



UNISECO



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Agro-ecological diversification to produce more food from Swedish ruminant farms

Photo: Kajsa Resare Sahlin

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

POLICY BRIEF

Specialised dairy and meat farms have the potential to improve their economic and environmental sustainability by including more crops for direct human consumption, as well as integrating agro-ecological practices. Policy can support farmers in this transition both at the national and EU level.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

In the case study, eight out of ten meat and dairy farms started growing and selling more crops for direct human consumption. On average, the farms have increased their food production in terms of calories, protein and fat per hectare. However, results on the individual farms have been varied. Farmers expressed the need to be paid a fair price for the plant-based foods produced, as well as the lack of knowledge to produce crops and the need for qualified advice. Another barrier to diversification has been the lack of buyers of crops for direct human consumption and of processing facilities for legumes and niche crops. Others found it hard to transition because of the high risks involved and the lack of supporting networks. Some national policies, such as the National Food Strategy, also favour animal production, which hinders the willingness of farmers to increase the share of crops cultivated.

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Related to UNISECO case study:

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*Farmer inspecting oats
Through contracts with food
companies, farmers sold their crops
for direct human consumption at
premium prices.*

Photo: Kajsa Resare Sahlin

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Farmers are willing to cultivate more crops for direct human consumption if they can access long-term contracts with private companies that will pay price premiums for their sustainability practices. National policies could encourage the diffusion of price premiums through the creation of clear standards for agro-ecological diversified practices, making it easier both for farmers and companies to draw up an agreement. Farm advisory services are also considered relevant to promote agroecology, and public policies could help promoting new interdisciplinary programmes for future advisors. Moreover, EU and national policies should promote alternative products and practices, such as niche crops and crop-livestock integration. Measures of the CAP such as Farm Advisory Services could give more support for the production of crops for direct human consumption, shifting the focus from livestock.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Agro-ecological diversification to produce more food from ruminant farms:

<https://uniseco-project.eu/case-study/sweden>

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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<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773901>

<https://zenodo.org/communities/uniseco-h2020/>

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