September 2026

agroscope

Agroscope good food, healthy environment

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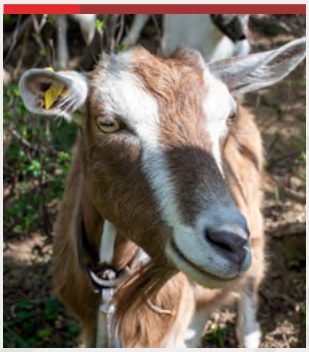


Agroscope conducts economic viability analyses. Using goat farming as an example, experts were able to demonstrate that it only becomes economically worthwhile from an annual production of 100 tonnes of milk onwards, which corresponds to approximately 120 to 180 goats, depending on their productivity (cf. article on topic, pp 22–23).
Photo shows a goat on the Jenins Alp (Canton of Graubünden)

Dear readers,

The digitalisation of production is an key factor for the future, in terms of creating a cost-effective, environmentally friendly, socially conscious and resilient agricultural sector. Digital technologies open up new possibilities: more-precise management, more-efficient deployment of resources, better-informed decisions. At the same time, they create new challenges for practice, extension and research.

In this issue, the article 'The Digital Transformation of the Swiss Agri-food Sector' will let you in on how digitalisation has developed in Switzerland from 2018 to the present. In addition, we highlight measures that are necessary for the further successful transformation of the sector.

Digital systems also help reduce plant-protection product use. Our article 'Reducing Plant-Protection Products thanks to Precision Farming' presents the key results of a longstanding trial in which digital systems enabled plant-protection products to be applied at the right time, in the right amounts and in the right place.

Life-cycle assessments are another topic covered in the article 'Reference Values for the Environmental Impacts of Eight Swiss Foods at a Glance'. These data clearly show whether a product lies above or below the Swiss average – and where improvements are possible.

Of course we also still do research on conventional topics, delving into economic issues in milk production, for example. In the article on page 22 – 'How Profitable is Swiss Goat Milk Production?', however, cows are for once not the centre of attention. That said, with the 'Site-adapted Pasture Management' project at the Experimental Station for Alpine and Mountain Farming, the focus is once again on cattle and sheep for curbing scrub encroachment.

We're also pleased to give you an update on our site strategy, which despite tough cost cuts has reached an important milestone – moving into the new laboratory building in Posieux. Read more about it on page 24.

Wishing you a stimulating read,
Nadja El Benni

Head of the 'Sustainability Assessment and Agricultural Management' Research Division

Other topics

Controlling Dwarf Shrubs through Targeted Grazing

Reference Values for the Environmental Impacts of Eight Swiss Foods at a Glance

How Profitable is Swiss Goat Milk Production?

Agroscope is the Swiss Centre of Excellence for Agricultural Research, and is affiliated with the Federal Office for Agriculture (FOAG). Agroscope makes an important contribution to a sustainable agriculture and food sector as well as to an intact environment, thereby contributing to an improved quality of life.

Events

3 – 4 November 2026
Joint Conference of ALB-CH, AGRIDEA, Agroscope and suissemelio, at Strickhof in Lindau

Rural Construction Training Course for Specialists in Construction

17 November 2026
Agroscope Reckenholz

49th Agroscope Agricultural Economics Conference

24 November 2026
Agroscope Tänikon; organized by OST, Agroscope, BBZ Arenenberg, Swiss Future Farm

7th Food Sector Innovation Forum

21 January 2027
Agroscope Reckenholz and online

14th Agroscope Sustainability Conference

27 January 2027
Agroscope, Swiss National Stud SNS

Equine Research Conference Switzerland, 2027

28 January 2027
Agroscope Posieux

Liebefeld Milk Conference

All Agroscope events that are open to the public are advertised on our website.

Controlling Dwarf Shrubs through Targeted Grazing

Increasing encroachment by dwarf shrubs is a growing problem in alpine and sub-alpine zones of the Swiss Alps. A joint project of Agroscope's Experimental Station for Alpine and Mountain Farming, AgroVet Strickhof and ETH Zurich investigates how this shrub encroachment can be controlled by targeted grazing.

Massimiliano Probo

Dwarf-shrub encroachment (dark areas on the photo) reduces biodiversity as well as the quantity and quality of forage.

Species such as alpenrose, blueberry, juniper and heather are particularly prone to spreading in areas with poor accessibility, leading to a decline in biodiversity, the quantity and quality of forage, and landscape value.

