



Slow Food Foundation
for Biodiversity

Slow Food Guidelines for the Selection of Italian Producers of Cow's Milk for Drinking

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Slow Food intends to use these guidelines to promote milk for drinking from cows fed on mixed forage (obtained from meadows and fields with a high level of biodiversity). A diet that includes a minimum 70% (of the dry matter) of fresh and dried forage in the daily feed ration makes it possible to obtain a milk with a ratio between polyunsaturated fatty acids from the omega-6 and the omega-3 series (n-6 PUFA/n-3 PUFA) of less than 4, which brings nutritional and health benefits (1:1 – 4:1).*

The kind of milk Slow Food wants to promote is the result of the right kind of diet for the cows, but also a farming system that respects the animals' physiology and welfare.

Its characteristics are set out in the following guidelines.

Producers

Producers can be individuals or joined together in groups (for example in small cooperatives, as long as the same guarantees requested from individual producers are provided).

Producers do not include packagers or processors of milk acquired from third parties, even if it comes from farms that meet the requirements of these guidelines.

Additionally, producers that have different production lines for milk within the same farm, including some lines that do not meet the requirements of these guidelines, cannot be included.

The milk can be produced anywhere within Italy, with the exception of areas at risk of environmental contamination which could affect the product's safety. The farm, pastures and forage areas must be at least 1,000 meters from motorways and not fall within a 5,000-meter radius of municipal dumps and landfill sites or within a 15,000-meter radius of district-wide dumps and landfill sites and waste-to-energy plants.

Livestock

The maximum number of animals annually in lactation must be equal to 50/60.

The density of the farm's lactating animals must be less than 2 LU per hectare per year. The size and management of sheds and other farm spaces must be in line with Slow Food's animal welfare specifications.

In particular:

- The farm must guarantee pasturing for the entire growing season (excluding the period necessary for the formation of grass cover, around three weeks), whenever weather conditions allow it.
- When they are in the sheds, animals must not be kept fixed in one position continuously, but must be free to move around for the majority of the time indoors. The shed must be clean, illuminated with sufficient natural light and well ventilated. It is good practice to paint the shed at least once a year.
- All of the indoor spaces must respect the current legal requirements. The rest areas must have clean litter available and the animals must not have to compete for access. There must be 60-70 cm at the feeding trough for each animal, and each animal must have at least one cubicle available to them.
- The animals must be free to exercise their species-specific behavior, without obvious behavioral anomalies. They must not have problems such as limps, lesions, alopecia and swelling.

*Simopoulos A.P. (2011). Importance of the omega-6/omega-3 balance in health and disease: evolutionary aspects of diet. In: Simopoulos A.P. (Ed.), "Healthy Agriculture, Healthy Nutrition, Healthy People". Karger, Washington, D.C., pp. 10-21.

- Reproduction should ideally be natural. If artificial, embryo transplantation is not allowed. The calves should ideally stay with the mother. If they are taken away from the mother after birth, during the first ten days of life it is necessary to ensure the separate milking of cows that have given birth, so that the colostrum/milk can be given to the calf.
- A career of at least four lactations must be guaranteed for at least 80% of the cows in lactation on the farm.
- Mutilations must be avoided, including dehorning (except when necessary for clearly justified veterinary reasons).
- Therapeutic interventions should ideally use plant-based and homeopathic products. The use of hormones, coccidiostats and other artificial stimulants is not allowed. The withdrawal period from medicines must be double what is established for the prescribed drug or, if not specified, at least 48 hours. If a pharmacological treatment is essential, before returning to production the animal must be given an analysis that shows the absence of drug residues. This analysis should also be carried out if the drug does not have a specified withdrawal period.

Diet

Of the cattle's diet, 70% of the dry matter of the daily ration must be made up of fresh or dry forage. The remaining 30% can be supplementary simple foods. During the grazing season, the feed ration must include at least 50% fresh grass. The limit of 30% for supplementary feed remains. The production of hay and forage and grazing must take place on mixed meadows and pastures (with at least five different species of legumes and grasses, of which the least abundant must count for at least 10% of the total dried plant mass produced). Hay can be produced on the farm or bought in, ideally from local farms. The artificial drying of forage is allowed.

Mixed meadows can be fertilized with mature manure (8-12 months), mature slurry and compost from the farm's green waste. Grazing or mowing must not be carried out for at least 45 days after organic fertilizer application. Weedkilling is not allowed.

Hay and forage can only be supplemented with a mix of simple foods. These must ideally be self-produced, and where this is not possible they must be sourced from Italian producers.

The following are allowed: corn/maize, barley, fava/broad beans, dried peas, triticale, bran, wheatgerm, wheat, oats, rye, field peas, forage rye, sunflower seeds and dried beet pulp.

Anything else is not allowed, including: urea, all silage (whether corn or hay), industrial processing scraps and feed of animal origin, as well as all products banned by law. Simple foods and compound feed that include any amount of genetically modified organisms are not allowed. GMO-based feed and all banned types of feed cannot be used on the farm, even for other uses.

No type of additive is allowed.

The components for the animals' feed (whether produced on the farm or bought locally) must be cultivated according to the technical standards for integrated production, at the least. The mycorrhization of the crops is recommended.

Production and milking

The yield of a cow in these farming conditions should be no more than 6,000 liters (farm average) per lactation cycle.

Lactation should last no more than 305 days. There must be a gap of at least 60 days between a birth and the next fertilization.

If the milk is not packaged on the farm, packaging must take place no more than 50 kilometers from the farm.

The milk can be sold raw, directly by the farm (through automatic distributors or bottled), and/or pasteurized and packaged for sale as fresh milk. The drinking milk can come from no more than two consecutive milkings.

The addition of any substances (such as vitamins or fatty acids) is not allowed.

No treatment of the milk is allowed other than pasteurization.

Labeling

The product must be labeled according to the legal requirements, and must also have a narrative label (example attached).

The label must advertise if the milk is produced in the mountains (pastures at altitudes above 600 meters) or using native livestock breeds.

The label should highlight any certifications relating to environmental sustainability, such as organic, biodynamic or linked to protected areas.

The producer will self-certify that they are following these guidelines, and must be open to any checks carried out by Slow Food.

Analytical parameters for reference

- Raw milk: Somatic cell count of at least < 300,000 cells/ml. The value is calculated as a geometric mean of monthly analyses (one analysis a month for a period of three months).
- Pasteurized milk: whey protein content greater than 16%.

For anything else not specified by these guidelines, reference should be made to the current legal regulations.



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