

Quality of live and quality of work life in organic versus conventional farmers

RAMÓN ALVAREZ-ESTEBAN¹, PILAR RODRÍGUEZ², CRISTINA HIDALGO³, CARLOS PALACIOS⁴, ISABEL REVILLA⁵, ITZIAR AGUIRRE⁶, INMACULADA BATALLA⁷, PAOLA EGUINO⁸

Key words: organic farmers, conventional farmers, quality of live, quality of work life

Abstract

Quality of life (QOL) and quality of work life (QOWL) play a key role in the overall concept of sustainability. In this paper we analyze QOL and QOWL variables in relation to the type of livestock farm (organic/conventional) and the use of some quality label (PDO Protected Designation of Origin, PGI Protected Geographical Indication).

Data were collected through regular visits in 2011 to 70 small ruminant farms in Spain using five-point Likert items with 1-5 range. Of all the 70 farms, 6 are organics, 39 have a quality label and 17 use traditional manufacturing methods.

The possession of quality labels in the small ruminant farms analyzed seems not to be related with the quality of life and work. Farmers with traditional production show higher valuation of quality of life but not of quality of work. Organic farms provide quality of life and quality of work significantly better than conventional ones.

Introduction

There is not a rigid and unique definition of sustainability concept and when it must be applied in practice some remarkable difficulties appear.

The study of sustainability of livestock farms can be approached from an economic or environmental point of view. A third element was added later: social sustainability. Sustainability was initially represented by three overlapping circles. Earlier on, Elkington (1999) provided the triple bottom line sustainability considering that it is not possible to fix a desired level of ecological, social and economic sustainability without taking into account the relationships. Quality of life (QOL) and quality of work life (QOWL) play a key role in this overall concept of sustainability.

In this paper we analyze QOL and QOWL variables in relation to the type of livestock farm (organic/conventional) and the use of some quality label (PDO Protected Designation of Origin, PGI Protected Geographical Indication).

Material and methods

Data were collected through regular visits in 2011 to 70 small ruminant farms in Spain within the research project "Effects on the quality of the products and the environment of the different systems of small ruminant farms with dairy type. Employment of economic, social and environmental indicators and final classification systems (RTA2010-00064-C04)" funded by the Spanish National Institute for Agricultural and Food Research and Technology (INIA) involving four research groups from the País Vasco, Navarra, Andalucía and Castilla y León.

QOL and QOWL were collected using five-point Likert items with 1-5 range. Of all the 70 farms, 6 are organics, 39 have a quality label and 17 use traditional manufacturing methods.

A first normality analysis using Kolmogorov-Smirnov test shows than the null hypotheses are not rejected for QOL (p-value 0.315) and QOWL (p-value 0.310), but both are rejected using the less conservative test of

¹ Universidad de León, Spain, www.unileon.es, eMail: ramon.alvarez@unileon.es

² Universidad de León, Spain, www.unileon.es, eMail: pilar.rodriguez@unileon.es

³ Universidad de León, Spain, www.unileon.es, eMail: cristina.hidalgo@unileon.es

⁴ Universidad de Salamanca, Spain, www.usal.es, eMail: carlospalacios@usal.es

⁵ Universidad de Salamanca, Spain, www.usal.es, eMail: irevilla@usal.es

⁶ Universidad de Sevilla, Spain, www.us.es, eMail: itziar@us.es

⁷ NEIKER, Spain, www.neiker.net, eMail: ibatalla@neiker.net

⁸ INTIA, Spain, www.intiasa.es, eMail: peguinoa@itgganadero.com

Lilliefors (0.016 and 0.015 p-value respectively). Therefore, we preferred to use the nonparametric independent samples Mann-Whitney U test (Mann and Whitney, 1947).

Results

The group of farmers value their QOL (3.63) and QOWL (3.59) slightly above the average of 3 into the 1-5 Likert scale (Table 1).

No significant differences were found when farmers have quality labels (3.72 for QOL and 3.51 for QOWL).

Farmers performing traditional production have higher QOL (4.06) but not a higher QOWL (3.82).

There were statistically significant differences in the QOL and the QOWL analyzing conventional versus organic farms.

The assessment of quality of life in organic farms is 4.67 versus 3.53 in conventional farms. The same is found for quality of work (4.50 in organic versus 3.50 in conventional).

Table 1: Quality of life and quality of work life in different kinds of farms

Likert 1-5 points Quality of	Organic		Quality indications		Traditional production		Average
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	
life (QOL)	4.67**	3.53**	3.72	3.52	4.06*	3.49*	3.63
work life (QOWL)	4.50*	3.50*	3.51	3.68	3.82	3.51	3.59

* significant differences Mann-Whitney U test at P<0.05 and ** significant at P<0.01

Among the three kinds of farms analyzed, higher values of QOL (4.67) and QOWL (4.50) were found on organic farms, almost one point above the overall average (Figure 1).

