

The Ochsenkühn Farm

- circular economy with free-range livestock



Photo: Ochsenkühn



Name	Ochsenkühn farm
Country	Germany
Biogeographical Region	Continental
Region	Bavaria
Type of farm	Grassland farm with grazing cattle and livery horses, family business,
Best practice	Extensive management of biodiversity-rich grasslands with cattle and horses, including direct marketing of cattle beef
Landscape/ Ecosystem type /protected area	The farm lies in a landscape protection area Natura 2000 protected areas: type 6510 (species-rich lowland hay meadows). A wet meadow, rich in sedges and rushes, is preserved as part of a field.
Duration	Since 2012
Size / Scope	34ha
Agricultural Use	24 ha grassland, 10 ha arable land, + 7 ha forest 41 grazing cattle, 17 livery horses Conventional farm, managed organically



Measures addressing water & soil	- Rotational grazing protects the soil - no chemical-synthetical fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides protect the water quality - Conversion from liquid manure as fertilizer to solid manure throughout the entire farm - Erosion control strips and biodiversity strips have been created on two arable areas.
Measures addressing biodiversity and climate	- Biodiversity: Insect-friendly mowing, heterogeneous management of the grassland parcels (e.g., late cutting), planting hedges (without funding). - Climate: circular economy (cattle), extensively managed grasslands function as natural carbon sinks, PV systems on roof surfaces, heat generation from wood chips
Involved Stakeholders/Partners	- Direct contact with clients and horse owners - Collaboration with Landcare Association "Neumarkt i.d. OPf. e.V."
Funding/Financing	- CAP: direct payments for conventional farming (no certified organic farm) - Bavarian "contractual nature conservation programme" - Direct marketing of the produced beef
Tip/suggestion from the farmer	The transformation of arable land to grassland cut the costs for machinery and management of arable land and made the farm more profitable. Customers appreciate quality beef and species-rich meadows.
Role of Landcare Associations (LCA)	The LCA "Neumarkt i.d. OPf." Has collaborated with the family since 2012, advising on funding for nature conservation measures and supporting knowledge exchange, public relations, and educational activities.
Transferability	Can be transferred to other farms when farmers are open to having guests (horse owners & customers) on the farm regularly, on-farm slaughter, and direct marketing.
Further information	www.hof-ochsenkuehn.de (German)

"The natural and cultural landscape that surrounds us shapes our thoughts and feelings, and we believe that a diverse environment also generates diversity in our thinking and actions. And we want to be a part of this."

The Ochsenkühn Farm

The Ochsenkühn farm

With only 35 ha of mainly grassland areas, the Ochsenkühn farm is rather small for Germany. And many farms with these framework conditions struggle for survival. But the Ochsenkühn farm is economically viable, and the family could even transition the farm business from part-time to full-time. How is that possible?



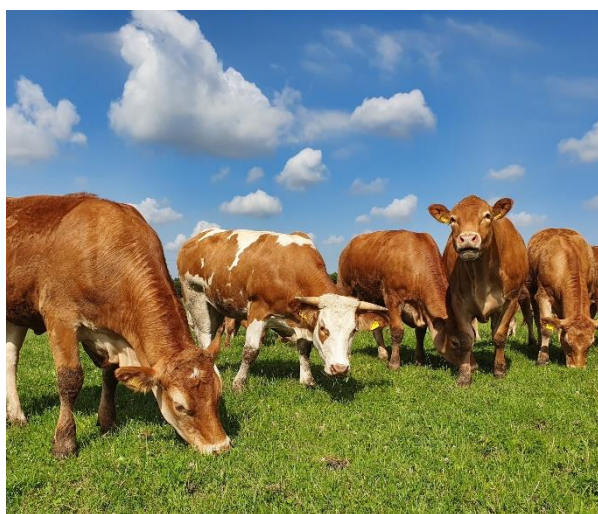
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"Everything started in 2012 when we first had contact with the regional Landcare Association 'Neumarkt i.d. OPf.,'" explains farmer Matthias Ochsenkühn. The initial contact was made through an agroecology consultation as part of the biotope network project "Juradistl – ecological diversity in the Upper Palatinate Jura". The farmers have been participating in measures of the Bavarian nature conservation programme "Vertragsnaturschutzprogramm" (VNP) since then and improved water retention, soil quality, and biodiversity on the farm. "The higher biodiversity on our farm also improved our image. We could attract new customers, and as a result we could transition the farm from a part-time to a full-time farming business," adds his wife, Daniela. Today they successfully market their cattle via the regional brand "Juradistl pasture-raised beef" (Juradistl-Weiderind). The 'Juradistl' brand scheme is a marketing system monitored by a state-recognised independent institute, under which participating farms must meet not only requirements relating to regional origin, animal-friendly husbandry conditions, general hygiene, and sensory quality standards, but also biodiversity criteria. Additionally, they have 17 livery horses on the farm. All animals are exclusively fed with grass and hay produced on the farm. The leaves of the herbs contain protein and minerals, the seeds starch. The qualitatively good hay, rich in herbs, is fed to the cattle, while the late-mowing hay can be fed to the horses. The third cut is often left on the meadow to rot and improve the soil.

