

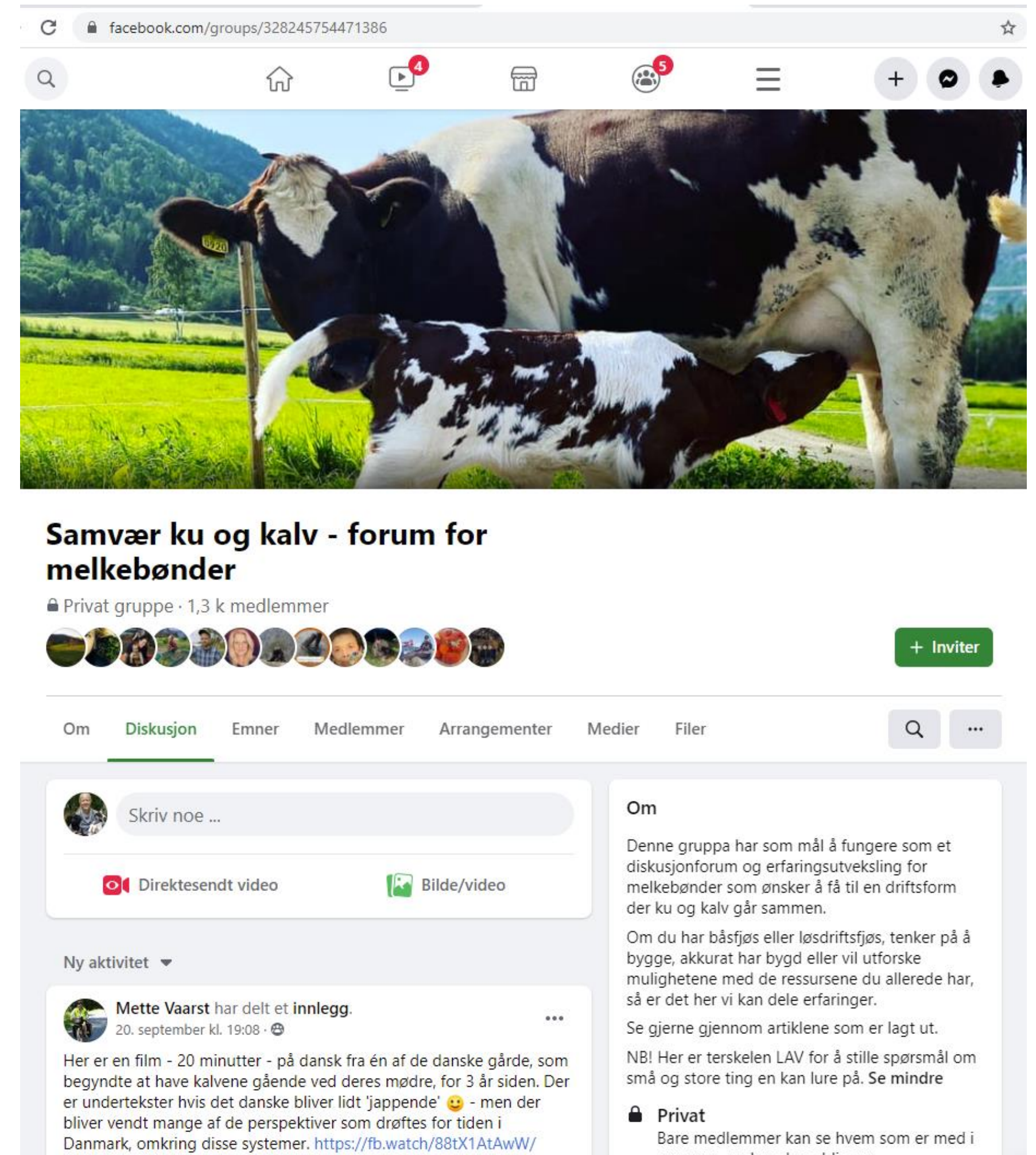
Interviews with Norwegian farmers with cow-calf contact systems

