

Project *brief*

Thünen Institute of Organic Farming & Thünen Institute of Market Analysis

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More than a niche: Products from cow-calf contact systems

Kerstin Barth¹, Matthias Placzek¹, Inken Christoph-Schulz²

- **Numbers of dairy farms that rear their calves by suckling and with contact to a cow increase.**
- **There is a wide range of cow-calf contact systems.**
- **Small and medium dairies are interested in milk of cow-calf contact systems. However, the marketing of surplus, and mainly male dairy calves produced in these systems still needs to be developed.**
- **Most consumers reject the early separation of cow and calf.**

Background and aims

Animal husbandry practices are increasingly questioned by consumers. Even dairy production that did not have to face image problems until now is no longer excluded. Especially, the early separation of cow and calf is criticised not only by consumers but also by farmers who started to develop new methods to prolong the contact between cow and calf on their farms and to allow cows to nurse their own or also foster calves. However, there is no broad knowledge about the management of these cow-calf contact systems and how their products are marketed. We aimed to close this knowledge gap.

Key findings

The survey including 60 dairy farms revealed a great variability between systems. There is no standard solution. Most of the farms are organic farms, and half of them market their milk directly which gives them the opportunity to communicate their rearing method directly to customers. However, only a few labelled their products accordingly. None of the 32 dairies that answered a questionnaire excluded that they might sell milk and dairy products from cow-calf contact systems in the future but only half of them intend to do so in the next two years. There are not many cattle fatteners that have experiences with calves from dairy farms that were raised by suckling. Unfortunately, most of the food retailers approached were not available for an interview, but the few questioned supported the marketing of products from cow-calf contact systems. More

than 50% of the 120 consumers included in the survey did not know about cow-calf separation shortly after calving, and three quarters rejected this practise – mainly women.

Recommendations

Dairy farms that intend to market products of cow-calf contact systems should consider that higher prices are achievable by direct marketing. However, this is often time consuming and causes further costs. Nevertheless, there are consumers that are interested in buying such products but they have to know where they can find them. The interest of dairies in milk from this special type of farms increases, but the marketing of the male and other surplus calves needs further attendance. The requirements of the fattening farms have to be considered.



Source: Thünen Institute

Further Information

Contact

¹ Thünen Institute of Organic Farming
kerstin.barth@thuenen.de
www.thuenen.de/en/ol

² Thünen Institute of Market Analysis
inken.christoph@thuenen.de
www.thuenen.de/en/ma

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