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Reducing antibiotics in livestock and improving farming through knowledge exchange

RELACS' partner 'Fédération des Eleveurs et Vétérinaires En Convention' (FEVEC) organises Farmer Field School in Balbigny, France, 1 April 2019

Rearing animals in better environmental conditions and the smart use of data lead to healthier animals and a decreased use of antibiotics. Five farmers visited 'La Ferme du Tilleul' to learn from the organic farmer Jean-Yves Lyonnet and exchange knowledge about improving animal and farm health.

To reduce dietary supplementation, Jean-Yves decided to increase calving in the summer in order to take advantage of the grass to feed the mother cows at the best of their lactation. The consequence of this has been an increase in the calving interval, which was controlled and voluntary and made him less dependent on feed suppliers. He also installed a permanent winter park for heifers. The introduction of these measures decreased the likelihood of illness of the animals. Moreover, Jean-Yves reduced the amount of antibiotics used on sick animals through several practices, such as storing and using technical data about the health of the cows, alternative medicines and proper animal husbandry management. This includes livestock health assessments to anticipate possible reproductive problems, improved housing and monitoring of calves as well as the identification of high-risk periods of mastitis to increase upstream prevention.

Like many organic farmers, Jean-Yves looks beyond simply improving animal health. Biodiversity protection, decreased water and energy usage and the targeted employment of new technologies play an important role in running the farm. To improve nature all around the farm, he integrated the barn into the environment and increased the number of trees and hedges on the farmland.

About the farm

For more than 20 years, 'La Ferme du Tilleul' has been successfully run organically and has achieved a high degree of autonomy. As the farm produces enough fodder itself, there is no need to buy extra feed for the livestock.

About the Farmer Field Schools

This was the first of five Farmer Field Schools focusing on reducing antibiotics in livestock. Each of these workshops within the framework of the RELACS project takes place on a different farm.

The Farmer Field School enabled a rich exchange and discussion of important issues. Though some farmers were initially reluctant to join the first meeting, it soon became clear that the benefits far outweighed the dedicated time and work. By the end of the day, farmers already showed eagerness to attend the next one, learn from their peers and change some of their practices. It was remarkable to see the farmers' friendliness and willingness to share their knowledge and receive feedback. To enable change that lasts, it is crucial to take farmers' opinions and remarks into consideration and not leave them unheard.





Picture 1: Farmers discussing the practicality of a milking parlour (Photo: Alexandre Fauriat, FEVEC)

Picture 2: Farmers discussing the integration of a barn into the environment (Photo: Alexandre Fauriat, FEVEC)

Picture 3: Permanent winter parc for heifers (Photo: Alexandre Fauriat, FEVEC)

Picture 4: Host farmer explaining the decreased use of antibiotics (Photo: Alexandre Fauriat, FEVEC)

About this news story and RELACS

Publisher:

Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL)
Ackerstrasse 113, Postfach 219, CH-5070 Frick
Phone: +41 62 865 72 72, info.suisse@fibl.org, www.fibl.org
The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements
EU (IFOAM EU)
Rue du Commerce 124, BE-1000 Brussels
Phone: +32 2 280 12 23, info@ifoam-eu.org, www.ifoam-eu.org
Fédération des Eleveurs et Vétérinaires En Convention (FEVEC)
Le Thévenon, 69850 Saint-Martin-en-Haut
Phone: +33 04 48 19 14 40, philippe.sulpice@wanadoo.fr

Authors: Olivia Tavares, Alexandre Fauriat

Editors: Verena Mitschke, Eva Berckmans, Bram Moeskops

RELACS: 'Replacement of Contentious Inputs in Organic Farming Systems' (RELACS) builds on results of previous research projects and takes far-advanced solutions forward. As a system approach to sustainable agriculture, organic farming aims to effectively manage ecological processes whilst lowering dependence on off-farm inputs. The RELACS partners will evaluate solutions to further reduce the use of external inputs and, if needed, develop and adopt cost-efficient and environmentally safe tools and technologies.

Project website: www.relacs-project.eu

Social media: Facebook (RELACSeu) & Twitter (@RELACSeu)

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