30.09.2021 – Juni Rosann Engelién Johanssen

Cow-calf contact in Norway



- Interviews in 2018: I knew about one farmer, found two more
- Most farmers seemed very negative and sceptical
- Animal protection alliance welfare label 2018 (two dairy farms)
- Workshop 2019 – Facebook group for farmers
- Smartcalfcare 2019-2020: Pilot study where cows could visit their calves
- SUCCEED-project, interviews 2020-2021: Much easier to find farmers!
- Many farmers seem to have changed their attitudes, much more positivity around this
- Many are interested - farmers shares their experiences with other farmers



My PhD

- 15.08.2020 – 15.08.2023
- Interviews with farmers winter 2020-2021 (with Ruralis)
- Hopefully two scientific articles from interviews
- Experiment cow calf at pasture summer 2021



Photo: Rosann Johansen

Interview guide questions

- About the farmer, the farm, the housing, the animals
- Practice with cow calf from before, the beginning and until today
- About the change/why they started with cow-calf contact
- Questions about economy
- Advantages and disadvantages/challenges with cow-calf contact
- If they want any changes, what's important for cow-calf contact, advises for other farmers
- Obstacles and advantages for more farmers to have cow-calf contact



Interviews

- 12 interviews
- 7 with farm visits and 5 on teams
- Lasting for 1-2 hours
- All audio recorded and transcribed
- Started analyse with NVIVO
- Talk a bit about the farmers, how much they have cow and calf together and why they do it..



The farmers

- 4 organic and 8 conventional
- 2 with the welfare label
- 6 – free stalls and milking robot, 2 – free stalls and milking parlour, 4 with tie stalls
- 14-60 dairy cows – 8 farms with fewer than average (30) and 4 farms with more than average
- Experience since – 1995-1999: 3, 2006: 1, 2015-2019: 8
- Spread calving: 7, mostly spring calving: 3, autumn calving: 2
- All of them have cow and calf together inside in cow area
- 7 also have cow and calf together outside on pasture (maybe 9 this summer)



Cow-calf contact

Tie stalls:

- Full time 2-3 weeks, a bit less till week 4, a period after milking morning and evening till weaning week 8
- Full time 4 weeks, a period after milking morning and evening till week 8, a period once a day till weaning week 9
- Full time 2 days, together morning and evening until weaning at 3 months (in the beginning more hours and from before milking, then gradually less and more after milking instead) (*organic*)
- Full time 2-4 weeks, then together half the day until weaning at 70-100 days