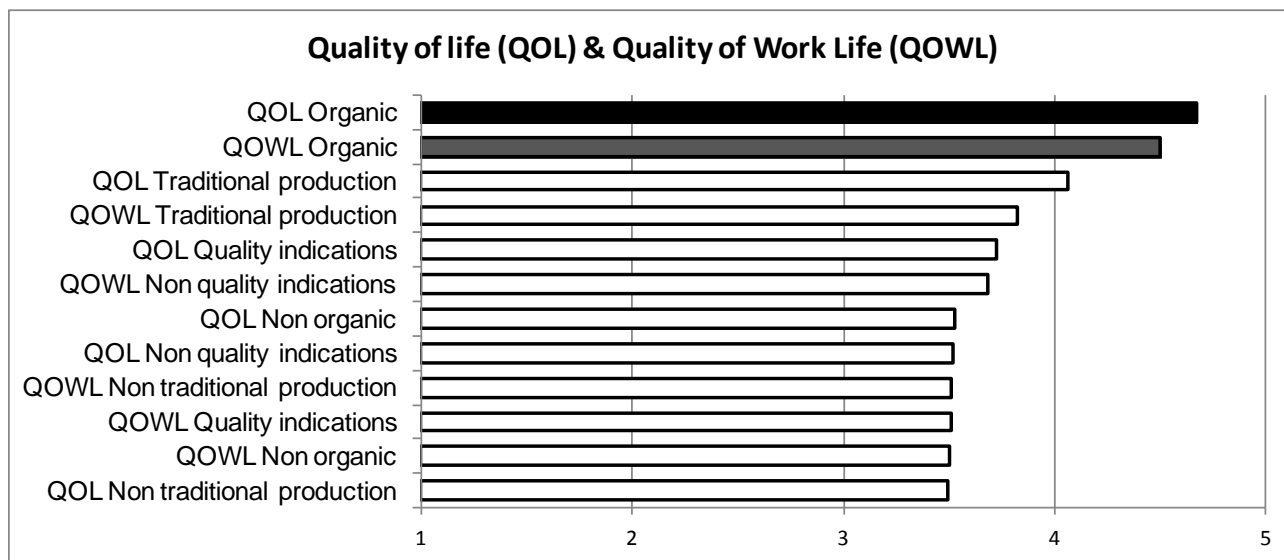


Figure 1. Quality of life and quality of work life in different kinds of farms

Discussion

The study of sustainability of farms or livestock from an economic point of view has traditionally been linked to short-term analysis, seeking to obtain enough income.

The environmental sustainability has been more related to the expected impacts of decision-making in the medium and long-term (Park and Seaton 1996), such as the destruction of non-renewable resources, pollution and the use of fertilizers and chemical products.

Smith and Sharicz (2011) point out that a lack of a precise definition of sustainability will lead us to "not having clear guidelines on how to adopt or implement sustainability" in the triple bottom line concept (economic, environmental and social). At this moment, the economic bottom line remains as the first corporate decision making (Steger et al. 2007). Fresh and Kroonenburg (1992) speaking about the land merged these two approaches: "...in order to be sustainable, land use must display a dynamic response to changing ecological and socio-economic conditions... to ensure that over time no net quantitative or qualitative loss of natural resources occurs".

Quality of life and quality of work life are very important indicators of long-term sustainability. They gather economic, social and environmental aspects but also subjective perceptions and styles of life for helping understand the different strategies of conventional and organic farmers.

The possession of quality labels in the small ruminant farms analyzed in Spain seems not to be related with the quality of life and work.

Farmers with traditional production show higher valuation of quality of life but not of quality of work.

Organic farms provide quality of life and quality of work significantly better than conventional ones.

The results of the study lead us to think that when a farmer decides to manage an organic farm he take into account not only economic, social and environmental factors, but also a different life style searching to obtain greater job satisfaction and a better quality of live.

Suggestions to tackle with the future challenges of organic animal husbandry

Studies on sustainability in livestock management should consider economic, environmental and social aspects, but their interpretation must be related to the different kinds of farmers.

Organic farms show better sustainability than conventional ones. Organic farmers point out higher quality of work and higher quality of life.

References

- Elkington J (1999): Triple bottom line revolution: reporting for the third millennium. Australian CPA, 69, 75.
- Fields M, & Thacker J (1992): Influence of quality of work life on company and union commitment. Academy of Management Journal, 35, 439-450.
- Fresco L O & Kroonenberg S B, (1992): Time and spatial scales in ecological sustainability. Land Use Policy 9, 155-168.
- Mann H B & Whitney D R (1947): On a test of whether one of two random variables is stochastically larger than the other. The Annals of Mathematical Statistics 18, 1, 50-60.
- Park J, & Seaton R A F (1996): Integrative research and sustainable agriculture. Agricultural Systems, 50, 1, 81-100.
- Sen A K (1987): The standard of living: The Tanner Lectures. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Sen A K (1992): Inequality re-examined. Oxford, Clarendon Press.
- Smith P A C & Sharicz C (2011): The shift needed for sustainability. The Learning Organization 18, 1, 73-86.
- Steger U, Ionescu-Somers A & Salzmann O (2007): The economic foundations of corporate sustainability. Corporate Governance 7, 2, 162-77.
- Veenhoven R (2000): The four qualities of life: Ordering concepts and measures of the good life. Journal of Happiness Studies 1, 1-39.

