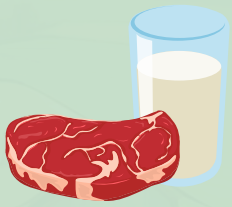
SPRINT SUCCESS STORIES

# SUSTAINABLE HAY MILK AND MEAT IN SLOVENIA



**The Hay Milk and Meat Initiative (Seneno), launched during 2020 in Slovenia, brings together pioneering farmers to revive traditional hay-only feeding practices instead of silage grown from maize, which often relies on pesticides.**

By coordinating multi-cut harvesting, investing in drying and storage infrastructure, and developing an EU-approved certification for hay-fed meat, the initiative has demonstrated marked improvements in bovine health and longevity, enhanced farm incomes and—crucially—reduced reliance on synthetic pesticides through its commitment to organic principles, alternative pest-management practices, and a move away from maize.

## THE CHALLENGE

**Overcoming the technical and logistical challenge of producing high-quality, nutritious hay instead of silage, while using minimal pesticides.**

## KEY OBJECTIVES

**Promote and enhance hay-only (seneno) feeding** and hay-milk production across Slovenia

**Improve grassland quality** and maintain high nutritional value of forage without silage

**Reduce reliance on synthetic pesticides** by adhering to organic principles and integrated pest management

**Support farmers** in converting from silage to hay farming through technical advice, shared resources and funding guidance

Seneno initiative members

## MAIN OBSTACLES

- **Feed preservation:** harvesting quality hay in 3–4 cuts to avoid nutritional losses of up to 30 % without silage
- **High upfront investment:** need for drying devices, expanded storage and bespoke logistics
- **Farmer mindset:** initial reluctance to collaborate or adopt new methods, compounded by bureaucratic subsidy processes
- **Market recognition:** low consumer awareness of hay-fed products and limited branding opportunities

## OVERCOMING BARRIERS

**Resource pooling:** farmers formed networks to share expertise and administrative burdens for subsidy applications

**Certification development:** collaborated with IKC Maribor and the Chamber to draft national standards, gaining European Commission approval for hay-fed meat

**Technical innovation:** members mastered new technologies for drying hay, which preserves nutrient content, coordinated harvest schedules to suit weather windows

**Advisory support:** provided one-to-one guidance on CAP points, organic criteria and conversion logistics

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## RESULTS AND OUTCOMES

The Seneno initiative has yielded clear benefits: farms report healthier, longer-lived cattle on hay-only diets and secure premium contracts for hay-fed milk and meat, boosting incomes.

By adhering to organic standards—eschewing synthetic herbicides, insecticides and fungicides in favour of crop rotation, diverse swards and targeted biopesticides—partners have sharply reduced chemical inputs.

Supported by pioneering farmers, institutional advice and shared infrastructure, the scheme offers a replicable model for sustainable hay production.

## LESSONS LEARNED

1. **Strong partnerships and shared infrastructure** are vital to distribute costs and build trust
2. **Early policy engagement** accelerates certification and subsidy alignment
3. **Technical precision i**n harvest timing and drying is essential to retain forage quality
4. **Active marketing and consumer education** underpin premium pricing and demand

## POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Simplify subsidy criteria** and boost payments for forage systems that use minimal to no pesticides
- **Fund shared drying and storage facilities** to lower entry barriers for small farms
- **Promote public-procurement** of local hay-fed products in schools and institutions
- **Strengthen advisory services** to guide farmers through organic certification and integrated pest management.

### Certification

National special certification for hay-fed meat drafted by farmers and IKC Maribor and approved by the European Commission. By 2024, 879 farms across had gained this certificate, ~92% of which produce hay fed meat.

This hay-milk certification is modelled on Austrian standards, with ongoing work to establish similar EU recognition.

### Organic hay production

Organic hay production emphasises multi-cut harvesting, sward composition and careful machinery settings. In addition, these practices should follow agri-environmental-climate measures under the National Strategic Plan (CAP) to secure funding. Good organic hay production, as seen in the Seneno initiative, integrates crop rotation, intercropping and natural predators to manage pests, thereby reducing chemical inputs - including pesticides.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Find out about other SPRINT success stories here: https://sprint-h2020.eu/index.php/resources/success-stories

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