

NETHERLANDS

Improving competitiveness

Location

Castenray

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P2 – Competitiveness

Measure

M4 – Investments in physical assets

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 770 000

EAFRD 125 000

National/Regional 125 000

Private 520 000

Project duration

2018 – 2019

Project promoter

Kipster Venray BV

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www.kipster.farm

A company created a modular rearing system that allows them to combine egg and quality rooster meat production, while respecting the environment and animal welfare.

Summary

In the conventional egg laying poultry sector, young male chicks are disposed of by being gassed. However, the Dutch company Kipster wanted to set a different example where profitability can coincide with animal welfare and environmental protection.

Instead of disposing of the unwanted male chicks (roosters in the Netherlands), Kipster invested in a modular rearing system where hens and roosters are reared together for a period of 17 weeks. The rearing is carried out according to the specifications of the 'Beter Leven' quality mark, which is awarded on the basis of animal protection and welfare. After this period the roosters are slaughtered to produce high-quality meat. Besides setting up the new modular rearing system, the company is also developing a dedicated quality mark for rooster meat, which does not yet exist.



Results

Hens and roosters are reared in the Kipster barn according to the criteria of the 'Beter Leven' quality mark. The eggs can be sold for 23 EUR cents each, which is higher than the average price.

A contract has been signed with the supermarket chain Lidl to provide them with free range eggs produced by the hens over the next five years.

The new rearing system reduces the amount of livestock transportation. This is better for the environment and also for the welfare of the animals.

In 2019, the company will start a Kipster barn in Belgium.

Lessons & Recommendations

- Get started with people from different sectors. The trick is to look outside your own circle of fellow farmers. For example, I work together with marketer Olivier and sustainability expert Maurits, they both live in the city.
- Work closely with social organisations. They have ideas about what the world will look in 30/40 years. It is good to see which steps you can take now to realise that world view in 40 years. Collaborate instead of being opposed to each other.
- Immediately include the sales. I have involved supermarket Lidl in my plans.
- Choose an integrated approach. Try to contribute to all aspects of world issues, not just to particulate matter, or only animal-friendly.

Context

An issue of critical importance for the whole of society, is how to feed the growing world population in a fair and sustainable way without overexploiting nature, excluding people and torturing animals. Kipster contributes to finding a solution to this challenge, by producing the most animal, people and environmentally-friendly eggs in the Netherlands. The company sets an example of how animal welfare can be combined with environmentally-friendly practices and financial profitability. In order to achieve this, their production process incorporates elements like closed-loop agriculture, ensuring minimum emission of fine particles, producing eggs that are carbon neutral, blending the farm into the landscape, connecting farmers and consumers, among others.

In 2016, the company received RDP support for the development of protein from grass for chickenfeed. In 2018, additional RDP support was used to invest in a modular rearing system, which would allow them to raise roosters for meat production alongside raising their own laying hens.

Until that point, Kipster had been sourcing their laying hens from a rearing company which, in turn, bought its chicks from a hatchery. In conventional laying poultry factories, roosters are gassed in order to be disposed of, but Kipster decided to go against convention by rearing roosters for meat. Kipster wanted the whole production chain to be as sustainable and animal-friendly as possible, but the hatchery and the rearing company that they had been using did not meet welfare certification standards. Therefore, the company decided to invest in a system to rear roosters and hens together, within the Kipster barn. By integrating the rearing system into the barn, quality rooster meat could be produced alongside the equally high-welfare rearing of laying hens.

At present, although Kipster meets the requirements of the 'Beter Leven' three star quality mark (which concerns animal protection and welfare), there is no specific quality mark for rooster meat production. This limits the profitability of the endeavour, so Kipster has been working closely with the Dutch organisation for the prevention of cruelty to animals (Dierenbescherming) to develop a dedicated quality mark for rooster meat production.

Objectives

The aim of this project is to develop a modular rearing system that will allow hens and roosters to be reared together: combining animal protection and welfare principles with economic profitability.



Activities

Kipster opened its first innovative chicken farm near the Dutch village Venray in October 2017 and 24 000 laying hens were moved into the newly built barn. The barn was designed according to the latest techniques related to environmental protection and animal welfare. Dierenbescherming was involved in the construction of the new barn and for this reason, Kipster was awarded the three stars of the 'Beter Leven' Quality Mark. In addition, Kipster's integral approach to making its production processes more sustainable resulted in them receiving the 'Milieukeur' award from Stichting Milieukeur (SMK) - a Dutch foundation promoting the protection of the environment.

