



**UNISECO**

UNDERSTANDING & IMPROVING  
THE SUSTAINABILITY OF AGRO-ECOLOGICAL  
FARMING SYSTEMS IN THE EU

# Preserving extensive dairy farming by increasing the market competitiveness of small-scale dairy farms

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## Farming system:

- Dairy farming: small scale extensive dairy farms. Focus on farms with on farm processing, where an environmental performance a pre-requisite for quality of goods (cheese).

## Dilemma:

- How to maintain and encourage extensive management (grazing) of grassland habitats while become (or remain) competitive in the market without intensifying the farming practice?

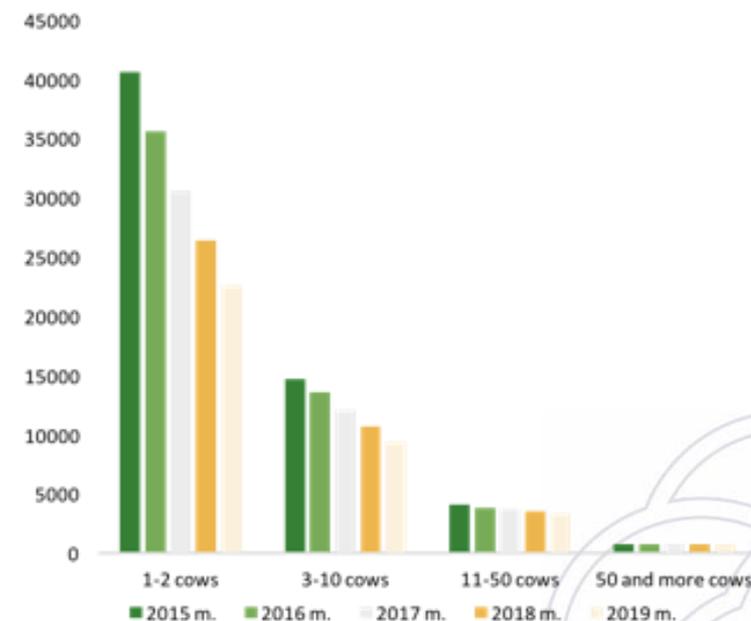
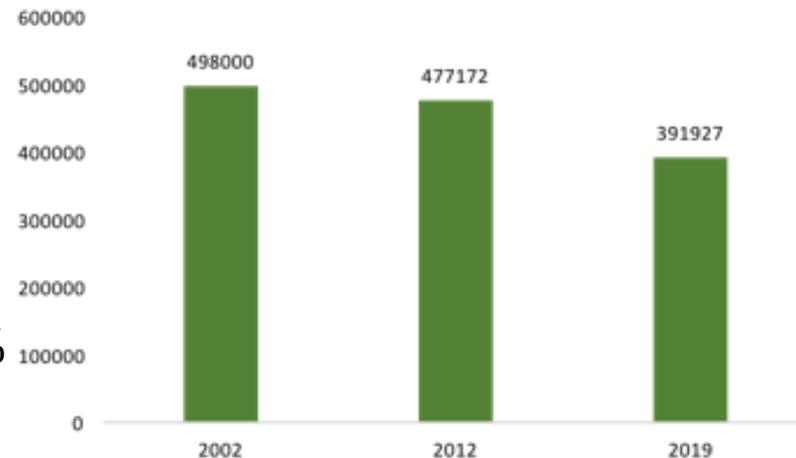


## Main sustainability issues:

- Decrease of area of permanent grasslands, wetlands that often are valuable wildlife habitats, by over 20% in 20 years.
- Number of dairy farms declined by 50% in the last 5 years mainly at the expense of smallholders. (decline in number of dairy cattle)

