

INNOVATION CULTIVATING TRADITION Fabio Curto, Italy

For generations, the family business Azienda Agricola Ponte Vecchio has been linked with mountain pasturing and the production of traditional regional cheeses. Fabio Curto together with his brother took the challenge of introducing new innovative technology to their dairy production while not abandoning farm traditions.

Context

The family business is located in the Veneto region, using the mountain pastures for cattle breeding. The milk produced by the company is directly processed into traditional dairy products.

After their parent's dairy farm was destroyed a fire caused by lightning, the two brothers decided to restart the family dairy business in a new manner. Their aim was to keep their traditions (system of pasture, production of typical cheese) but at the same time modernise and automate production, making it more effective.

Idea

The process started with the planning for a new barn that would fulfill the requirements of maintaining animal welfare and where production would be fully automated. In cooperation with a company from Netherlands, a project was developed for a new barn equipped with a robotic system for milking and feeding, so that the cows could be fed and milked without human intervention. Thanks to a special collar, the machine recognises each cow. If the cows are ready to be milked when they present themselves, the milk is immediately tested (e.g. for control of mastitis).

A great deal of useful information on the cattle is collected using the software which is interlinked to the breeder through a smartphone application. The machine checks, for example, the weight of the cow, tests the rumination time to check the cow's health or monitors the kinetic activity of the cow for reproduction. Also the feeding system is completely automatic, controlling the ingestion of feed based on how much the cows have to eat depending on their production state and growth.

Location

Vidor, Veneto region

Programming period

2007-2013

Measure

M 121 Modernisation of agricultural holdings

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 402,407€
EAFRD 160,963€
Private 241,444€

Project duration

October 2014 –
September 2015

Project beneficiary

Az. Agr. PONTE VECCHIO

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The use of technology can increase production performance. A lot of useful data for animal welfare is collected which may lead to, for example, a reduction in the consumption of antibiotics. There are also energy savings and environmental improvements (tractors and other machines for feeding and milking are no longer needed). In addition, fully automatic feeding and milking systems significantly improve the life quality of the people employed in the dairy sector.



“The surprise is how this innovation and technology makes an enormous increase in good breeding practice, first of all for the health of the cows.”

Outcomes

The investment was realised in 2014 and 2015, starting with the introduction of the feeding system and a year later, with the milking robot. In 2016 the activities of the first fully robotic barn began (milking and feeding controlled by an app on the smartphone).

The project permitted the farm to become the first fully robotic Italian company. The introduction of the new technology has increased the number of cattle (by 25%), individual cow production and improved breeding techniques. It has led to lower use of antibiotics thanks to the improved cattle welfare and also led to a decrease in emissions.

The investment in the robotic system resulted in the optimisation of the milk quantity and ensuring its safety, allowing the family business to produce more high-quality traditional cheese.



“Tradition grows with innovation.”