SPRINT SUCCESS STORIES

IP-SUISSE: PIONEERING SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE IN SWITZERLAND

SPRINT
SUSTAINABLE PLANT PROTECTION TRANSITION

IP-SUISSE is a leading organization in Switzerland promoting sustainable farming practices. Established in 1989, it sets high standards for its 10,000 member farms, focusing on economic viability, animal welfare, and environmental sustainability. In 1993, the first IP-SUISSE labelled products landed on the market.

IP-SUISSE aims to prove that sustainable farming can be financially viable, challenging traditional views. It functions both as a certification label and a support organisation, helping farmers transition to more sustainable methods. IP-SUISSE occupies a middle ground between conventional and organic farming, and emphasises the value of this in making sustainable practices more affordable to consumers.

THE CHALLENGE

- During the 1990s, Swiss agriculture was embroiled in crises of overproduction and environmental damage.
- Organic was seen as unachievable and inaccessible by many.
- Farmers did not feel heard by the agricultural commissions, and found that top-down regulation of farming was not supporting sustainable agricultural practices.

BOLD STEPS IN CEREAL PRODUCTION 2021-2022

EXTENSO-WHEAT:

23,000ha

grown without growth regulators, fungicides or insecticides.

LOW PESTICIDE CEREALS:

6,200ha

grown without any pesticides, including herbicides.

IP-SUISSE: KEY FACTORS FOR SUCCESS

Middle Ground: IP-SUISSE situated itself between conventional and organic as an affordable approach to increasing environmental sustainability.

Grassroots Movement: IP-SUISSE began as a farmer-supported grassroots initiative. Unlike other labels, it garnered strong support from farmers in its early years.

Self-Organisation and Networking: Establishing contracts with prominent bakeries and retailers in Switzerland played a vital role. Networking with customers and retailers helped build the profile.

Favourable Funding: Political support was necessary for economic viability. Direct payments and IP-SUISSE premiums needed political backing to make sustainable farming economically attractive, making profits comparable to conventional farming.

SCHEME ACTIONS AND IMPACTS

AGRONOMY AND RESEARCH

1. **Collaborations with research institutes, hosting field days and consultation events.**
2. **Encouraging farmers to choose crops which are resilient to disease.**
3. **Promoting innovative methods such as electric instead of chemical desiccation.**

GOVERNANCE

4. **Flexible production standards allow farmers to adapt to environmental conditions.**
5. **Farmers must adhere to the climate and biodiversity points system.**
6. **Strict standards and practical compromises balanced: limited herbicide use permitted, but insecticides and fungicides largely banned.**

ECONOMIC

7. **Direct payments and bonuses make sustainable practices financially attractive.**
8. **Flexibility in the standards applied to mixed farms means aids financial viability.**

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BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE POINTS SYSTEMS

Every IP-SUISSE farm has to meet specific criteria that promote biodiversity and address climate change. The biodiversity points system encourages practices that support beneficial insects and other wildlife. The current standards are higher than in organic agriculture (Bio-Suisse). This system has been influential in shaping the label's identity as a champion of biodiversity in agriculture.

The climate friendly points system does not currently have a minimum score to be certified, but encourages farms to adopt climate friendly practices in line with their capacity.

RESULTS AND ACHIEVEMENTS

- By growing Extenso and pesticide-free wheat, pesticide use was reduced by 1.5 to 2.5 treatments per hectare compared to conventional wheat production.
- Contributed significantly to the overall decline in pesticide dependency in Swiss agriculture.
- Major Swiss retailer Migros backed this transition by pledging to only sell bread made from pesticide-free wheat from 2023.
- Natural pest control in sugar beets, particularly aphid management, has become more commonplace, with pest predators supported.
- Leading Swiss catering company SV Group has pledged to source 65% of its products from IP-SUISSE farms.

TRANSFERABILITY

IP-SUISSE's success has garnered international interest across Europe, with a view to adopting a similar model. Successfully transferring the Swiss model may be dependent on:

- **A grassroots approach**: the founding members being farmers, and the organisation being developed for farmers.
- **Resistance to outside influence:** IP-SUISSE excludes agrochemical companies and politicians from its ranks.
- **Direct payments**: the Swiss model financially supports farmers with payments for their participation. Political and economic viability of this would be fundamental to similar schemes' success.
- **Close collaborations**: partnerships with retailers, consumers and other stakeholders are important to its work.

Sugar beet success!

Despite significant scepticism about the possibility of doing so, sugar beet was grown under IP-SUISSE using no pesticides by using new disease resistant varieties.

LESSONS LEARNED

- IP-SUISSE seeks to support local production of food with a lower environmental impact than conventional production.
- By balancing sustainability, price and profit, IP-SUISSE has created and adaptable model in the face of increasing pest challenges from climate change.
- By positioning itself as a pragmatic middle ground, IP-SUISSE has increased the appeal amongst a wide range of farmers.
- The environmental impacts of reducing pesticide use are complex. Crops imported under Bio-Suisse standards may have a higher carbon footprint than crops grown locally using minimal pesticides.

Changing farmer outlooks

Farmers certified by IP-SUISSE have come to take pride in adopting more sustainable practices, diverging from maximising yields through intensive farming. They recognise the value of supporting biodiversity and species richness in their fields.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Read more about IP-SUISSE here.

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