under Horizon 2020** (DE -EN – FR – HU – SP)
- **EIP-AGRI Brochure Horizon 2020 multi-actor projects** (DE – EN - FR)
- **EIP-AGRI Brochure on Funding opportunities under Horizon 2020 - 2018 Calls** (EN)

**Contact information**

Ina Van Hoye
Communication officer
EIP-AGRI Service Point
ina.vanhoye@eip-agri.eu
+32 486 90 77 43