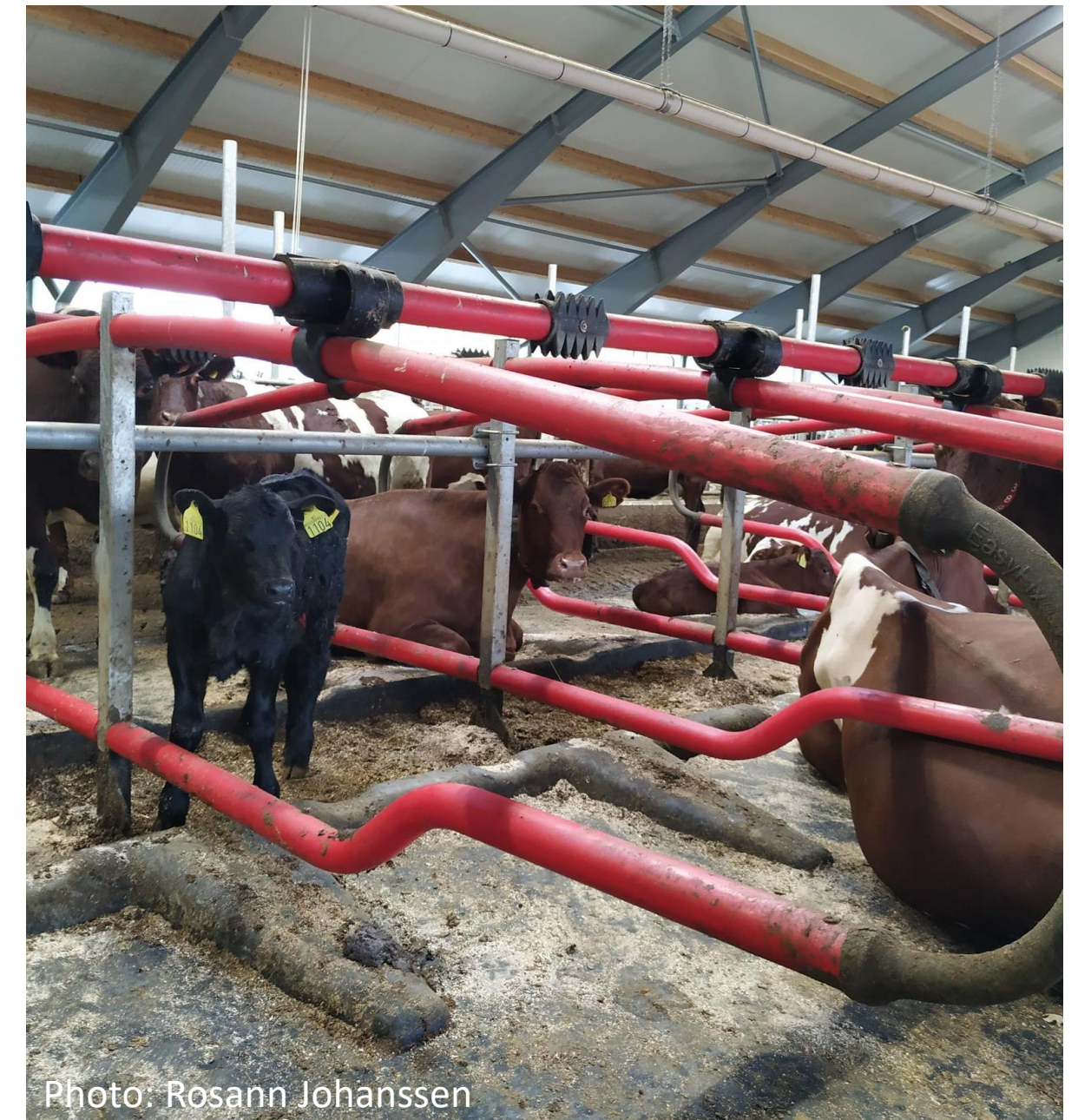


Photo: Rosann Johansen

Cow-calf contact

Free stalls:

- Full time 4 weeks, then nurse cows till separation and weaning at 12 weeks (2-4 calves per cow) (*organic*)
- Full time till abrupt separation and weaning at 8 weeks (some are together for periods for some more days)
- Full time 9 weeks, last week with nose flap (weaning at 8 weeks)
- Full time 9-12 weeks, last 1-2 weeks with nose flap (weaning at 8-10 weeks)
- Full time till separation at 6-8 weeks, three days with fenceline contact, weaning after 12 weeks or more (*welfare label*)
- Full time till abrupt separation and weaning at 12 weeks now (6 months before)
- Full time till separation at 8 weeks, five days with fenceline contact, then weaning at 4 months (heifers) and 6 months (bulls) (*organic and welfare label*)
- Full time 12 weeks, gradual separation and weaning til 4 months (*organic*)



Why do they have cow and calf together?

