



UNISECO



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Small family dairy farms - from status quo to agroecological farming systems?

Photo credit: Varinis Puodas farm

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

POLICY BRIEF

Small dairy family farms have the potential to improve their economic sustainability through on-farm processing and innovative marketing schemes, while an aim for high product quality can be an incentive for environmentally friendly farming and agroecological transition (or vice versa). This transition can be encouraged by policy and market incentives at both National and the EU level.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

The environmental and economic sustainability of small dairy farms that process their goods and seek to produce high quality products is overall better as well as the niche product realisation is easier (less competition). Although in Lithuania the number of such farms is slowly growing, there is still very little on farm processing, added value created on farm is low. The farmer entrepreneurship could be improved and realisation of more sustainable product is still a challenge to be overcome. Small family farmer associations' role in advocacy and leadership needs to be strengthened as the small farmers interests on the political level are underrepresented. Overall, farming intensification can be observed with the signs of increasing soil degradation and water pollution. Sustainable natural resource management is not sufficiently prioritised on the political level and critical observations about soil and water health do not translate to policy well.

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Related to UNISECO case study:

Keeping it small and extensive: the way to a sustainable future in the Lithuanian dairy sector

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Small cheesemakers try to farm environmentally sustainably, as it is a prerequisite for product quality

Source: Valdas Kavaliauskas farm facebook page



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Policy measures should be effective and precisely aimed at specific goals of farm transition to sustainable farming. The agricultural policy should incorporate transition to agroecology and improvement of sustainability of small scale farms (whose numbers are currently in decline) in their long-term strategy. During the Lithuanian case study activities policy recommendations have been co-constructed to facilitate the transition to AEFS by strengthening the role of small-scale family dairy farms and addressing the current issues. Primarily, enhanced access to knowledge on AEFS (presently limited availability) is needed and its uptake through education, field days, individualised consultations, access to high-quality advisory service or expert support on sustainable farming methods and entrepreneurship through support measures. In the near term, support for improvement of sustainability of farming systems throughout the transition period as well as result-based payments schemes aimed at reaching environmental targets is desired. Also highly important is to address the key challenges for farm economic sustainability by incentivising on-farm processing and improving value chains as well as improving access and uptake of local sustainable produce through practice validated or innovative market incentives (such as local sustainable food fairs, agroecological food markets, etc.).

FURTHER INFORMATION

Link to case study page: <https://uniseco-project.eu/case-study/lithuania>

And Lithuanian case study story map:

<https://panda.maps.arcgis.com/apps/Cascade/index.html?appid=0f6e7664f2b44b1a8ea411e859d22357>

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/>

UNISECO in the EIP-Agri projects database:

<https://ec.europa.eu/eip/agriculture/en/find-connect/projects/understanding-and-improving-sustainability-agro>

VISIT THE UNISECO AGRO-ECOLOGICAL KNOWLEDGE HUB: <https://uniseco-project.eu>



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