Optimal animal stocking rate to curb shrub encroachment

The aim of the project is to determine the optimal animal stocking rate for stabilising or reducing shrub cover. Researchers are studying how different grazing intensities and durations affect vegetation composition, species diversity and nutritive value. The experiment will be conducted from June 2026 to August 2028 on Alp Weissenstein at the Albula Pass (Canton of Graubünden, around 2000 m.a.s.l.). The data survey will take place each year during the growing period from June to August. Cattle (1-to-2-year old heifers; Holstein Friesian and Braunvieh breeds) and sheep (ewes with lambs; Swiss Black-Brown Mountain Sheep breed) grazing on a total of 16 enclosures will be used in the experiment.

A lever for site-adapted grazing management

The experiment focuses on three control variables in grazing management: animal species (cattle vs. sheep), grazing duration (4 vs. 8 days) and forage availability (depending on the size of the enclosure). Each enclosure offers a mixture of open grassland and bush-encroached land. Forage supply is varied across four levels: (1) 20 % more grass forage than necessary is available (slight underuse); (2) exactly as much grass forage as necessary is available; and (3) and (4) 20 % and 40 % less grass forage than necessary, respectively, is available, so that the animals must bridge the gap by foraging on dwarf shrubs. In addition, a nighttime enclosure is installed in every cattle and sheep enclosure in heavily shrub-encroached areas. This not only guarantees protection of the herd, but also achieves an even higher trampling and grazing pressure.

The project involves the use of sheep and heifers (young cattle).

The combination of different grazing durations, grazing intensities and grazing animals enables a systematic comparison of the impact on the dwarf bushes. In addition to vegetation analyses (species composition, percentage of dwarf bushes, forage quality), animal data such as weight and movement patterns are collected. The extent to which the animals contribute to plant dispersal, e. g. through seeds in their pelt or dung, is also investigated. The findings will form the scientific basis for site-adapted grazing management to control dwarf bushes.

Conclusions

- Increasing dwarf-shrub encroachment reduces the biodiversity, forage quality and landscape value of alpine pastures.
- The main aim of this study is to determine the optimal stocking rate for stabilising, or even reducing, dwarf-bush encroachment.
- The findings will provide a scientific basis for developing site-adapted grazing management strategies to promote the sustainable reduction of dwarf bushes.

Experimental Station for Alpine and Mountain Farming

Experimental Stations – Research with Practitioners

Insect Diversity in a Changing Switzerland: Differences between Species Groups

How has the world of insects in Switzerland changed in the last 90 years? For the first time, a new study gives comprehensive answers to this question – and paints a mixed picture.

Felix Neff and Eva Knop

Researchers from Agroscope, the Swiss Federal Research Institute for Forest, Snow and Landscape WSL, info fauna, the University of Zurich and the Swiss Ornithological Institute Sempach evaluated 1.2 million records from info fauna, the *Swiss Faunistic Records Centre*. They reconstructed how the distribution ranges of 811 insect species – 216 butterfly and 595 saproxylic beetle species – changed between 1930 and 2021.

Their findings reveal a decline in the mid-20th century for both groups, followed by highly divergent trends. Species with certain requirements such as specific habitats or a cooler climate declined more steeply, whilst others recovered.

Butterflies: decline without recovery

Diurnal butterflies have been declining since 1930. Particularly between 1950 and 1980 – the heyday of agricultural intensification – their populations collapsed. The reasons for this were manifold: agriculture became more homogeneous, species-rich grasslands disappeared and greater use was made of both fertilisers and plant-protection products. Since then, there has been no recovery. In present-day Switzerland, butterflies are on average around 12 % less species-rich than in 1930 – a figure that actually rises to 29 % on the Swiss Central Plateau and 13 % in the Northern Prealps.

Specialised species are particularly hard-hit: butterflies that are dependent on specific plants or habitats lost up to 41 % of their distribution ranges. Small species, which can only open up new territories for themselves slowly, declined more sharply (– 26 %) than larger, more mobile species (+ 14 %). Cold-adapted species face an additional

The distribution of the scarce copper butterfly is restricted to the Alpine region; this highly specialised species has completely disappeared from the Swiss Central Plateau.

The Alpine longhorn beetle also benefits from increasingly nature-oriented forest management, as it can once again find more deadwood for reproduction.

problem, with climate change constricting their habitats further (–30 %).

Saproxylic beetles: decline followed by turnaround

Beetles that are dependent on deadwood initially experienced similar declines. More-intensive forestry meant fewer old trees, less deadwood, and therefore a smaller range for these species.