- Animal welfare
- Natural behaviour
- Wanted to try something new and different
- The cow is better than the human to take care of the calf
- Problems with calf health before – Much better now
- Didn't want to separate them – seemed strange to take away the calf, milk the cow and give the milk to the calf
- Less work with calf feeding
- Wanted a simple system with good animal flow
- Like it when the animals can do much as they want
- With milking robots and cow and calf together – flexible work

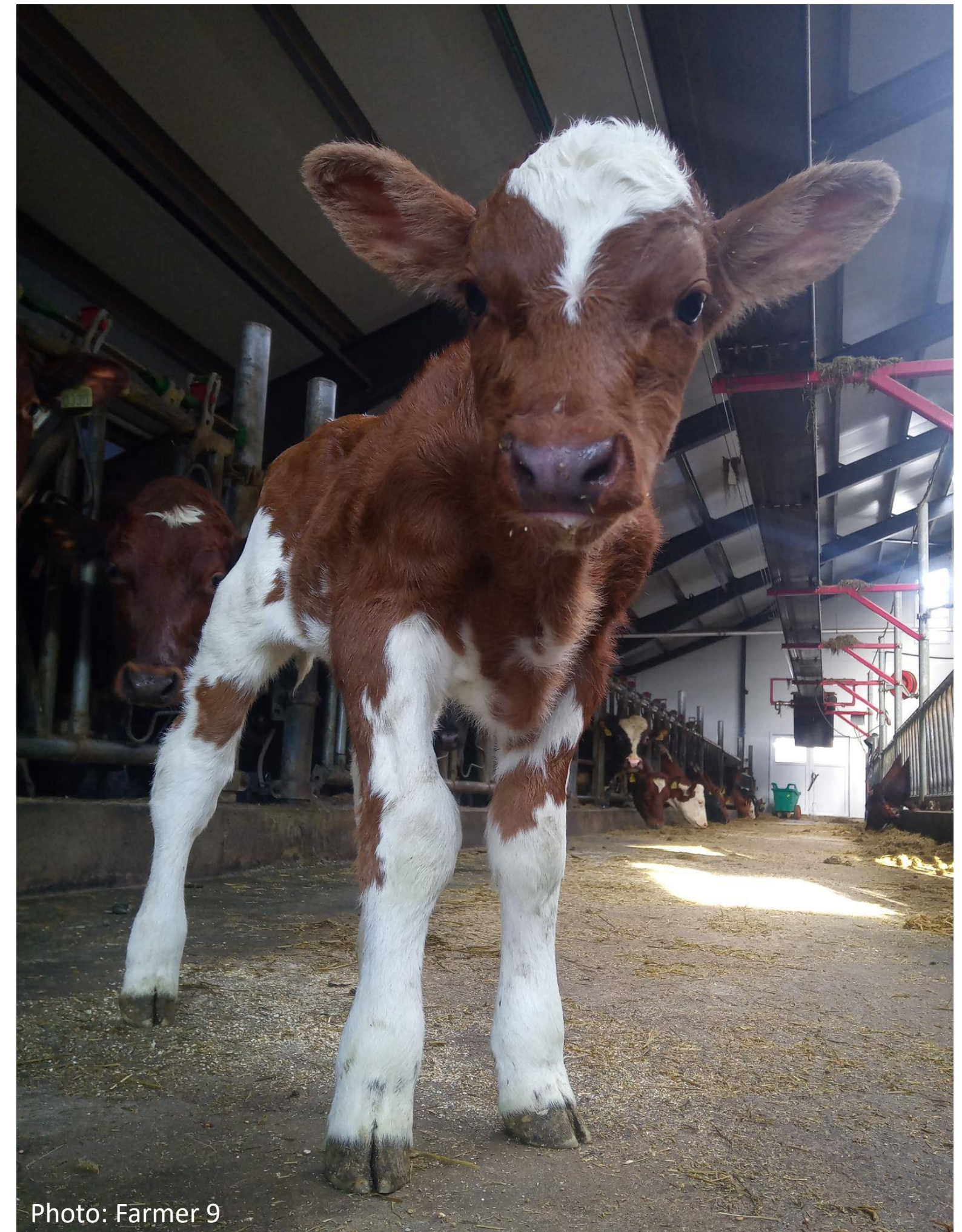


Photo: Farmer 9

Why do they have cow and calf together?

