

## Improving chicken value chains: an Operational Group in Hesse, Germany



**Biohuhn** is an Operational Group (OG) looking into innovative uses for laying hens at the end of their productive life. They are developing new, local food products from this organic meat to provide extra income for farmers, reduce environmental impact and improve animal welfare.

This OG brings together six organic hen farms, two regional slaughter houses, the University of Kassel, one product development business and a manufacturing company.

### High consumer demand for organic eggs

Organic eggs are a sought-after commodity, and in order to ensure quality products, the hens of these 6 farmers are very well looked after during their laying life. Purchased from an organic poultry breeder, they spend two years as laying hens. In this time they receive 100% organic feed, a high nutritional mixture. Eckhardt Eisenach, one of the organic farmers told us "Even the beans are peeled for them: it's better for these feathered gourmets to avoid bean pods because they contain bitter substances". They are kept in fenced pastures and hen houses which are equipped with aviaries, elevated perches, family nests and windows and have a covered area for the hens to shelter during bad weather. From spring to autumn the hens can use three meadows close to the farm. This means that the animals can live out their species-specific behaviour.

But what happens to the hens at the end of this productive life?

### Lack of consumer demand for laying hens as a meat source

So after receiving the excellent feed and housing/living conditions, it would seem logical to then use the meat from these chickens for food. However, compared to meat breeds, they do not provide a large amount of meat so it does not fulfill industrial demands. On a regional scale there currently is no consumer demand for these animals as a high quality, organic meat source either. "The use of laying hens as chicken soup is now very uncommon" says Eckhardt, "Consumer demand and cooking habits have changed and there is currently no regional market for these animals and their meat." Sometimes the hens are used for animal feed, but the transportation before slaughter is costly for the farmer and very long and stressful for the hens. Currently therefore, the meat does not provide any extra source of income for farmers.

### A regional supply chain of convenience products

The aim of the OG Biohuhn is to establish a regional supply chain, to provide farmers with an additional source of income and to improve animal welfare in all parts of the value chain. The OG wants to raise awareness and provoke consumer demand for this meat. The OG plans to develop high quality ready-cooked chicken-based meals and sauces which respect the consumers' demand for convenience

products. Biohuhn will also employ an innovative marketing approach that addresses younger consumers.

We spoke to Tim Treis, lead partner, about the origins and the activities of this OG. He explained that one of the project partners ([www.sonnenei.de](http://www.sonnenei.de)) had already experimented with food products from the hen meat some years ago, along with the OG product developer ([www.heinzelcheese.de](http://www.heinzelcheese.de)) they worked on some new, interesting recipes. A few years on, the two companies felt that their idea had potential as an Operational Group, involving a number of hen farmers and animal health specialists. This was the beginning of Biohuhn.

So far, Biohuhn has completed the first stage of its activities: to develop a range of innovative convenience products from the chicken meat. Now they are working with a marketing agency who is currently designing of the logo, labels and packaging. From November 2016, the products will be for sale in a number of pilot shops, and they will be carrying out a customer survey and tastings. The final launch of the range of products is planned for the second half of 2017.

The farmers and other members of Biohuhn would like for organic laying hens to be rediscovered as a high-quality, modern food. Follow their progress: <http://www.hessische-biohuhn.de/>



<http://www.hessische-biohuhn.de/>

<http://www.bioland-ei.de/unser-hof/>

Video in German: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KIZyXE-5PS4>

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