

Supporting sustainable practices: welfare assessment in alpine small scale dairy farms

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Workplan

Background

The Short Term Scientific Mission entitled “Supporting sustainable practices: welfare assessment in alpine small scale dairy farms” aims at fostering the collaboration between the University of Ljubljana (SLO) and the University of Udine (IT) in the field of dairy cow welfare assessment.

Data on dairy cow welfare are collected following the adapted welfare assessment protocol recently developed by EFSA (2015) for small scale dairy farms in the Eastern Italian Alps and in the Western Slovenian Alps.

Small scale farmers are selected among those rearing local breeds and practicing the traditional alpine transhumance to summer pastures. Forty (40) farms are visited three times: before going to summer pasture, at summer pasture and after summer grazing.

The overall aim of the study is to identify the management practices that enhance welfare in traditional alpine dairy systems while maintaining biodiversity in cows and in marginal grazing areas. This traditional farming system guarantees the existence not only to a wide range of local dairy breeds and alpine grasslands, but also to local communities and products. Welfare assessment and communication in this context could therefore be an effective tool to support sustainable farming practices, products and landscapes that would otherwise disappear.

Activity 1

Period: November 17th - November 27th 2015

The first part of the STSM (two weeks) are devoted to farm visits. The visits will involve the collection of animal based measures and the understanding of the traditional farming system in the Slovenian Alps. According to the protocol, farms will be visited after morning milking. Animal based-measures related to health and behavioral aspects will be collected. An interview will be performed in order to gather information on the overall farm management with a special emphasis on the past pasture season.

Activity 2

Period: November 28th - November 11th 2015

The second part of the STSM will focus on data management. The data collected throughout the season and therefore including all visits for all participating countries will be cleaned and merged together in order to develop study reports for the farmers involved in the study. The proper communication of results will help farmers to have a bigger and better picture of small-scale alpine dairy farming in their region and neighboring countries, to identify potential welfare issues in their farms and eventually promote welfare-friendly, small-scale, pasture based production in marginal areas.