- Believe that it gives better animals – which can give better economy
- Show other people that it is possible
- Inspired by other farmers and by researchers
- Want a good conscience and that anyone can visit the farm and still want to buy the products
- Nice to work when cows and calves are together – Well-being for people and animals
- My caring gene struck in, I was a mum myself and I taught it was unfair for the cow that she should be deprived from her calf
- Felt bad for the cows and didn't like the look in their eyes when we separated them early
- We gave the calves ad libitum of milk earlier, started gradually to have more calves more with their mums, and it created a great well-being for us seeing them together



Farm 1



Photos: Rosann Johansen

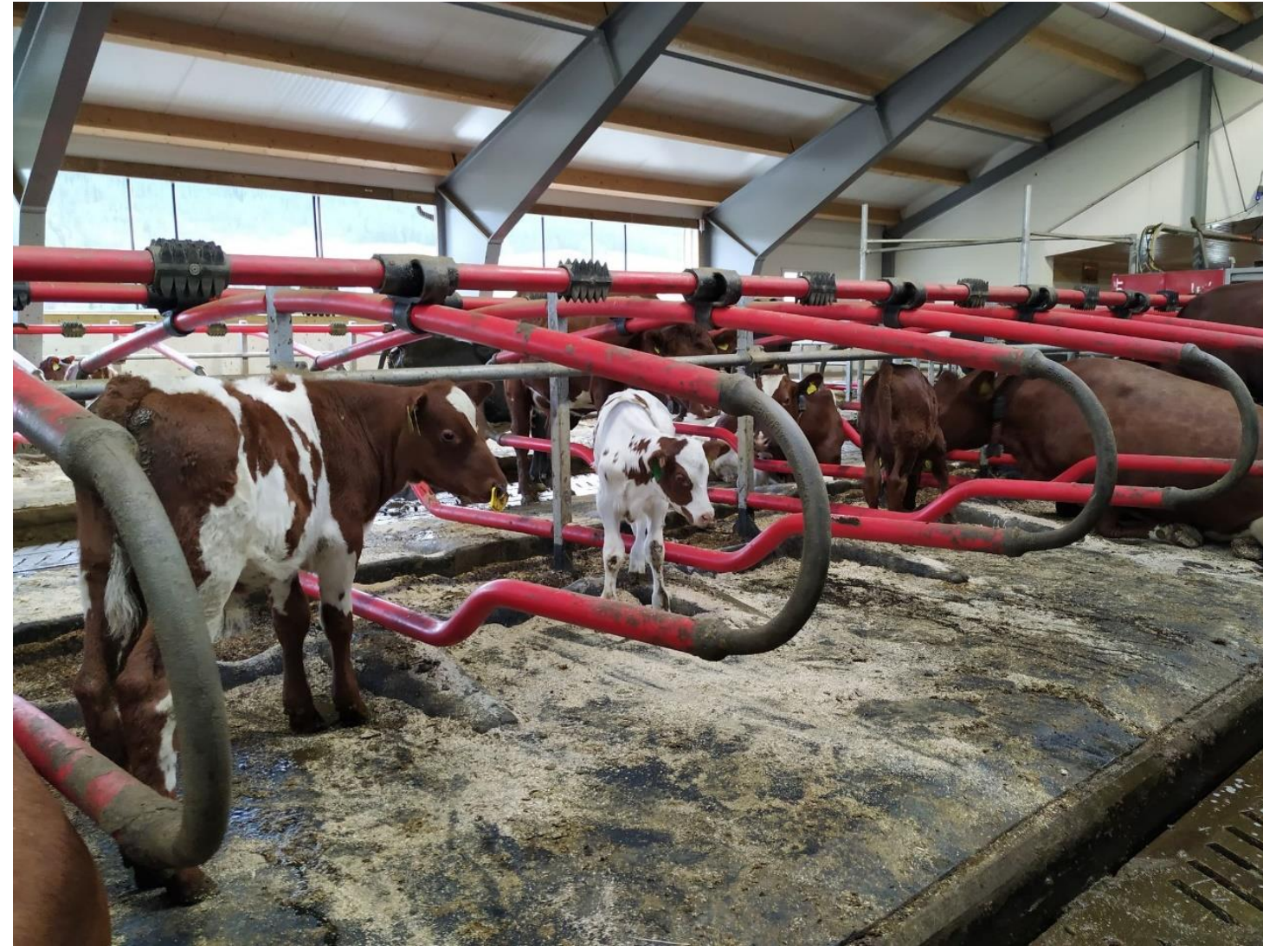
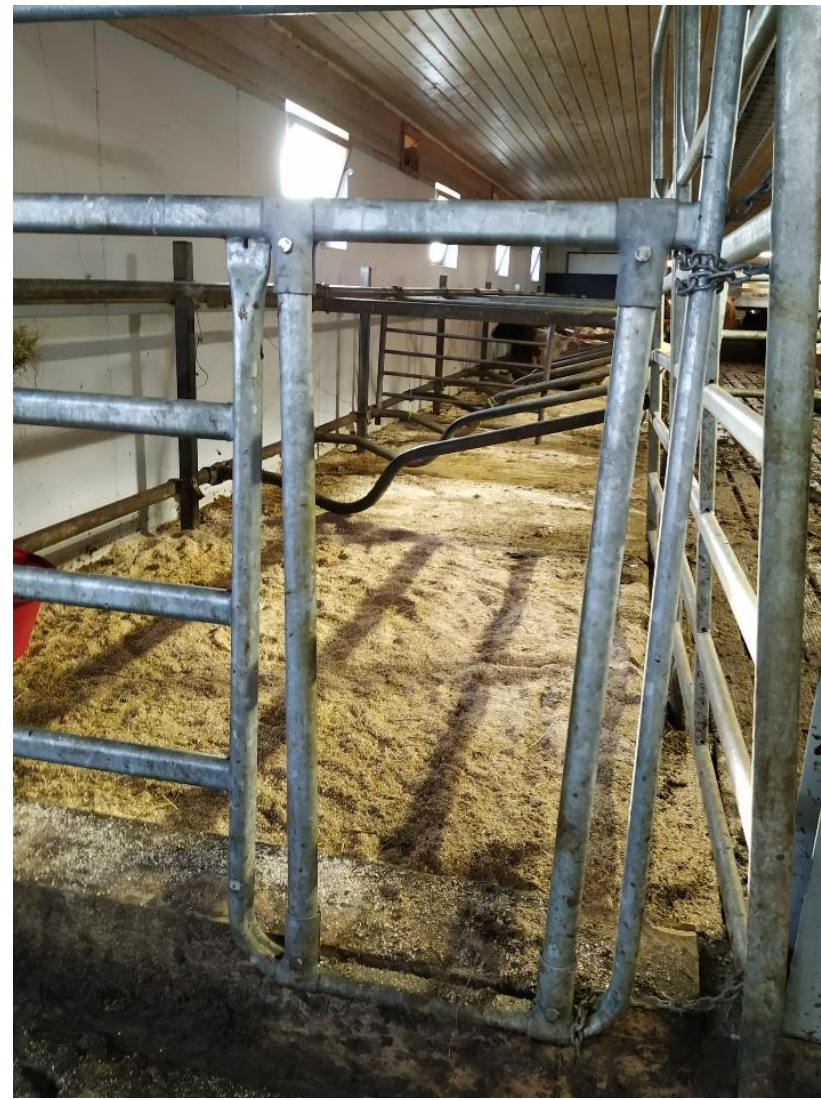


