



The Herbivorous project (2013-2018) is implemented by the Competence Centre in Animal Husbandry of the Latvian Rural Advisory and Training Centre. During this publicly-funded project 1-2-year trials on different topics related to breeding of dairy and meat cows, sheep and goats have been organised in more than 30 commercial farms. Results have been presented in over 40 public demonstration events (Farm days) alongside a series of online and printed materials.



Objectives

- To facilitate sustainable development of the sector and competence-based implementation of trials/demonstrations in animal husbandry
- To boost the efficiency of production in the field of livestock-breeding

Topic selection

- Carried out by a board including advisors, scientists and other professionals
- Based on an economic analysis of the sector, forecasts of the future development of its segments, existing legal requirements, feedback from participants
- Emphasis on the in-house production of high quality animal feed; longevity of herds; production/breeding of young animals; animal health; introduction of new breeds, etc.
- Economic analysis of farms in assessing their efficiency

Evaluation of peer-to-peer learning environment

- Mutual diverse learning by both the visitors and the demo host, along with advisors and scientists
- Possibility to visit the host farm, to meet peers/acquaintances and to establish new contacts as important self-perceived personal benefits for the visitors, aside from the direct knowledge gains
- Active exchange of experiences among the visiting farmers on farming-related topics not directly linked to the primary object/topic of the demo event

Demonstration set-up

- Each farm assigned a different topic
- One or two different trials per farm
- Carried out in cooperation between a farmer, an advisor and a scientist
- 4 to 15 Farm days a year (May-October)
- Organised on farms in different regions
- Farm day format: indoor presentations (~2h) + farm visit (~2h) (incl. Q&A, lunch, quiz)
- Broadening/adjusting the topic for the demo event to provide for demonstrability

Audience and participation

- Targeted at all livestock farmers, but also advisors, scientists, students, and officials
- Attendance of Farm days free of charge
- On average 75 visitors per event
- Average age between 40 and 50 years
- Differing gender balance by topic
- Both from within and outside the region

- Involvement of farmers, advisors and scientists in jointly setting up and implementing a demo activity is a challenging but also a mutually enriching endeavour that, ideally, allows building on and aligning the differing interests and types of knowledge represented by the various actors.
- Qualities ascribed to good demo hosts include open-mindedness, cooperation, willingness to learn, determination, daring, attractiveness, well-considered approach to farm's development, status of opinion leaders in the farming community, readiness & ability to meet the requirements for a trial.

