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In Europe **we care for Beef:** **Sustainable, high-quality beef** **produced in Italy**

IN EUROPE WE CARE FOR BEEF is a two-year project (2024-2025) sponsored by **AOP Italia Zootecnica** and co-funded by the European Commission that aims to raise consumer awareness about the excellence of beef produced by Italian farmers to high standards of quality and sustainability, regulated by the **Italian National Zootechnics Quality System (SQNZ)**, in order to encourage more informed consumption.

The beef production chain has long been seeking concrete solutions to the ethical and environmental issues associated with all types of livestock farming, and with the new guidelines on *Standards for Sustainable Meat Production* (Sustainable Husbandry), approved by the European Commission, the sector has chosen to prioritise sustainability, in terms of both improved animal welfare and action to reduce environmental impact.

The **Sigillo Italiano Consortium** was established to allow consumers to identify **safe, high-quality beef**. This solid and influential association of market leaders has launched an umbrella brand, designed specifically by Italian farmers. Endorsed by the **Ministry of Agriculture, Food Sovereignty and Forests**, the Consortium's main purpose is to promote and publicise meat produced under the SQNZ, telling the world about its excellent quality and safety. Products of farms that adhere to SQNZ are guaranteed by statutory guidelines that certify the quality of husbandry and ensure transparent and safe **production traceability**.

Currently 700,034 beef cattle are raised in line with the National Zootechnics Quality System (2023 figure from the national database), 49.7% of total production (1,407, 034).

The **IN EUROPE WE CARE FOR BEEF** project aims in particular to promote and valorise **grain-fed steers** and **heifers and Fassone Piemontese**, whose meat is delicious, tender and succulent. Italian farmers are actually considered some of the best in Europe and the world for their protected husbandry of beef cattle. This is thanks to a high-quality 100% plant-based diet designed to meet the nutritional needs of the animals, which are raised in comfortable, functional environments with no sources of stress, to maximise welfare.



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The project's short-term goals include the promotion of high-quality beef combined with informed consumption and increased recognition of the **Sigillo Italiano** brand, achieved through initiatives such as participation in sector trade shows as well as events targeting consumers directly, like special menus in restaurants and tastings at selected sales outlets.

IN EUROPE WE CARE FOR BEEF is an essential way of raising consumer awareness of the excellence of beef produced according to the high standards of the National Zootechnics Quality System. By means of promotion campaigns implemented by the Sigillo Italiano Consortium, the project aims to educate consumers in **more sustainable and informed consumption**, prioritising quality, traceability and the particular features of Italian production. Thanks to this programme, Italian and French consumers and stakeholders have the opportunity to appreciate and recognise the superiority of Italian-produced beef, thus contributing to an increasingly ethical and environment-friendly production chain.

SUSTAINABILITY AND ANIMAL WELFARE: THE VIRTUOUS DIRECTION OF ZOOTECHNICS

Animal welfare is closely connected to food safety for consumers.

Animals raised without stress in a controlled environment, with high-quality feed and clean drinking water, free from parasites and with careful use of drugs are the best guarantee for the safety and quality of the product.

In terms of legislation, the push for high-quality husbandry began with the creation by the Ministry of Agriculture of the National Zootechnics Quality System, which contains guidelines for feeding methods, stabling conditions and the use of antimicrobials.

According to the guidelines approved by the SQNZ, cattle should be fed on a diet of high-quality, certified cereals and plant products. They should be housed in such a way as to allow natural movement and behaviour. Premises must be protected against parasites and bad weather, and constantly regulated in terms of temperature, humidity and air circulation, with the removal of gas and dust. They must also be inspected by qualified vets who can intervene promptly to prevent the animals becoming sick, reducing the use of drugs to when they are really necessary.



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To incentivise the transition of the entire sector towards a sustainable food system, a working group of farmers from AOP Italia Zootechnica drafted the Zootechnical Standards for Sustainable Meat Production (Sustainable Husbandry) which, following approval by the European Commission, in September 2023 were passed to the Ministry of Agriculture for inclusion in the National Quality System.

Unique in Italy and Europe, the Sustainable Husbandry guidelines are in line with the Farm to Fork strategy at the heart of the European Green Deal. The use of these virtuous standards by farmers is a crucial step in the zootechnics supply chain towards reducing environmental impact through the adoption of good practices such as monitoring water consumption, the use of energy from renewable sources and the use of manure as a natural crop fertiliser.

A DIET THAT MEETS ALL NUTRITIONAL NEEDS

Superior quality meat can only be produced through specific feeding regimes that take into account the animals' nutritional needs at the various stages of development.

Animals raised in accordance with the MASAF and EC guidelines that regulate the SQNZ benefit from a diet based mainly on cereals. Feed must be free from added animal fats and consist solely of plant products like cereals, legumes, oily seeds and fodder.

The provenance of the feed should be identifiable through the purchase documentation, while in self-produced feed, traceability is ensured by the seed purchase paperwork.

A TRANSPARENT SUPPLY CHAIN FOR A SAFE, TRACEABLE PRODUCT

The umbrella brand of the Sigillo Italiano Consortium was created to guide consumers towards informed choices in their food shop. In particular, the label displaying the Consortium's logo seeks to guarantee the history and the journey of the product, because it can only be used by farmers who follow SQNZ-approved production methods. Farmers who adhere to the guidelines not only have to comply with strict rules for fattening and finishing, but must also guarantee traceability throughout the supply chain, from origin to sale. Every stage of the journey is carefully checked by sector professionals and accredited inspectors, thus ensuring the product is safe and healthy, as it meets the requisites established by the SQNZ.



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HOW TO RECOGNISE HIGH-QUALITY MEAT: NUTRITIONAL PROPERTIES AND FLAVOUR PROFILE

An essential part of the Mediterranean diet, meat has the important role of providing the body with high-class protein, iron, zinc, vitamin B12, phosphorus and calcium. As part of a balanced and varied diet, it is recommended twice a week, prioritising certified, high-quality and little-processed meat.

Specifically, beef from steers and heifers, with its bright red colour, intense flavour and juicy tenderness, is highly desirable. Lean and easy to digest, it does not require elaborate preparation: grilling or barbecuing with a drizzle of extra-virgin olive oil and a pinch of salt will bring out all the natural flavour. Meat from the Piedmontese Fassone breed is characterised by low levels of connective tissue in the muscles, which makes it particularly tender. Furthermore, the small amount of fat is of very high quality, and can help regulate cholesterol.

Flavourful, light and versatile in the kitchen, Piedmontese Fassona beef is perfect for numerous recipes, but is best enjoyed raw.



A.O.P. ITALIA ZOOTEKNICA

The ITALIA ZOOTEKNICA association of producer organisations (AOP), recognised by the Ministry of Agriculture in 2019, brings together 90% of Italian producers' organisations (POs), and represents over 72% of the country's beef production.

Its role is coordinate the activities of the member POs, and offer services to improve quality and facilitate certification. The AOP represents the interests of its members in national and European institutions. It supports its members' commercial activities and conducts research to this end. The association takes part in studies on sustainable production methods, and facilitates training and innovation in animal husbandry, encouraging the adoption of standards to ensure quality, certification and promotion.