However, from the 1960s onwards the situation stabilised, and since the Noughties saproxylic beetles have actually been increasing again. Overall, their current distribution range is similar to that of 1930.

Several factors have worked to their benefit here: many warm-adapted saproxylic beetle species benefit from climate change, with rising temperatures favouring their spread. In addition, major storm events such as Vivian (1990) and Lothar (1999) created massive amounts of deadwood at a stroke, and with this, new habitats. Moreover, today's more biodiversity-friendly forest management is likely to have contributed in no small measure to this recovery.

Nevertheless, the more-specialised saproxylic beetle species declined more precipitously and lost up to 17 % of their distribution range, whilst cold-adapted species have not benefited from the climate change of recent decades.

Cautious optimism

There have been positive effects since the 1990s. Today's biodiversity-friendly approach to forest management leaves more old and dead wood in situ. In addition, agri-environmental programmes and ecological focus areas create refuges for endangered species. These measures are beginning to show a positive impact, even if the previous degree of species diversity – particularly for specialised and cold-adapted species – is far from being achieved. —

Conclusions

- Across Switzerland, there are now around 12 % fewer butterfly species than in 1930. On the Swiss Central Plateau, the decline reaches 29 %. Specialist species, less-mobile species and those adapted to colder climates have been affected most strongly. Ecological focus areas and agri-environmental programmes have positive mitigating effects.
- Although saproxylic beetles also experienced an initial decline, their populations have recovered since the 2000s and have now returned to roughly the same levels as in 1930. This recovery has been supported by an increase in deadwood resulting from biodiversity-friendly forest management, as well as by major storm events such as Vivian and Lothar.

Scientific publication:
Nature Ecology & Evolution, 10, 1103–1113, 2026

Trials with Drought-Resistant Forage Crop Mixtures

The development of drought-resistant forage crop mixtures for the mountain regions is moving forward in five cantons. Results from 2024 and 2025 show that two species play a particularly vital role in maintaining yields during droughts.

Wild Swiss Hops – A Promising Resource for the Future of Beer Brewing

Although currently a niche crop in Switzerland, hops are experiencing a resurgence of interest. A recent study highlights the potential of wild Swiss hops.

Climate Change to Redraw European Viticulture

Where in Europe will tomorrow's wine be produced? A study based on climate analogues shows that global warming will redefine the wine-growing regions, with diseases playing a vital role.

When Are Battery Electric Tractors Economically Feasible?

A systematic literature review shows that battery electric tractors can be economically viable under specific conditions – especially with high annual usage, light-duty tasks, the integration of renewable energies, and a suitable policy framework.

Agrivoltaics: Different Impacts in Raspberry and Strawberry Crops

Agrivoltaic systems affect strawberry and raspberry crops differently. The results of four years of trials are presented in a video and in an article in Swiss Agricultural Research.

→ Video

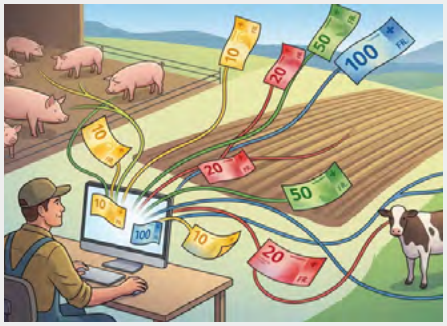
UV-C for Controlling Powdery Mildew in Greenhouse Strawberry Crops

Nighttime UV-C treatment enables the effective, residue-free control of powdery mildew of strawberry. Agroscope presents its findings on this topic and sets out the promising prospects offered by the use of autonomous robots.

→ Video

Fabric Wrap Optimises Cheese Ripening

Smear-ripened cheeses often develop quality problems such as odours and stickiness in the pre-packing stage. A new ripening method which involves wrapping the cheese in biodegradable fabric offers a solution. Trials conducted in commercial cheese dairies have confirmed this.



Full Costs Now Available Online

Full-cost calculation depicts the profitability of individual farm activities. Practitioners and extension services can use it as a basis for decision-making, e. g. in the case of investments. The data have recently been published online.

→ Further information

Alternaria in Potatoes: Use of Robust Varieties Recommended

There are increasingly fewer plant protection products available for controlling Alternaria in potato production. Agroscope is therefore investigating how the potato varieties recommended for Switzerland respond to this disease and will incorporate this knowledge into future potato variety lists.

Use of Drones to Find Missing Livestock on Alpine Pastures

For the second year in a row, alpine farmers can use drones to find their missing livestock.