The focus of the farm's marketing strategy is the direct marketing of beef. The 15 cattle per year are slaughtered in a humane manner, without previous stressful transport in the farm's own slaughterhouse and cutting room. Animal-friendly husbandry with pasture grazing and the avoidance of transport and stress-free slaughter result in high-quality meat. And the customers appreciate it.

Improving water retention and soil quality

The way the Ochsenkühn farm their land has positive effects on soil quality and water retention. On the grassland, they apply rotational grazing. The key idea is that the animals graze one area for a short time, then move to another pasture so the plants and soil can recover. When grass plants get recovery time, they grow deeper and denser roots, which add organic matter to the soil, feed soil microbes, and create channels that let water soak in. Healthy roots also reduce erosion. If animals stay too long on one pasture, their hooves compact the soil. With rotational systems, the grazing pressure is temporary, and soil biology can recover. Rotational grazing leads to cooler and moister soil in the summer as the dense pasture shades the soil, leading to less evaporation and cooler surface temperatures.



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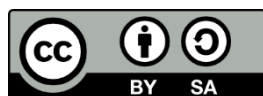
On the remaining 10 ha of arable land, the farmers try to keep the soil covered as much as possible. They farm the land with crops like ryegrass, clover, and legumes. Furthermore, they created erosion control strips and biodiversity strips on the fields with arable land. Additionally, the Ochsenkühn planted two hedges, which do not only promote biodiversity through the provision of food and shelter. They also avoid water and wind erosion and contribute to building humus through and improving the water infiltration capacity.

Biodiversity creates economic profitability

"Our experience in cooperative nature conservation has been excellent. Thanks to the "Juradistl" project run by the Neumarkt i.d.OPf. e.V. Landcare Association, we were able to optimise direct payments for nature conservation services on our farm through extensive management. The extensive use of land via the VNP funding programme can be easily integrated into the overall operating system," says Matthias Ochsenkühn. Programs include, for instance late mowing, the switch from liquid manure as fertilizer to solid manure, and insect-friendly mowing with a double-blade mower. The Ochsenkühn's use measures of the Bavarian contractual nature conservation programme (VNP) on 80% of their grasslands. And the results show. "Currently we have around 20 different herbs growing on our grassland areas, including Ragged Robin (*Silene flos-cuculi*), Common Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), Brown Knapweed (*Centaurea jacea*), Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*), Meadow Saxifrage (*Saxifraga granulata*) and Spreading Bellflower (*Campanula patula*)", says Matthias Ochsenkühn. All species-rich grassland areas also serve as stepping-stone biotopes to support the biotope network. They are located just 1 to 4 kilometres away from the "Nürnberger Reichswald" Natura 2000 bird sanctuary and the "Moosgraben und Dennenloher Weiher" flora-fauna habitat area. With its extensive areas, the farm makes an important contribution to the biotope network targeted in the Bavarian Nature Network project "Juradistl".

For their commitment, the Ochsenkühn farm won the prize "Nature Conservation Partner Farmer 2025" from the Bavarian Academy for Nature Conservation and Landscape Management. The future of the species-rich meadows is secured. When the two Ochsenkühn daughters were asked if they could imagine running the farm one day, they answered with a confident "Yes!".

Author: Corinna Friedrich, Deutscher Verband für Landschaftspflege (DVL), 16.03.26



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