



Sustaining Animal Health and Food Safety in Organic Farming

The organic farming sector has experienced a rapid growth over the past decades. The growth has raised the need to address food safety aspects in relation to animal health, the farm situation and the living conditions of animals. Furthermore, the EU-regulations need to be put into perspectives when food safety is considered.

The objective of SAFO is to improve food safety and animal health in organic livestock production systems through exchange and active communication of research results and conclusions between researchers, policy makers, farmer organisations and other stakeholders, including consumers.

The growth in organic livestock production

In the past decade, the European organic livestock production has experienced rapid growth. Conversion to organic production implies that the whole way of management has to be developed and adjusted to organic principles. This includes emphasising the importance of a systems approach to animal health and welfare protection, and minimizing the use of veterinary drugs. These developments are not always without problems.

Recommended practices in the European

Organic Livestock Standards (EU Regulation 1804/1999) such as closed herds and flocks and improved health security on farms, also include extensive production systems (e.g. free range production) that expose livestock to increased disease challenge.

An EU-funded Concerted Action project, Network for Animal Health and Welfare in Organic Agriculture (NAHWOA) identified in 2001 that organic livestock production faces major challenges with regard to harmonisation and successful integration of organic animal husbandry

into the whole organic production system. Major questions about food quality and safety exist, in conventional, as well as organic livestock production. The NAHWOA-network successfully produced a number of recommendations and guidelines on animal health and welfare.

More focus on human health and food safety
Consumers' interests, human health aspects, and food safety issues were not covered in the NAHWOA project. There is a urgent need to focus on these aspects and relate them to animal health and the farm situation, the living conditions of animals, and the choices which are necessary to make. Furthermore, the EU-regulations need to be put into perspectives seen from a food safety angle, and the wide diversity between European countries need to be included in the discussion.

In principle, organic standards on livestock production must secure animal health and food safety, they must comply with common EU standards, they should allow farming systems in harmony with their geographic and cultural localities. They should also be the result of a productive discussion between researchers, policy makers, farmers and consumers.



The objectives

The ultimate objective of the SAFO project is to improve food safety and animal health in organic livestock production systems in existing and candidate member countries of the European Union through exchange and active communication of research results and conclusions between researchers, policy makers, farmers and the wider stakeholder community, including consumers.

We achieve this by:

- ▶ Providing a network in which consumer and policy maker concerns about food safety, animal health and welfare in the expanding field of organic livestock production in existing and candidate EU member countries can be addressed.
- ▶ Supporting the process of development and implementation of EU-standards in organic livestock production in the diverse climate of agricultural production systems in the member countries.

The main intermediate objectives of the project are to:

- ▶ Identify important food quality characteristics linked to organic livestock products, and improve food quality, including food safety with regard to zoonoses, drug residues and the development of anti-microbial resistance in the food chain. This objective also includes aspects of food processing quality with regard to animal health and welfare in organic livestock production systems.
- ▶ Develop strategies for implementing and harmonising organic livestock production standards in existing and candidate member countries.
- ▶ Improve the interaction between researchers, farmers, certification bodies and policy makers in order to guarantee the development of organic livestock standards that are driven by inputs from all stakeholders in the EU.

The cornerstone of SAFO is a series of five thematic workshops:

1st SAFO workshop

In early September 2003, the first workshop in the SAFO-network was held in Florence, Italy. The workshop focused on "socio-economic aspects of organic animal production - both on farm level and in a social context".

2nd SAFO workshop

The second SAFO workshop "Development of organic livestock farming: potential and limitations of husbandry practice to secure animal health, welfare and food quality" was held on the 25-27th March 2004, in Witzenhausen, Germany.

3rd SAFO Workshop

The third SAFO workshop was held in Falenty, Poland on the 16-18th September 2004. The workshop theme was "Enhancing animal health security and food safety in organic livestock production systems".

Proceedings together with abstracts translated into partner languages can be found via the workshop homepage.

4th SAFO Workshop

The theme for the fourth SAFO Workshop held in Frick, Switzerland on the 17th-19th March 2005 was "Systems development: Quality and safety of organic livestock products".

The information presented formally and the ideas discussed at the workshops are published in proceedings. Proceedings together with abstracts translated into partner languages can be found via this workshop homepage.

5th SAFO Workshop

The fifth SAFO workshop, where the conclusions and the recommendations from the project will be presented and discussed, will be held as a part of the Joint European Organic Congress. This congress takes place in Odense, Denmark on the 30 & 31 May 2006. A separate workshop in the SAFO project will be held either 29th May or 1st June (information will appear on our website when the exact date is decided).

Facts on the SAFO-project

The full title of the project is: "Sustaining Animal Health and Food Safety in Organic Farming". SAFO is a European Commission funded Concerted Action Project, Contract QLK5 - CT - 2002 - 02541.

Project duration

The project started in March 2003 and will last for 3 years. It involves partners from 26 European countries.

Project participants

Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Denmark

The University of Reading, United Kingdom

University of Kassel, Germany

Scottish Agricultural College, United Kingdom

University of Wales, United Kingdom

Forschungsinstitut für Biologischen Landbau, Switzerland

Università degli studi di Firenze, Italy

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

Norwegian Centre for Ecological Agriculture, Norway

Institute for Land Reclamation and Grassland Farming, Poland

Bundesforschungsanstalt für Landwirtschaft, Germany

University of Veterinary Medicine, Slovak Republic

Universitaet fuer Bodenkultur Wien, Austria

Institute for Sustainable Development, Slovenia

University of Helsinki, Finland

The Royal Veterinary and Agricultural University, Denmark

Louis Bolk Institut, Holland

Instituto de Sociología y Estudios Campesinos de la Universidad de Córdoba, Spain

Estonian Agricultural University, Estonia

Institute for Land Reclamation and Grassland Farming, Poland

Latvian University of Agriculture, Latvia

Università degli Studi di Milano, Italy

University catholique de Louvain, Belgium

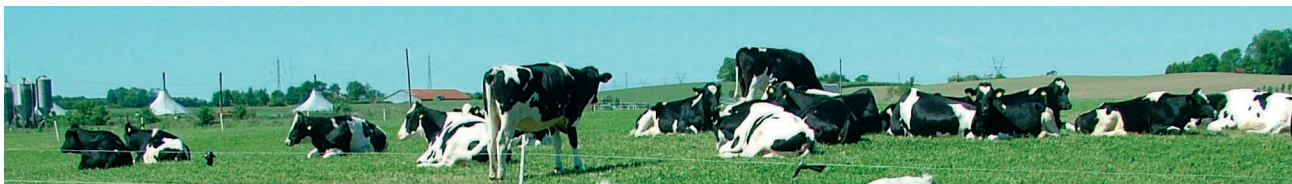
University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Szent István University, Hungary

Ecole Nationale d'Ingénieurs des Techniques Agricoles de Clermont-Ferrand, France

Project coordinator

Mette Vaarst, Danish Institute of Agricultural Sciences, Denmark



How to get information about the project

The primary website for the SAFO project is at: <http://www.safonetwork.org>.

Activities include workshops, reports, technology transfer, facilitation of research proposals, recommendations on organic livestock standards etc. Emphasis is on the exchange of information, dialogue and communication.

In May 2006, the project will participate in the major organic congress to be held in Odense, Denmark. The congress will be held in collaboration with a number of other EU funded projects.