



SusCatt - Increasing productivity, resource efficiency and product quality to increase the economic competitiveness of forage and grazing based cattle production systems

Sustainability factors of the Italian dairy rearing system

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About

If we are to improve the production efficiency and environmental sustainability of Italian animal farming, with full regard to animal health and welfare, we need to identify what strategies and changes are appropriate - system analysis is crucial, especially for the dairy sector.



Friesian cows reared on a SusCatt farm. Photo: Dott.ssa Riuzzi Giorgia.

The Italian context: challenges and goals

Although striving to improving environmental, ethical and economic sustainability, the Italian farming system has many obstacles. With more than 60,000,000 inhabitants, the Italian population density is very high, more than 200 people per km². Furthermore, there are also many farmed animals – almost 6 million beef and dairy cattle, with more than 3.75m in the Po Valley alone. For dairy cows, there are about 3,750,000, nationally 12.4 animals/km² although about 65% of them are in the Po Valley. In addition there are more than 180m other farmed animals, mainly poultry and pigs, but also goats, sheep, equines, buffalos and rabbits. All in a rearing system that can count on only 12.6m ha of Utilised Agricultural Area (AUU).

Furthermore, even though the production performances have improved, home milk supply does not cover national consumption. More milk is needed but if farms are to increase production it is important they continue to enhance sustainability and meet consumers' increasing attention to product quality and to the way animals are reared.

University of Padova's goals within SusCatt fulfil this needs and expectations. Indeed, we aim to provide Po Valley production systems with new perspectives, to evolve competitive and sustainable strategies from an environmental, ethical and economic point of view. In particular, the research focuses on evaluating and promoting new feeding approaches moving towards a circular economy, based on a greater use of home-grown feeds, especially hay, and by-products coming from other industries.

Results

SusCatt activities' will demonstrate how to improve both animal health and welfare and dairy product quality, yet reducing farms' environmental impact by using more home-grown forages, especially hay. This a win-win - these forages are not only more suitable for a healthy rumen activity but, allowing farmers to exploit local resources, they reduce their reliance on imported products or on locally produced feeds which are hard to grow. Moving towards a circular economy scenario that is not only sustainable from an environmental, ethical and, possibly, economic point of view, but also matches with the current consumer's expectations.



SusCatt partners visiting a farm in Padova.



Brown cows reared on a SusCatt farm. Photo: Dott.ssa Riuzzi Giorgia.

Imprint

Citing: Flaviana Gottardo and Giorgia Riuzzi (2020): Sustainability factors of the Italian dairy rearing system. SusCatt technical note 3.4.1. Download at <https://bit.ly/2GT1OHF>

SusCatt was possible by funding from SusAn, an ERA-Net, co-funded under European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (www.era-susan.eu), Grant n°696231, and Ministero delle politiche agricole alimentari e forestali (MIPAAF).

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Review: Gillian Butler and Håvard Steinshamn

Editor: Håvard Steinshamn

Publishers: Consortium of the SusCatt project, c/Norwegian Institute of Bioeconomy Research, Norway