Savings Measures: Agroscope Sharpens the Focus of its Research Portfolio

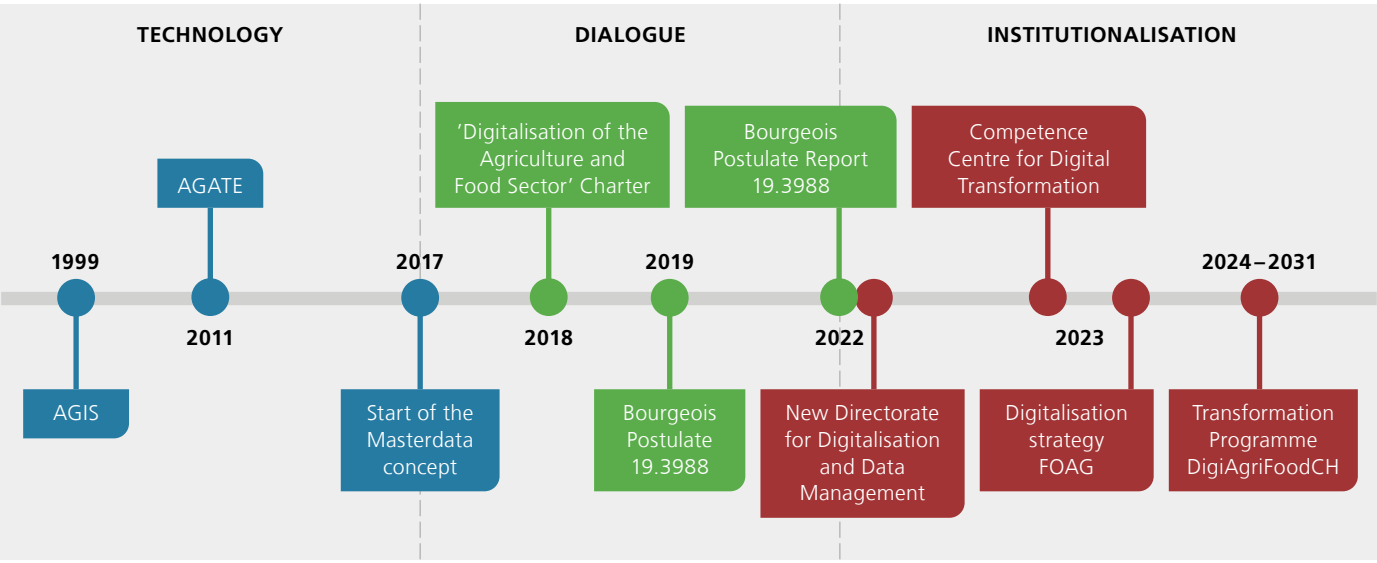
Because of various savings measures passed by the Swiss Parliament and the Federal Council, Agroscope's ordinary budget shows a structural deficit of around CHF 10 million. This makes a narrowing of the thematic focus of the research portfolio essential and leads to a loss of 58 full-time positions. Even with this narrowed focus, Agroscope will remain a competent and competitive research institution for the Swiss agriculture and food sector over the long term. The site strategy for Agroscope passed by the Federal Council in May 2020 will continue to be implemented.

→ Further news topics

The Digital Transformation of the Swiss Agriculture and Food Sector

This article describes how digitalisation in the Swiss agricultural sector has evolved from 2018 to the present day. It also outlines the measures required for successful digitalisation.

Nadja El Benni, Cédric Moullet, Ulrich Ryser, Nadine Trottmann, Salome Schneider, Stefan Gfeller, Marco Mattmann, Markus Rombach



Digitalisation milestones in the Swiss agriculture and food sector.

Cooperation between all stakeholders in the Swiss agriculture and food sector is key to bridging gaps in the roll-out of new technologies, ensuring that all farms have the same opportunities to adopt technological innovations, and avoiding power imbalances. This requires the incorporation of various technologies into new production processes, the gearing of technological development towards the needs of farmers, the strengthening of vocational education and training, and the taking account of digital advances in agricultural policy. At the same time, data protection must be guaranteed and all participants in the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS) must contribute jointly to the digital transformation.

