



modern **AKIS**

Together for
Systems' Innovation



**Funded by
the European Union**

Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or European Commission. Neither the European Union nor the European Commission can be held responsible for them.

AKIS in action: Improving farmers' position in the food value chain Q&A Documentation Networking event on April 11, 2024 - Online

ProWeideland - A labelling approach based on multi-actor co-design for maintaining grazing

Dr. Arno Krause, [ProWeideland](#) and [Centre for Grasslands](#), Germany

Q: Does your multi-stakeholder community include also consumer representatives? We are creating a network, a regional coordination body for AKIS and we are thinking of involving also the consumers because it's the voice of the market.

Dr. Arno Krause: They are on board without signing the Charta. One way is to involve organizations that represent society, but we involve consumers on two levels.

One level is the University Göttingen, with the Department of Marketing. Because we wanted to know what consumers expect from meadow milk. University Göttingen, as a partner executed all the polls that we needed like the consumer's appreciation for grazing or what is important in terms of criteria for example. For example, GMO-free forage is not a scientific criterion, because if you feed GMO forage or not, does not make any difference in the milk, but the consumers just want it. I would explain this as the objectivity of subjectivity. So, the consumers just wanted GMO-free milk in Germany. The University of Göttingen did all these polls to understand what society wants.

The Verbraucherzentrale (the consumer advice center) made sure that the consumer expectations were integrated. We connected our program closely to the consumers and I think it's very important to do that. However, you have to differentiate between consumers and society. We call it the consumer citizen gap. There is asynchronous behaviour to what people tell you in the polls and what they buy at the end of the day. This should be kept in mind. Those who are asked in the afternoon if they want to preserve the planet by buying meadow milk will say: "Yes, of course. I will tonight buy a lot of meadow milk and I will pay twice the price!" However, in the evening when people buy the products, the behaviour is different.

Q: Regarding the percentage of the reduction in grazing, is it due to fewer farms dealing with animal production or to the smaller number of animals per farm?

Dr. Arno Krause: The reduction in number of farms. If you want, I can send you the publications. We did some recent publications also in grazing for agroecology. Some of the publications will be presented during the next conference European Grazing Federation. If you contact me, I will find out the correct publication for you.

Q: Can winter milk also be meadow milk, i.e. can you make forage / silage on non-meadow?

Dr. Arno Krause: We understand grazing as a system. And we do not focus on the product. So if somebody applies grazing, he commits himself or herself to a production style. And this is the main approach for us. It is the justification for us to say, even in winter when the cows have to be in the stable. We can still market this as meadow milk because what counts is not the moment when the milk is produced from the forage. It's the production type that we want to focus on.

If we would change this approach, we would have to change our controls as well. We would need to control what the cows eat in the moment they produce milk. Additionally, we would differentiate between the different Member States. In some Member States, the season for grazing is 80 days, for example in the north of Sweden. In Ireland, it can be 300 days. If a farmer commits himself or herself to participate in the program, he or she can market the milk for the entire year as meadow milk. We do not focus on the chemical composition. There are differences in the infrared spectroscopy and others, but these are negligible. For food, it doesn't make a difference. For example, we analysed the difference between omega-3-acids in meadow milk and conventional milk. If you have for example 60% of food from grass without maize, thus a very high proportion of grass like for example in Ireland, you can only slightly measure the increase the omega 3 acids. To reach the level of a Salomon filet of 200 g, you have to drink 40 litres of milk. That is why we focus on the production system.

Q: Have you measured the impact of climate change in grass milk versus traditional dairy?

Dr. Arno Krause: No, we haven't measured that. The question for us was: What are the advantages if someone applies grazing? What criteria do we have to define that we contribute to GHG sequestration? That's why we expect in our criteria, that farmers have at least 2000 sqm of permanent pasture at their disposal for the meadow milk program. We have publications that show that permanent pasture can sequester up to 2 tons of CO₂ per hectare per year. Depending on the amount of fertilizer, depending on the access to water, and also on the soil.

For example, mineral soil can sequester more CO₂ than carbon-rich soil. And the other point: we know that the content of grass in milk production defines the circularity of methane between the atmosphere and the ground. This is a closed circle of GHG, quite different from other circles of GHG. Methane has a life endurance of approximately 12.4 years. If you feed grass then methane comes down from the atmosphere, goes into the grass, is eaten by the cows, goes back to the atmosphere, and after 12 years goes again. The amount of grass and the amount of non-digestible forage that you put into the cow determines the carbon footprint. There are scientific publications on that. That's why we said: "Use as much as possible grass for the forage, this minimizes methane, use permanent pasture."

Q: Maybe a good message to try and promote this idea of a carbon-neutral system in grazing. This is not the case with cattle in feedlots and or indoors all the time. We see economists and other people publishing that people should eat less meat and keep less cattle... There is a misunderstanding about how the methane circle works. As farmers and advisors, it is our job, to help consumers at least to understand, that it is not simplistic.

