

Mangio Carne Bio: direct sales circuit of organic beef

Kees de Roest, Raffaella Cerruti, Claudio Montanari - CRPA SpA Reggio Emilia

An initiative for increasing sustainability of organic production in a less favoured area...

Mangiocarnebio represents a collective initiative for the direct sales of organic beef produced by a small group of farmers located in the Apennines near Bologna. The project has been launched in 2004 by PROBER, the organic producers' association of the Emilia-Romagna Region. Its aim is to create a better remuneration for local organic cattle farms that did not find a solid market for their product and often were forced to sell calves and cull cows on the market of conventional beef.

Based on direct sales to consumers

The aim of the joint activity is the development of a direct sales system able to grant higher prices than conventional market channels. Direct contact with consumers has been developed by delivering boxes of different beef cuts directly at the consumers' homes. This system is managed by PROBER who buys organic cattle from the members and is in charge for the packaging and delivery of the boxes. By cutting out middlemen and wholesalers a greater share of the final price is returned to farmers.

MangioCarneBio

Nella tua città la carne della tua campagna



Potential benefits of collective action

Besides the premium price, a short market circuit may entail advantages for the side-activities run by farmers (lodging services, bed and breakfast). More in general the promotional activities carried out by PROBER contribute to reinforce the visibility of the area. On the consumers' side, the benefits of the initiative are related to the possibility of having access to fresh and local product, while supporting both environmental friendly agriculture and short retail chains which reduce food miles. The brandname stands for "eat organic beef" and the slogan "*in your city, the beef of your countryside*" embodies the strategy adopted.

Farmers' involvement in the initiative

The project currently includes 15 small-size cattle farms. The heterogeneity of the farms in terms of specialisation implies a different degree of expectations of the single farmers that may affect the cohesion of the group. Some of them focus mainly on dairy production, where beef is considered a by-product, others are more specialised in beef breeds. Furthermore the traditional presence of dairy breeds or crossbreeds does not allow to reach a complete quality standardization which would improve the distinctive characteristics of the product.



Market performance

Volumes traded within Mangio Carne Bio circuit are still limited. The lack of a critical mass of organic beef demand through box schemes appears to be a crucial issue for the development of the initiative. How to upscale direct selling is the central question emerging from the case study. Logistic problems related to the boxes delivery system affect the possibility of further developing the initiative as it would require further investments for making the initiative manageable at a larger scale and more visible. The association is gradually expanding its contacts in order to enlarge and stabilise the beef sales of its members. The intervention of PROBER, as the institutional initiator has been fundamental for the start up of the project. Now efforts are carried out to reconcile the different development perspectives of the involved producers. New entrepreneurial skills and attitude to cooperate are mobilised within the group of the farmers involved, in order to assure the sustainability of the initiative over time. Most of the farmers are more focused on production aspects and are less prepared to tackle marketing activities, which are crucial for the upscaling of the initiative and the synergy within the group.

