

## Adding value to grasslands through certified organic beef production

G.A. Ferreira, O. Pittaluga, C. Mas, S. Revello and R. Tellería

*Instituto Nacional de Investigación Agropecuaria (INIA), Ruta 5 km 386 Tacuarembó, Uruguay, Email: gferre@inia.org.uy*

**Keywords:** organic meat, production systems, adding value

**Introduction** New demands are being made for safe beef from low input production systems (low input of energy, pesticides, other chemically synthesised products and hormones and GM free) by the main retailers and consumers (Howard, 2004). These present an opportunity for adding value to grazing production systems and to reinforce relationships among farmers, agro-industrialists, exporters and consumers and to show advantages of positive externalities of grasslands (Meister, 2001).

**Materials and methods** A project with two slaughterhouses located in the North of Uruguay was developed in order to produce certified organic beef. The main objective was to certify extensive grassland production systems where the animals grazed mainly native grasslands, i.e. the most common system to produce meat in Uruguay (Ferreira & Pittaluga 2002). The organic programme started with INIA support working with PUL and Tacuarembó slaughterhouses in 2000 and the number of certified farms to August 2004 is shown in Table 1.

**Table 1** Certified organic beef production programs

Slaughterhouses	PUL	Tacuarembó	Total
Farms	130	140	270
Hectares	323903	419813	743716
Beef cattle	244641	258461	503102
Sheep	284920	326166	611086
AU/ha	0.74	0.62	0.67

Source: PUL & Tacuarembó Data bases of farms certified by SKAL International

**Results** Currently, the two plants are exporting organic certified meat mainly to Europe and USA and the average premium price is around 12% for the farmers. The market niche is growing and the market forecast for the next few years is that demand will continue to increase (Regmi & Dick 2001). The programme has been approved by SKAL International, KRAV Sweden and USDA Organics to certify that the meat produced is organic beef. Most of the foreigner brokers and buyers are amazed at the quality of the natural environment of Uruguay to produce quality grassland beef. This reinforces the results obtained by Environmental Sustainability Index (ESI) “that is a measure of overall progress towards environmental sustainability, developed for 142 countries, that permits cross-national comparisons of environmental progress in a systematic and quantitative fashion. It represents a first step towards a more analytically driven approach to environmental decision-making” (Columbia University 2002). Uruguay has been ranked as number 6 because of its clearly natural resources. Therefore, this programme adds value to grasslands in different ways, i.e. by i) increasing the economic value of the products, ii) improving cooperation between farmers, slaughterhouses and exporters iii) applying sustainable technology and methods approved by the organic protocol iv) supporting decision making to enhance positive externalities of grasslands to the environment

**Conclusions** The organic beef programme implemented in Uruguay by two slaughterhouses working with INIA technical assistance, shows that is possible to develop an innovative programme supported by a strategic alliance among agricultural researchers, farmers and slaughterhouses.

### References

- Columbia University (2002) Environmental Sustainability Index <http://www.ciesin.columbia.edu/indicators/esi/>
- Ferreira, G. & O. Pittaluga (2003). Evaluación Económica de Sistemas de Engorde Bovino y Ovino para la
- Howard, M., (2004). Developing the Uruguayan Food Chain. Draft Report. Project N°: GRP-P89 Issue: 1.0
- Producción de carnes Diferenciadas. En: Seminario de Actualización Técnica: Producción de Carne Vacuna y Ovina de Calidad. Serie Actividades de Difusión. N° 317
- Meister, A (2001) Dilemma: increase in human food production or use of grasslands for environmental and / or social purposes. *Proceedings of the Nineteenth International Grassland Congress*, Brazil, 1013-1014.
- Regmi, A. & J. Dick (2001): Effects of Urbanization and Global Food Demand, in Changing Structure of Global Food Consumption and Trade. In Regmi, A. (ed), Agriculture and Trade Report. WR 501-1, USDA, ERS.