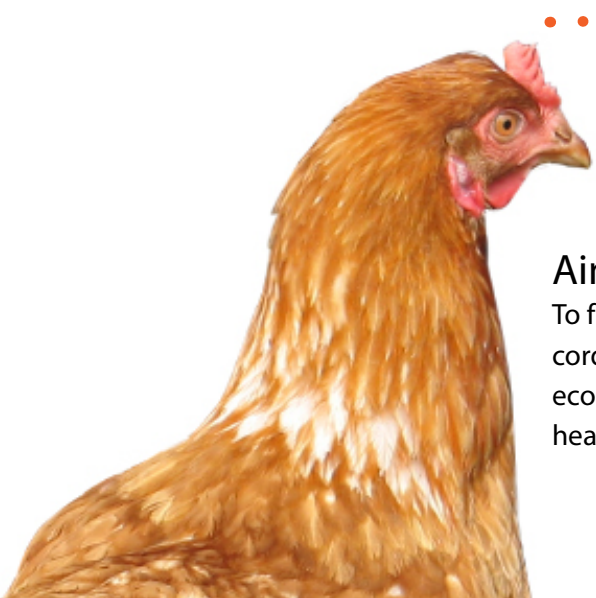




Good health and welfare

– Promoting good health and welfare in European, organic laying hens

HealthyHens



Aim of the project:

To further develop bird health and welfare according to the organic principles, and to enhance economic competitiveness through improved bird health and performance.

Introduction

This project focuses on disease management, animal welfare and impacts on the environment on organic laying hen farms, as organic husbandry poses special challenges and has to fulfill high expectations in these areas. Major risk factors will be identified in 8 participating countries: Germany, Austria, Denmark, Italy, UK, The Netherlands, Sweden and Belgium.

Background

Organic egg production has substantially increased over the last years and in some EU states gained considerable significance. A critical challenge for its further development is the ability to document a high level of animal health and welfare. Currently there are a number of health and welfare problems of mostly multifactorial nature. An epidemiological study will help to better understand these problems and address risk factors.

Benefits of the project

Resulting recommendations will help organic egg producers to further develop bird health and welfare according to the organic principles, and to enhance economic competitiveness through improved bird health and performance. Efficient management strategies will improve the current health and welfare status of organic hens, as well as to reduce nutrient build up in the surrounding environment.



Expected results

The main results from this project will be scientifically based recommendations about how to efficiently manage health, welfare and environmental impacts in organic laying hens. This knowledge will be transferred to farmers and advisors. Furthermore, the data recorded within the project can be used for European benchmarking. Farmers and advisors can use the recording protocol that has been tested and refined in this project for their monitoring purposes.

Expected long-term impacts

On the basis of the recommendations made from the results of this and related current research projects, health and welfare standards of organic laying hens will be raised.

Target groups

The main target groups are organic egg producers and advisors as well as political decision makers in Europe and other countries with comparable production systems.



Main activities

107 flocks distributed over 8 countries will be included in the observational study with a cross sectional design. Flocks will be visited twice at specified age periods during two seasons. Housing, management and animal based data will be recorded during interviews, direct measurements or from farm documentation. Recommendations will be formulated based on analyses carried out



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Related projects

Researchers from the HealthyHens project will stay in touch with the CORE Organic II project ICOPP and the European project www.lowinputbreeds.org. Results from completed European research projects (www.welfarequality.net, www.laywel.eu) will be considered in the HealthyHens protocol.

Project dissemination

In each participating country, at least one agricultural press article and an electronic leaflet with recommendations for farmers and advisors will be produced in the national language. The leaflet will be of the same content in all countries and be made available on international and national organic websites such as Organic Eprints (www.orgprints.org) or www.oekolandbau.de and websites of the participating institutions. However, they will also be offered to the organic associations for printing. In addition, results will be presented at farmers' or organic associations' meetings or seminars in all countries.

The large international and standardised database, covering a variety of aspects in relation to animal diseases, parasites, welfare and environmental problems in organic egg production, is unique. It shall be discussed in an open scientific workshop, in order to share knowledge within academia and present results to critical peer review. Paper for peer reviewed journals will be produced from the project. These papers will be the basis for the five English articles written for farmers and advisors

How to reach the endusers

Relevant national advisory services and organic organisations will be involved in the implementation throughout the whole project. The direct involvement of organic farmers as hosts for the study will be one route for dissemination and implementation of the results.



Further information

This project is funded via the ERA-net CORE Organic II by national funds to each partner. CORE Organic II is a collaboration between 21 countries on initiating transnational research projects in the area of organic food and farming. In 2011, CORE Organic II selected this project and 10 more for funding.

Read more at the CORE Organic II website: www.coreorganic2.org/HealthyHens and in Organic Eprints: <http://orgprints.org/view/projects/HealthyHens.html>