



Sustainable Organic and Low-Input Dairying

Results from the SOLID project

AUTHOR

Lindsay Whistance

CONTACT

Lindsay Whistance

ORC ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Katharine Leach, Susanne Padel

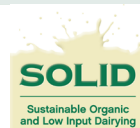
YEAR

2011-2016

FUNDING - PROJECT

EU FP7

- SOLID



Opportunities exist to increase the sustainability of organic low-input (LI) dairy systems across Europe. Compared to high-input dairy farms, LI dairy farms are smaller, less specialised, have more grassland, and rely on more forage and less maize. They also generate more labour alongside lower productivity, so smart decision making that adds value to products is key. The Sustainable Organic and Low Input Dairying (SOLID) project (2011-2016) worked with farmers to address key challenges surrounding forage and feeding, use of natural resources, and management of animals and the environment. A close collaboration between researchers and farmers helped promote the development of context-specific solutions to increase both sustainability and competitiveness of LI organic milk production.

Results showed that although well-adapted native livestock breeds are typically preferred, more conventional breeds can also be farmed successfully in organic LI systems if well managed. Energy requirements for body maintenance were found to increase for dairy cows on high forage diets, and a range of novel and local feed sources were identified as potential sources of energy and protein, including by-products and herb-rich pasture mixes, the latter also being used as a strategy to minimise antibiotic use. Within dairy supply chains, information sharing along the chain was important, and innovation uptake was supported through increased collaboration between stakeholders.



Cattle mob grazing herb rich leys

Overall, organic LI dairy cow and goat systems were considered to be competitive, but for future sustainability, greater attention should be paid to continuous improvement of farm management practices particularly relating to animal welfare and milk quality. Alongside this, developing shorter, more effective supply chains would promote collaboration, competitiveness and sustainability.

FURTHER READING

1. ORC Bulletin 111: tinyurl.com/3m6caxvb and 112: tinyurl.com/tmwn4p
2. SOLID Dairy Farming: farmadvice.soliddairy.eu
3. The SOLID Farmer Handbook: tinyurl.com/4e2vaxa5
4. Sustainability and competitiveness: core.ac.uk/download/pdf/86565817.pdf