

Multi-species livestock farming

Problem

The livestock sector is being highly criticised for its environmental impacts. Moreover, this sector is not very attractive to the young generation. On the one hand, it requires hard work. On the other hand, making a decent living from livestock husbandry remains a challenge across Europe.

Solution

Multi-species livestock farming is proposed as a solution towards higher sustainability of livestock farms. It consists of keeping two or more animal species – or more generally combining different animal production units – on the same farm.

Impact

Multi-species livestock farming has the potential to improve the three dimensions of sustainability – economic viability for farmers, environmental soundness, and social acceptability – by being respectful of animals and humans, as long as locally relevant farming practices are implemented, especially an appropriate stocking rate during grazing.

If relevant practices are not observed, multi-species livestock farming may produce undesirable effects, such as competition for resource acquisition during grazing, parasitic cross-infection, and more intense work peaks.

Practical recommendation

- **Not all livestock species combinations are complementary. Reflecting on species features and expected benefits is essential to find a locally relevant combination.**
- **From the perspective of autonomy for fertilizers, complementarity takes place when livestock species produce different types of effluents.**
- **From the perspective of autonomy for feed, complementarity takes place when livestock species have different feed niches.**
- **From the perspective of livestock health, species should not be exposed to the same parasites and diseases.**
- **From the perspective of work, livestock species should not compete for human resources; instead, multi-species livestock farming allows spreading work peaks.**
- **From the perspective of farm economics, complementarity takes place when processing of one livestock species' products generate by-products usable to feed another species.**
- **Finally, productions have to be sufficiently different to stimulate economies of scope and to enlarge the basket of goods offered to consumers.**

Applicability box

Theme

Sustainable livestock husbandry

Keywords

Mixed farming; livestock farming; livestock husbandry; diversification; multi-species

Geographical coverage

Europe

Equipment

Specific equipment for secondary species, e.g. fencing, milking machine



Picture 1 (left): Beef cattle and meat sheep co-grazing in the French Massif Central

Picture 2 (right): Heifers and broilers raised on the same pasture in Central Germany

Further information

Video

- Check the following video for further instructions:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kdS6lyPA8zQ>

Weblinks

- Check the [Organic Farm Knowledge Platform](#) for more practical recommendations.

About this practice abstract

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