



Protection of endangered Istrian native cattle breeds

COUNTRY

Croatia

PROJECT PROMOTER

AZRRI - Agency for Rural
development of Istria Ltd Pazin

FUNDING

ERDF funds, EUR 850 000

DURATION

Started in 2005

CONTRIBUTION TO

- generating environmental benefits
- creating value through improved production methods or processing technology
- scaling up a pilot project to commercial scale

KEYWORDS

Animal husbandry, environmental protection, quality food, supply chains

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The initiative

This project brought together a wide range of stakeholders, including research institutes, universities, farmers, caterers and the public administration, in order to revive traditional production systems of endangered local cattle breeds. This resulted in the creation of a new market for local, certified, high-quality beef meat, which provides benefits for the environment, the farmers and the local economy.

RESULTS

- ✓ The endangered Istrian cattle population increased from 700 to 1900 animals.
- ✓ Improved the management of pastures and landscapes in the project area.
- ✓ Reduced the fire hazard in the areas where Istrian cattle graze.
- ✓ Increased the number of farms with the optimal number of animals for the area (20-50 animals per farm);
- ✓ Set the foundations to create the programme “Beef meat of Istrian cattle”; and develop the special label for the restaurants offering Istrian cattle meat on their menu;
- ✓ Increased general interest in the Istrian breed due to the nutritional value of its meat;
- ✓ According to the evidence gathered on the economic sustainability of Istrian cattle breeding, it is understood that 25 heads of cattle can ensure an additional yearly income of about 15 000 EUR to families in depopulated territories.
- ✓ 10 individuals directly employed in/by the initiative and 150 benefitted indirectly through e.g. spin-offs of the initiative, suppliers, transport, etc.



Context

The Karstic territory of Istria is experiencing significant depopulation in the areas that used to engage in traditional livestock production and grazing. As a result of this decline in agriculture, the pastures and grasslands in the areas are no longer managed, resulting in an increased risk of fire.

Objective

The objective of the project is to promote traditional cattle breeding using endangered local breeds.

Activities

High-quality breeding animals were bought from established breeders and transferred through the programme to younger breeders in order to increase their herds sizes.

Specific activities to support cattle breeding were implemented through the project:

1. Conduct a study of the traditional production systems of the territory and the state of the current animal population;
2. Dissemination of information among cattle breeders, but also to the commercial target group (e.g. restaurateurs) about the benefits of preserving traditional breeds;
3. Dissemination of information concerning the procedures for keeping, reproducing, feeding, and fattening the traditional cattle breeds;
4. Definition of the correct technical procedures for fattening the animals for beef production;
5. Establishment of technical procedures for slaughtering, meat maturation, storage and arrangement/display;
6. Identification of the quantitative and qualitative characteristics and potentials for production;
7. Assessment of the value of traditionally produced meat compared to conventional meat, proposing ways to market the product for tourism in order to increase revenue;
8. Conduct a review of the organisational structure and business relations of the Istrian breeder's association;

9. Start the process of registering the designation of origin for Istrian cattle meat, which is produced traditionally (ensuring that the needs of breeders, consumers, as well as animal welfare are respected);
10. Create the conditions for establishing a Centre for Istrian cattle;
11. Development of educational workshops for professionals and interested consumers;
12. Organisation of awareness raising activities to promote Istrian native breeds, while emphasizing the connections between traditional forms of livestock farming and the preservation of natural resources, biodiversity and the traditional landscape of the Mediterranean Karst.

The project involved a wide range of stakeholders: the Agency for Rural Development of Istria Ltd Pazin (AZRRI); the Istrian County; the Croatian Agricultural Agency (HPA); the Association of Istrian Breeders; the University of Zagreb, Faculty of Agriculture; the Croatian Livestock Centre; the Tourist High Schools in Porec, Rovinj and Pula; the Istria Tourist Board; the Croatian Culinary Federation; the Association of Artisans of Istria.

AZRRI established a long term cooperation with some of the breeders whose economic earnings were primarily from the production of calves and yearlings for meat.

The experts from AZRRI Ltd Pazin, together with the Faculty of Agriculture of the University of Zagreb and the Croatian Livestock Centre coordinated the management of the beef production (veal and beef) and developed specific procedures that provided information about the accommodation of fattened animals, their feeding, age, body mass, health care and reproduction.

Furthermore, AZRRI worked together with the Istria Tourist Board, the Croatian Culinary Federation and the Association of Artisans of Istria to promote the Istrian cattle meat, to create new recipes and to have them included in the menus of a number of high level restaurants and catering services.

The Croatian Culinary Federation and the Association of Artisans of Istria collaborated with the Tourist High Schools in Porec, Rovinj and Pula in order to include Istrian cattle meat in the educational programmes of the sector.

Environmental sustainability

Improving the environment is an important goal for this initiative. It promoted traditional methods of animal production focusing on micro farms (with a small number of animal e.g. 5-10 cattle), and multi-species farms (with small numbers of different species).

The project aimed to increase the Istrian cattle population from 700 to 1900 heads. At the same time, it aimed to improve the management of pastures and landscapes and reduce fire hazards.

The project also promoted short supply chains by establishing direct connections between restaurateurs and farmers, enabling knowledge exchange in order to preserve and develop a culture of local living and eating.

The project is aligned with the Croatian 2007-2013 Strategy for rural development in the Istrian region and is part of the APRO (Cross border initiatives for the protection of environment biodiversity using autochthonous breeds), and IPA Slovenia – Croatia 2007-2013 (IPA - Instrument of pre-accession aid).

Lessons learnt

The project achieved its results by investing in a strong multidisciplinary approach. It engaged an extended team from a wide and diversified network including breeders, processors, traders, caterers, scientific institutions, and local, regional and state administration.

Additional success factors included long-term support from the Istrian Region.

Challenges included the high fragmentation of agricultural land, the lack of awareness regarding traditional cattle breeding, the small number of herds, and an abrupt decline in public funding for native breeds after Croatia joined the European Union.

Additionally, there are risks associated with rearing endangered cattle, such as the of high level of inbreeding, fraudulent sales of non-certified beef and lack of training among butchers and restaurants.