In 2018, Kipster applied for RDP support to develop its modular rearing system. The project is organised in three phases: implementation, monitoring and optimisation.

Phase one - Implementation

Step one: Construction and fitting of the modular rearing system (01-09-2018 to 30-04-2019), making optimum use of the existing barn facilities (e.g. sliding walls for light/air intake, existing heating and light systems, etc). The final installation of the modular rearing system in the barn began in January/February 2019. Then the barn was emptied as the first lot of laying hens, which have been in production since October 2017, and they were taken to the slaughterhouse.

Step two: Start rearing laying hens and roosters (01-01-2019 to 30-06-2019) as the new laying hens and roosters enter the Kipster barn.

Phase two - Monitoring

Step three: Monitoring of the laying hens and roosters (01-01-2019 to 31-10-2019) to see how the modular system works. In the first 17 weeks, the monitoring process will focus on the growth of the hens and roosters and on how the animals behave in the facility. After 17 weeks, the roosters will be taken to the slaughterhouse. The weight of the meat produced, its quality, the percentage of non commercial produce, etc. will all be recorded. At that time, the hens will start laying eggs. The egg production and percentage of rejected eggs will also be monitored and recorded.

Step four: Documenting the knowledge and data collected (01-01-2019 to 31-10-2019). The combined information will be used for the optimisation and standardisation of the Kipster system, for future use by other poultry farms in the Netherlands and abroad.

Phase three - Optimisation

Step five: Applying the knowledge and experience gained (01-11-2019 to 31-12-2019). The improvements identified during step three will be introduced into the modular rearing system for its optimisation.

Step six: Reporting and publication of project results (01-11-2019 to 31-12-2019). After the project has been completed, a report will be prepared and the results will be published.

Main Results

Economic benefits:

- Hens and roosters are reared according to the criteria of the three stars quality mark. The eggs can be sold for 23 cents each, which is higher than the average price.
- A contract has been signed with the supermarket chain Lidl to provide them with the eggs produced by the hens over the next five years.
- A dedicated quality mark for rooster meat production is being developed in consultation with the Dutch organisation for the prevention of cruelty to animals (Dierenbescherming). Upon completion, Kipster will be able to charge a higher price for their rooster meat.

Environmental/Climate action benefits:

- The company applies closed-loop agriculture practices, ensures minimum emissions of fine particles, produces carbon neutral eggs, etc.
- With the new rearing system, the transportation of chicks from the hatchery to the rearing pen and then of hens from the rearing pen to Kipster - a process that causes a lot of stress to the animals and the unnecessary emission of greenhouse gases - will be entirely avoided.

Social benefits:

The current Kipster barn is fully accessible to the public. It has a room to accommodate visitors and an education and information centre. This allows visitors to see the hatching and rearing of roosters and hens. In this way consumers can be better informed about the entire laying poultry and egg production chain.

Networking value:

The project can be regarded as a good example of networking. The promoters worked on the development of the concept for more than four years using the report 'Houden van Hennen' (Poultry farming') by Wageningen University. They also involved the Dierenbescherming (Dutch Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals), Milieudefensie (a Dutch environmental organisation), Urgenda (a sustainability organisation) and numerous other specialists in the design process. Kipster also collaborates with the Dutch branch of Lidl.

Transferability:

In the future, other poultry farms can apply the Kipster concept in the Netherlands and abroad. In 2019, the company will start a Kipster barn in Belgium.

Synergies with other EU policies:

The Kipster concept contributes to other EU policy areas by responding to environmental and climate action related objectives, in addition to contributing new thinking around food production sustainability.

“Choose an integral approach. Try to contribute to all aspects of world issues and work together with people outside your own circle of fellow farmers.”

Ruud Zanders, cofounder of Kipster and number two in the sustainable top 100 of the daily newspaper Trouw.

Additional sources of information

www.kipster.farm/blog/the-guardian-about-our-carbon-neutral-eggs

www.kipster.nl/blog/food-inspiration-over-het-hele-eieren-eten

www.kipster.nl/blog/exclusief-te-koop-bij-lidl

*This project has been categorised under 'Improving Competitiveness' by the nominating National Rural Network