Farm 2



Photos: Rosann Johansen





Farm 3



Photos: Rosann Johansen



Farm 4



Photos: Rosann Johansen



Farm 5



Photos: Rosahn Johansen



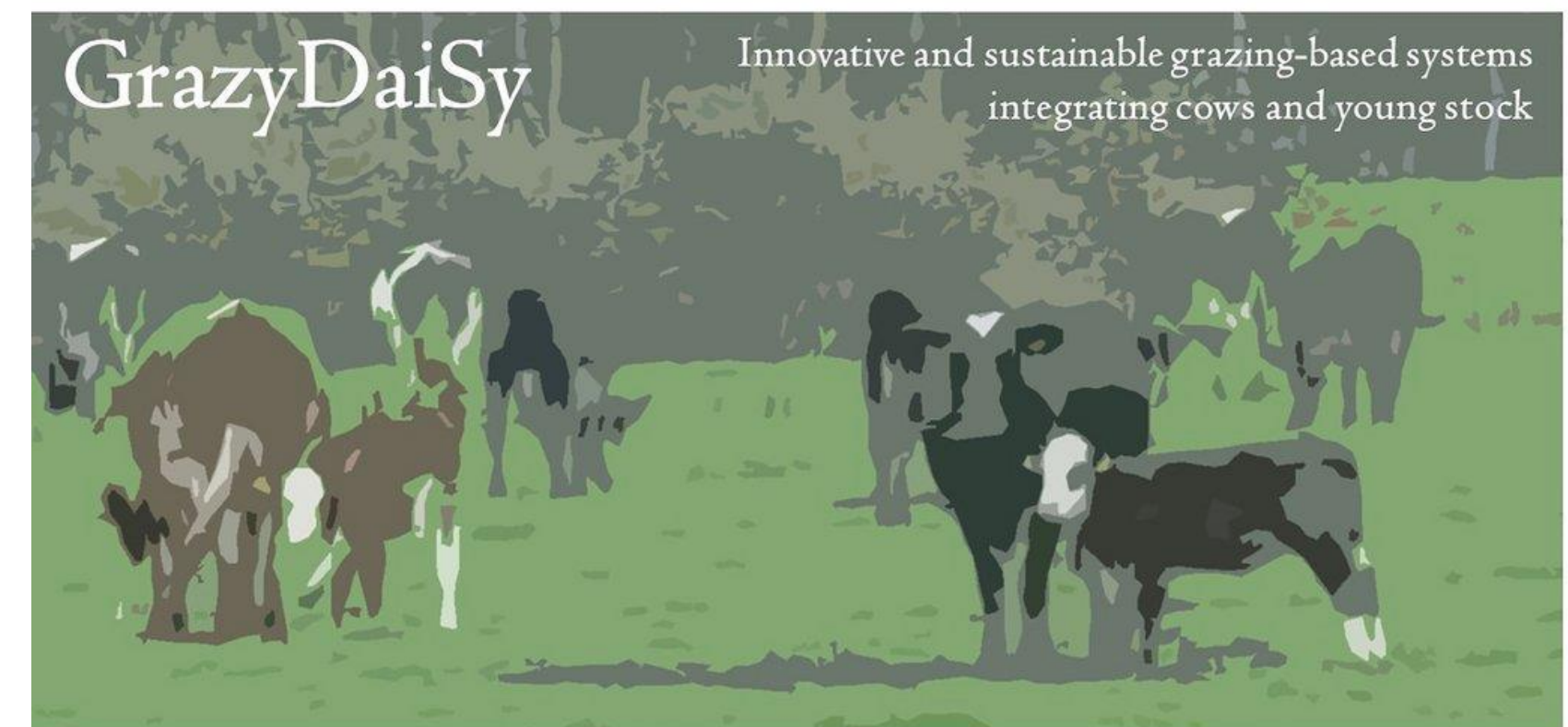
Farm 6



Photos: Rosann Johansen

Project financing

- Core Organic Cofund
– GrazyDaiSy
- The Norwegian Research Council, Research funding for the agriculture- and food industry (FFS-JA)
– SUCCEED
- The Norwegian Animal Protection Alliance's Research Fund
– Dairy cow and calf together at pasture



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Thank you!



Photo: Rosann Johansen