



# Living lab in the Swiss organic veal and beef sector



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**Organic Cattle sector**

**Organic beef  
and veal**

FiBL conducted a Living Lab (LL) with stakeholders in the Swiss organic beef and veal sector to come up with ways to reduce antimicrobial use (AMU). Subsequently, a Living Lab of 12 stakeholders was established. The stakeholders represented organic veal and beef farmers, vets of the Swiss Calf health service (SCHS) and the organic farmers association Bio Suisse (BS). The LL was based on an existing group. The focus of the group was mainly on conventional calf / beef systems. Roadmap allowed to focus also on the needs of organic farmers and bring in their perspectives. The first LL meeting started already in May 2019 and the last LL meeting takes places in February 2023. In between the Action Labs were established to implement strategies as discussed in the LL.

## The strategy tested in the Living Lab

There were two main aims of the LL: (a) an adaption of the SCHS management advisory tool to organic principle and regulations (including the aim of reducing antibiotics) and (b) a standard visit of a representative number of Swiss organic veal and beef farms via SCHS (including registration of the used antibiotics).

Therefore we intended in Action Labs (a) to gain a representative overview over the management and antimicrobial input on >100 organic cattle farms, (b) to implement at least one elective course during the Swiss veterinary education with regard to the particularities of veterinary action on organic livestock farms and (c) to promote the use of complementary medicine, mainly phytotherapy and homeopathy, in veterinary education and post graduate training to reach a maximum of active veterinarian practitioners in Switzerland.

## The roadmap to implementation

The LL focused on education and training of veterinarians, in the overall handling of cattle health on organic farms and in issues of complementary medicine. During the process the following points were experienced:

- Adjust the management recording scheme to the needs and regulations of organic cattle farms was successful and an important base for the ongoing cooperation between BS and SCHS
- In the first phase (on farm evaluation of the health situation and the antimicrobial input) the contracted veterinarians of the SCHS experienced a broad spectrum of feedbacks of the randomly chosen farms. Even if the participation in the project was voluntary, some farmers showed a “demonstrative disinterest” in the supervision. In contrast, others were highly interested and very satisfied with the measure, which they would not have requested on their own initiative
- While farms with suckler cows show good management, dairy, beef and veal farms show an average management compared to the experience of the SCHS
- In the second LL representatives of organic dairy, beef and veal farmers participated which leads to fruitful discussions about future cooperations



## The impact created by the Living Lab

### AMU:

- Establish a close cooperation between SCHS and BS
- Adjusted management recording scheme to organic dairy, veal and beef production and provide a feedback to farmers
- Reach about 80 participants with practical basic information about veterinary herbal medicine via an online course

### Animal Health:

- Initiating cooperation between organic dairy and organic veal and beef farmers with the aim to keep calves which were born on organic dairy farms as often as possible in the organic sector for veal and beef production.
- Establish an ongoing two-day elective course for veterinary students with regard to the particularities of veterinary action on organic livestock farms as well as an ongoing two-day elective course for veterinary students with basic information in veterinary phytotherapy together with the University of Berne

### Costs and savings:

- Awareness about the differences in margins between conventional and organic milk and its consequences for calf rearing and animal health.



## Challenges

- Organizing LL in a pandemic situation
- Selection of measures that can realistically be implemented
- Establish a cooperation between dairy and veal or beef farms respectively to keep as much as possible calves of dairy farms in the organic sector

## Successes

- Starting point to include the goals and needs of organic livestock production in the veterinary education
- Reaching a high number of veterinary cattle practitioners with some basic information of veterinary phytotherapy
- Establishing a close cooperation between a health service and the organic livestock sector
- To cooperate with two large stakeholder groups of the sector was inspiring.

The organic cattle sector could be an interesting example of how the use of antimicrobials can be reduced through a combination of preventive herd health management measures and complementary veterinary medicine. The basis for this is close cooperation and dialogue between farmers of different cattle sectors, veterinarians and health services, and for a long-term impact, the inclusion of Universities as veterinary training institutions.

[www.roadmap-h2020.eu](http://www.roadmap-h2020.eu)



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