## Stage of transition:

- Early stages of an on-going transition towards AEFS

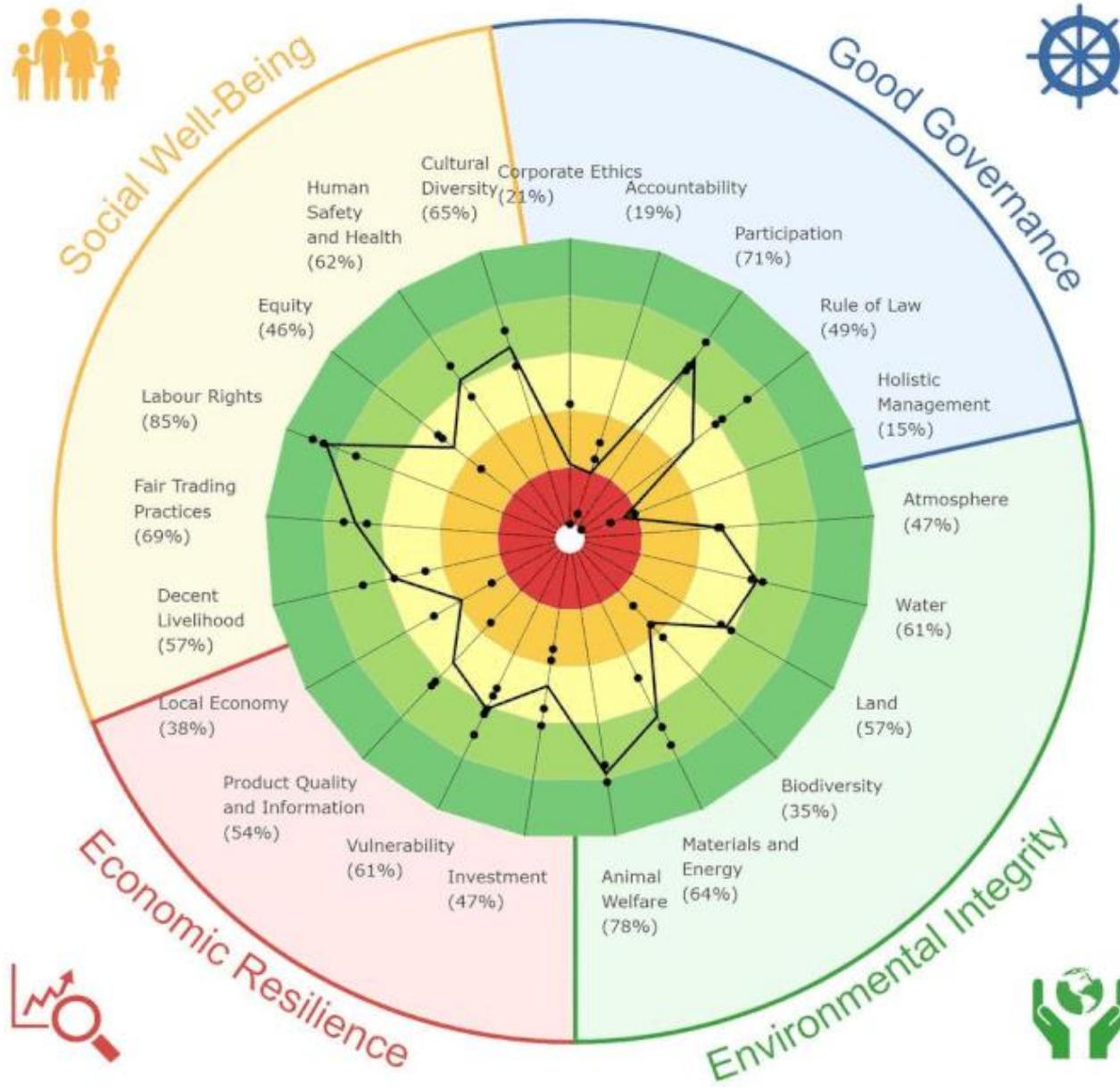


## Agro-ecological practices identified:

- Extensive grazing on permanent meadows, grazing in rotations, animal diversification, use of locally adapted animal breeds, locally adapted high diversity grass crops on temporary grassland, increased proportion of legume on temporary grassland, reduced amount of concentrate feed. Also, other measures for more sustainable dairy farming.

## Key actors involved in the MAP:

- Farmers, farmer associations and a cooperative, state institutions, agricultural advisory, academia, NGO.

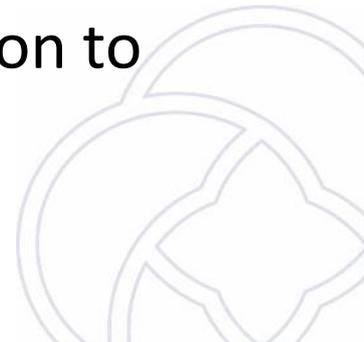


# Barriers for implementation

- Knowledge on sustainable or AE farming is presently low among the farmers, as is its' availability in the country and use in practice.
- On farm processing - rare, added value created on farm could be improved.
- Quite low farmer entrepreneurship.
- Realisation of sustainable produce is still a challenge, limited consumer interest
- Low farmer cooperation
- Weak advocacy of small family farms interests
- Sustainable natural resource management is not sufficiently prioritised on the political level.



- Improvement of access to knowledge on AEFS – improved availability and accessibility.
- Encourage farmers to move on to more sustainable farming - support for the transition period.
- Result-based payment schemes.
- Improve value chains
- Improve access and uptake of local sustainable produce through opening up new realisation channels
- Educate consumers
- Need for an overall political direction for transition to agroecology/ more sustainable farming.



- **Improving farmers knowledge** on agroecology and more sustainable farming is a key. This should be done through education, individualised consultations and group education by facilitating access to high-quality advisory service or expert help on sustainable farming methods and entrepreneurship.
- There is lack of strong direction or political will regarding, where should the dairy sector head to. Policy should direct the **transition** towards more sustainable farming **through concrete measures and support schemes**.
- **On farm processing** should be encouraged in order to improve economic sustainability of smallholders as environmental protection often goes hand in hand with a need to produce high quality goods. There also should be more investments into product development and research (e.g. biotechnologies).
- **Better uptake of local organic/ AE/ sustainable production should be facilitated** to support the transition. (e.g. municipality public procurements).
- **Capacity of farmers associations should be improved** for them to be able to support farmers in terms of improving farm environmental performance, transition to AEFS, entrepreneurship, gaining knowledge, funding and to represent their interest;



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