

Dairy farming in Slovenia



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July 2016 the EuroDairy network travelled into Slovenia. The University of Ljubljana hosted this cross meeting and also planned a field trip to 3 (family) farms in the northern Bled region. It provided a good insights into the business needs of Slovenian dairy farmers in the post-quota era.

Slovenia has 2.1 million inhabitants. Slovenian agriculture is characterised by small family farms. Average farm size is 7.5 ha. This is influenced by historical reasons. Till 1991, private family farms were allowed to have a maximum of 10 ha of agricultural land. Largely due to mountainous and hilly terrain, almost 75% of the utilised agricultural area is characterised as less favourable area. Forestry is also of considerable importance in Slovenia; 63% of Slovenia is covered with forest, 37% is agricultural land used, with more than half grassland. The composition of the agricultural area is dominated by meadows and pastures, which represent 58% of all agricultural land. Maintenance of grassland and development of cattle production for both milk and meat is of strategic importance. The keeping of grassland is a suitable use of land, in particular in less-favoured areas where alternative usage is quite limited. Indeed, the maintenance of livestock production and grasslands are important factors in the preservation of the cultural landscape and of settlement in the rural areas, preventing the risk of abandonment and overgrowing. Milk production is the predominating agricultural activity in the country, accounting for 16.2% of the Gross Agricultural Output (GAO), which places Slovenia close to the EU average. The fluctuations in the contribution of the sector to the GAO can be partly explained by the changes in milk prices and by fluctuations in GAO of crop products. Suckler cow farming on the grasslands with beef as production goal is also a major activity in Slovenia. This big group of farms, often combined with off-farm employment, is characterised by very small herds.

Since the mid-1990s, the dairy sector in Slovenia went through rapid structural changes including a continuous decrease in the number of producers and an increasing herd size per holding. In 1985, 161,875 dairy cows were reared on 58,194 agricultural holdings. Total raw milk production amounted to 379,800 tons of which 80% was delivered to the milk collection stations and the rest was used or sold on the farm. In 2015, 99,664 dairy cows were reared on 6,073 dairy farms with a total milk production of about 595,000 tons and with on average 16 dairy cows per farm. More than 60% of dairy cows are housed on farms within less-favoured areas: in mountain, hilly, karst, Natura 2000 and water protected areas. Apparently, there is higher competition to obtain land between the agricultural sectors and the human settlements and industry in the valleys. Indeed, very high prices for land are paid in the lowlands (from €30,000 – €60,000/ha) and lower prices in less-favoured areas (€20,000 – €30,000/ha).

Slovenia has a well-developed operating system of milk collection. It is largely organised through cooperatives but in some cases, dairies themselves collect milk. In 2015, there were 92 registered and approved purchasers of milk of which 82 were cooperatives. There are seven domestic dairies that are a member of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Slovenia and the Slovene Dairy Association. The self-sufficiency rate of milk production is over 120%, which makes Slovenia a net exporter of milk. Before accession to the EU, milk was purchased only by domestic dairies, but afterwards, some cooperatives reoriented their sales of raw milk to foreign processors. In 2015, 539,000 tonnes of milk were delivered for processing, of which around 40% was sold and transported to Italian companies. Slovenia exports approximately 20% of its dairy products, so the export market is important for our dairies. The main export markets are, besides Italy, the countries of the former Yugoslavia, in particular, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo.

The milk price is at present 21 ct/kg, it is one of the lowest in Europe. Diversification and especially agrotourism is an important issue in Slovenia. The dairy sector in Slovenia could profit from better networking with other European countries which are in the front of dairy production.

During EuroDairy Meeting in Bled, Slovenia, we visited three family dairy farms in Gorenjska region (northwest part of Slovenia): family farm Dolenc, technical farm Sajovic and multifunctional farm Soklic. Download our field report here: [EuroDairy Meeting in SLOVENIA](#).

Research Themes

EuroDairy drives the engine of innovations on 4 main themes at dairy farms: animal care, biodiversity, resource efficiency and socio-economic resilience. Find more info on these dairy topics here!

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