Dr. Arno Krause: That's exactly the case. The problem is that this entire topic is quite complicated. It's much easier to send messages such as "Don't kill animals for food." It's complicated to tell this but we are in the process of communicating. I am quite happy to work on the meadow milk program because it is even more complex for dairy companies or other providers to explain their sustainability programs. We have a dairy company [DMK](#) in Germany. They have a sustainability program, it is called Milkmaster. All the different aspects are included in the program. We just tell the story "Keep the cows in the pasture" - easy. Because this is highly perceived as positive and we do not care, the majority of the people have no clue about the entire topic behind that. It is easy to tell this story. Knowing this and knowing the complexity of the whole topic, we know that we are on the right track. It's an easy entry point for starting communication with the society.

Q: Do you have any financial calculations to justify the higher price for pasture milk? Is there a floor price for milk, you say beneath that, it is just not fair in terms of sustainability and profit. Do you recommend it to buyers? Do you do something in that direction?

Dr. Arno Krause: Yes, we had economic calculations that we relied on. However, you cannot use economic calculation for grazing, for putting grazing into value. Grazing in context A is not the same as in context B. The production cost of grass milk in Ireland is 22 Cents per liter. The production cost in Germany is 35/36 Cents per liter. For some people in Germany, grazing would require 15 Cents more because the local conditions are quite difficult. If you do not have the pasture in your direct vicinity, if you don't have the know-how and the attitude to grazing, if

you don't have the right cow for example, and if you have labour that you have to pay, then 15 Cent per liter would not be enough to provide an adequate incentive to maintain grazing. However, another farmer in Germany has 60 cows and he wouldn't need any cent at all. He makes a profit from grazing because he has the know-how (know-how is most important, but also the local conditions). Using models is pointless in this context. The heterogeneity between the farms is too big. If you know what retailers can get from good stories and if you would make an educated guess then 5 Cents is the right means to provide a good incentive for the farms. However it's not the money at all, it's rather more the appreciation that the farmer is doing something good. That's why we also say 2.5 Cents is very good. And no model can tell you that 5 Cents, 6 Cents, 15 Cents, or 2.5 Cents is the right incentive. That's not possible. We have to do both, on the one hand, provide money from the value-added chain, and the more money you get the better. Because milk is not highly valued. In Germany, the price for one liter of milk is about one Euro or even less. The price of a bottle of water sometimes is 1.20 Euro. That is why I think - get as much as you can from the value-added chain.

Q: Did you potentially educate buyers or is there a floor price, below which you would say it is just not fair?

Dr. Arno Krause: Yes, of course, there is a floor price for milk. That you could calculate. But there is an authority safeguarding the competition and open conditions, the German federal cartel office. Our goal was to determine the price retailers have to pay as a premium to farmers for a liter of meadow milk. We wrote the German federal cartel office in Bonn and we visited them to explain our project. Nonetheless, they do not allow price determination for anything. In the meantime, the law changed and we have a new law in place in Germany, triggered by the European Commission stating that you can expect money for sustainability issues, but the authority didn't care. We even went to Brussels. We went to the DGs COMP, DG ENVI, and DG AGRI. We had them all in one meeting and explained our project. So far it was not possible to determine a fixed price for meadow milk. They said, "You could and probably we could put you to court or not."- We are so small, that if we were judged by the court and received a fine, we would ruin ourselves. That's why we said, we recommend dairy companies. They negotiate the prices with the retailers and we monitor in the community meeting what each farmer gets. We confront them with the figures and we stimulate them to increase the price for the farmers but we cannot determine the price.

Q: Is there some competition between the [ProWeideland](#) label and the organic farming label? When the [ProWeideland](#) label is expanding, does the organic farming label decrease?

Dr. Arno Krause: In the beginning, there was a big fear from organic farming organizations that we would compete with them. This fear has been alleviated. We collaborate with organic farming organizations. The cake is big enough. Our share derives from a decrease in conventional milk. We are in a competitive setting, however there is a good coexistence. As long as we are not really competing and taking away each other's shares, we are fine with it.

Q: Regarding CO₂ emissions, have you thought to include a carbon footprint label in your labelling?

Dr. Arno Krause: The criteria that we have a focus on all different aspects, of animal welfare, the competitive situation for the farmers, the environment, and also on GHG. As long as there are no legal obligations, we would leave it as it is. Because if we increase the criteria more and more, we will decrease the number of farmers participating in our program. The premium of 2.5 Cent per liter is not so high. With an increase of criteria without simultaneously an increase of the premium, we would lose farmers. Those farms that we lose, go to the stables and will not come back again. There is a clear vector, directed towards one side: if a farm once decides to put the cows into the stable, they never go back to the meadow system again.

We have this on our radar but we will wait till there are clear expectations and signals that the society or the retailers will pay for it.

I very much appreciate meetings like this to spread ideas and learn from each other. In case of questions feel free to contact us via [Grünlandzentrum](#).