



UNISECO



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# Strengthening Agro-Ecological Farming Practices and Economic Viability of Organic Dairy Farms in Latvia



Photo: A. Zilāns

Understanding and Improving the Sustainability of Agro-ecological Farming Systems in the EU

ISSUE BRIEF

***Organic dairy farmers require training, tailored advice and farmer-to-farmer learning on agro-ecological dairy farming practices to improve milk and crop yields and farm economic viability.***

In Latvia, EU CAP Pillar II support for Organic Farming has incentivised grassland-based dairy farmers to transition from conventional to organic dairy farming practices; however, the accompanying 25% decrease in milk and crop yields acts as a barrier to transition for many conventional dairy farmers and adversely impacts on the economic viability of organic dairy farms.

## LOWER YIELDS & ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE ON ORGANIC DAIRY FARMS

Most small conventional and organic dairy farms produce on-farm roughage and grain feed. The transition to organic dairy farming practices requires specialised knowledge and skills on organic and agro-ecological farming practices (e.g. complex crop rotations, inter-cropping, crop mixes, nitrogen-fixing crops) in order to maintain milk production and crop yields without the use of mineral fertilisers and chemical plant protection products. Many organic dairy farmers lack sufficient knowledge regarding optimal crop mixes and rotations for the maintenance of crop yields, soil fertility, and weed and pest control using organic fertilisers and biological plant protection methods. Agricultural advisory services are knowledgeable on conventional farming practices, but have less expertise and experience on organic and agro-ecological farming practices.

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## STRENGTHENING TRAINING, ADVICE & FARMER COOPERATION ON AGRO-ECOLOGICAL FARMING PRACTICES

Tailored practice-based training and advice to farmers organised by agricultural advisory services should include greater cooperation with farmer organisations and agricultural research institutions. Additionally, support should be provided for bottom-up initiatives led by local farmer groups and cooperatives tailored to address specific farm production issues and learning needs of farmers. Particularly relevant is increasing farmer-to-farmer learning and experience exchange visits to see farming practices demonstrated and explained in-situ on farms in Latvia and abroad. Capacity-building on organic and agro-ecological dairy farming practices is also needed by agricultural advisory services which can be realised by closer cooperation with agricultural and environmental research institutions, farmers organisations and experienced practitioners.

### POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Improving knowledge of organic and agro-ecological dairy farming practices among organic dairy farmers and agricultural advisory services will help to maintain soil fertility, control weeds and pests and improve environmental performance including biodiversity and water management. Milk and crop yields will be increased improving the overall production value and economic viability of organic dairy farms. Improved organic and agro-ecological dairy farming practices will help reduce one of the barriers to the transition to organic dairy farming. This is particularly relevant in the context of the Green Deal and Farm to Fork Strategy which set an objective to increase the share of organic agricultural land in the EU to 25% by 2030.

### FURTHER INFORMATION

Case study page: <https://uniseco-project.eu/case-study/latvia>

#### ABOUT UNISECO:

UNISECO is a European research project aiming to develop innovative approaches to enhance the understanding of socio-economic and policy drivers and barriers for further development and implementation of agro-ecological practices in EU farming systems.

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