BEING A FARMER AND PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

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A Greener Agriculture for a Bluer Baltic Sea conference
Bella Center, Copenhagen, Denmark 24-25 October 2012
VAPOLA FAMILY FARM

• The Vapola farm is mentioned already in the 16th century

• Katariina’s family has farmed the place since 1850

• Succession in 2003 when Katariina and Jyrki bought the farm and changed the production type from pork to cattle production

• Aberdeen Angus-breeding cattle and nowadays also Rygja-ewes

• Both the fields and the cattle are organic

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LOCATION OF VAPOLA FARM

- The farm is located in the town of Uusikaupunki in South West Finland

- The main house is 15 km from the Baltic Sea shore, by the lake Häähäjärvi catchment area

- Some of the fields are by the lake Kaitajärvi
THE FARM IN FOCUS

• Fields 125 hectares, of which 55 hectares are own

• Coastal meadows and secondary areas for grazing about 135 hectares at the moment, of which 12 are own

• Fields and meadows are in more than 100 administratively blocks

• Forests 100 ha
CATTLE

100 Aberdeen Angus suckler cows

• Calving time from the end of February to the end of April

• All cows and calves are grazing together

• After weaning all the heafer calves are grown up on the farm but most of the bull calves are raised elsewhere

• Breeding cattle

• Sale of live animals

• Direct sale of organic meet on the farm
ANIMALS

25 Rygia-ewes

• A little flock of sheep (again)

• All the ewes are going to have a landskaping task in Vekara island

• Direct sale of wool and meat on the farm

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LANSCAPING AND BIODIVERSITY

- Most of the animals graze secondary areas like coastal meadows and traditional biotopes
- Most of those secondary areas are in Natura 2000 areas
- Cows and their calves keep the landscape and the land near water open
- Grazing those areas promotes biodiversity
- Welfare of the animals must be taken into account all the time

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PRODUCTION ENVIRONMENT

• Welfare of the animals

• Two new loose cow shelters built for cows

• Concrete base in every shelter and large exercising yards with drainage behind both new shelters

• Renovated shelter for young cattle with a compact concrete exercising yard

• A compact exercising yard for sheep with asphalt base

• All animals are grazing in summer except bulls for the meat production in the end of breeding
STORAGE AND PROCESSING MANURE

• Bedding materials for cattle: straw, peat and wood chips

• Manure and urine are absorbed to the bedding materials

• Dry manure is stored in covered manure storages with water-tight concrete base and walls

• Composted manure is spread to the fields during the growing season using a precision spreader
STORAGE AND PROCESSING MANURE

• Before manure was spread to fields direct from manure storage → because of the large amount of bedding materials dry manure was not always composted enough

• Purchase of composting turner to the farm → also other nutrient components like wood chips from exercising yards, slurry from wetland and sedimentation basins and contaminated bales together with leaves from the garden → a very good soil improvement agent → does not consume soil nitrogen

• At the moment there is under construction a water tight composting area with a basin for the nutrient drainage water
FIELDS AND FEED PRODUCTION

• Organic
  - No other fertilizers used than dry manure from own cattle
  - no pesticides in use
  - the growth is in good condition

• Wintertime green cover in more than 90% of fields

• The grassland renewed by direct sowing
  → reduces need of ploughing
  → reduces nutrient runoff
  → perennial grassland cultivation sequesters carbon from the atmosphere

• Pre-dried silage without preservatives
  → less effluents
  → baled to round bales, plastic is not good but preserves the silage well
WATER CONSERVATION MEASURES

• Sedimentation basins for the exercising yard - recovers the nutrients

• Multifunctional wetland - recovers the nutrient runoff from the grassland and pastures around the farm and helps to recycle nutrients
  - Monitoring of the quality of water both in sedimentation basin and wetland by TEHO project during the years 2008 - 2010

• Special measures from the agri-environmental scheme such as nutrient balances and extensive grassland production
WHAT IS IT LIKE IN FUTURE?

Shared responsibility

• Nutrients from agriculture are part of the environmental impacts of food production

• Everyone eats, so we all are responsible for the impacts

• Farmers’ task is to put the conservation measures into practice
  → water conservation
  → climate change mitigation
  → growth
  → biodiversity
  → landscaping
  → welfare of animals
WHAT IS IT LIKE IN FUTURE?

Our hopes for the future:

• political steering should support more environmentally friendly and varied production

• simpler rules for the coming agri-environmental scheme

• more effective measures via variety of selection

• more support for for the research and development of organic farming

• support also for the least favorable areas

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WHAT IS IT LIKE IN FUTURE?

The most effective way to farm is to hold everything in balance!

→ nutrient flows
→ animal numbers - field area
→ food production - environmental care

but also

→ farmers' work load - farmers' payments

THANK YOU!