

Organic Knowledge Update

Goats and sheep

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Organic goat and sheep dairy in the Netherlands

The dairy sector is the largest organic sector in the Netherlands. Not only cows, but also goats and sheep are kept to produce milk and a variety of cheeses. Although a significant share of total organic dairy production is exported, domestic consumers are continuing to buy more and more Dutch organic dairy. To facilitate organic dairy farmers, Wageningen UR and Louis Bolk Institute carry out a variety of research aimed specifically at organic dairy production.



Dutch organic goat and sheep dairy production

Estimations from early 2010 indicate that there are about 59 organic goat dairy farms and 21 organic sheep dairy farms the Netherlands. The 59 organic goat dairy farms produce a total of 11 million litres of milk. Although most organic goat milk is processed in the Netherlands, almost all Dutch goat cheese is exported.

Current affairs

An important issue for organic goat and sheep dairy is the cost of production. Over half of the costs are feeding cost. Keeping a healthy stock and producing high-quality roughage on farm are important issues.

Animal health and welfare are also at the top of the agenda. An outbreak of Q-fever has been the focus of the public debate concerning the goat and sheep sector. The disease has not hit organic farms disproportionately, only 5 of 92 infected goat farms were organic. Two of the three infected sheep farms were organic.

Dutch research projects concerning organic dairy production are focusing on these and other issues, aiming to provide farmers and other members of the dairy production chain with practical solutions and hands-on advice.

→ Aspirations

By 2013 the Dutch organic dairy sector aims to be at the forefront of sustainable agricultural production, while at the same time providing a consistent economic benefit to all links in the production chain.

The organic dairy sector focuses on:

- the discerning qualities of its products;
- a sustainable production system;
- the relationship with dairy consumers;
- closing production cycles;
- breeding robust and resilient animals;
- animals with natural behaviour and housing;
- a sustainable livelihood for all producers and processors.



Research projects

- **Improving resistance to diseases in goats** This project brings together knowledge and experience regarding resistance, that has been gathered in recent years. The aim is to develop management measures at individual farm level.
Contact: Gidi Smolders, Gidi.Smolders@wur.nl
- **Minerals for organic sheep** This project will create an overview of the mineral supply to organic dairy sheep and develops guidelines for mineral use.
Contact: Jan Verkaik, Jan.Verkaik@wur.nl
- **Optimising pasture use for dairy goats** Continuous milking can spread milk production and labour demand more evenly over the year. In the last few years, experience has been acquired in the goat sector. This project looks at the possibilities for continuous milking of dairy sheep.
Contact: Nick van Eekeren, N.vanEekeren@louisbolk.nl
- **Family herd dairy sheep** The family herd system has successfully been developed for organic dairy cows. This project investigates whether the family herd can also be suitable for dairy sheep. Animal health, economic and environmental sustainability of the system will be taken into account.
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Literature

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Bioconnect aims to further develop and strengthen the Dutch organic sector by initiating and implementing research projects. Within Bioconnect organic entrepreneurs (from farmers to shop-keepers) work together with research institutes, colleges and universities and consultancy organisations. This leads to demand-driven research that is unique to the Netherlands.



The Ministry of Economic Affairs, Agriculture and Innovation sponsors these research projects.



Ministry of Economic Affairs,
Agriculture and Innovation

Wageningen University and Research Centre and the Louis Bolk Institute together carry out these research projects. About 140 projects dedicated to organic agriculture are currently under way.



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