Scientific Publication:
Swiss Agricultural Research, 17, 91–97, 2026

Technological focus of the Swiss agricultural sector since the 1990s

Much has been achieved since the launch of the 'Charter on the Digitalisation of Swiss Agriculture and Food Production' in 2018. The DigiAgriFoodCH transformation programme is currently being implemented. Various data platforms are available, the most relevant of which are the Swiss Agricultural Policy Information System (AGIS) and the AGATE portal (agriculture, animals, food). The 2017 master data concept forms the basis for technical developments and since 2021 farm managers have been able to reduce their administrative burden by using the 'Meine Agrardatenfreigabe' (MAF) app to share their data with third parties on the agate.ch portal.

Promoting dialogue in the Swiss agricultural sector since 2018

The Digitalisation Charter community has been instrumental in promoting dialogue between stakeholders in the Swiss agriculture and food sector since 2018. They have succeeded in raising awareness of digitalisation, strengthening cooperation, highlighting the need for action and implementing joint projects. A 2019 policy initiative prompted the audit on the creation of a Centre of Excellence for Agricultural Data.

Institutionalisation of digitalisation since 2022

Following the recommendations of the Postulate Report, the FOAG established the 'Digitalisation and Data Management' division in 2022 and tasked it with setting up a Centre of Excellence. Since 2023, six sector-related measures focusing on data use, interoperability, innovation and user-friendly digital processes have been introduced as part of the DigiAgriFoodCH transformation programme.

Implementation of the DigiAgriFoodCH transformation programme since 2025

To date, data standards for the Swiss agricultural sector have been published. The data transfer service agridata.ch, which aims to ensure secure, interoperable data exchange, is now operational. The information and communication platform DigiAgriFoodCH also provides knowledge, organises events and creates networking opportunities. In addition, the interoperability platform I14Y (Switzerland's national data catalogue) enables the harmonisation and retrieval of official records and agricultural data. —

Conclusions

- Since its launch in 2018, the Digitalisation Charter has put digital transformation on a professional footing with DigiAgriFoodCH.
- The DigiAgriFoodCH transformation programme sets out clear responsibilities, defines measures and provides a framework for their implementation.
- Digitalisation can only be implemented in a sustained and meaningful manner if all stakeholders in the Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System work together.
- Technological developments and production processes geared towards the needs of farmers together with the standardisation and exchange of data create genuine added value.
- Trust in and acceptance of digital technologies and their use must be strengthened to enable the digital transformation to be successfully rolled out.

We Research both for and with Practitioners, Providing a Forum for our Partner Farms

Benjamin Gasser, Schleitheim (Canton of Schaffhausen)

"We can share our observations and researchers listen to us"

Benjamin Gasser, an organic farmer in Schleitheim, has been collaborating with Agroscope for several decades now as part of the Swiss Soil Monitoring Network (NABO Programme). Scientists have access to a plot on his farm where they record various soil parameters on a regular basis. Gasser undertakes to farm this plot in exactly the same way as the rest of his land and precisely documents all of his actions and fertiliser inputs, which the scientists take into account to interpret soil quality parameters.

This collaboration allows Gasser to monitor changes in the quality of his soils over the long term. "I find this monitoring particularly interesting. In the short term, this doesn't necessarily change my practices – however, it allows me to spot new issues as they arise. And I, too, am changing and evolving. For example, I've become more mindful of the fertility of my soils" he explains.

Yannick Stabrowski, Galmiz (Canton of Fribourg)

"With research, progress is faster"

Since the beginning of the year, Yannick Stabrowski, a market gardener and Head of Crops at Wyssa Gemüse in Galmiz (Canton of Fribourg), has been taking part in an Agroscope research project focusing on the 'Jordan virus' *(Tomato Brown Rugose Fruit Virus)*. Stabrowski, whose farm was affected by the virus several years ago, now cultivates resistant varieties which the Agroscope scientists evaluate.

His farm in Fribourg is not alone in this venture: several other Swiss producers are also taking part in the trials. Their greenhouses are veritable life-size laboratories, allowing around fifty resistant varieties to be tested in real-world production conditions. "This network enables us to share with other producers and benefit from their experience. With research, progress is faster" observes Stabrowski. —

You'll find these testimonies in full as well as others on our site.

Impressions of current Agroscope (research) activities.

1 Cheese research.
2 Soil samples.
3 Research for successful alpine farming.

Archive photo: potato harvest

1

2

3

1 Beet weevil.
2 Tests on strawberries.
3 Bee research.
4 Dairy cow research.
5 Underground lysimeter for measuring soil leaching.
6 Laboratory work.

Reducing Plant-Protect Products thanks to Precision Farming

Digital technologies make it possible to apply plant-protection products at the right time, in the right amount and in the right place. This means that the amount of PPPs used can be significantly reduced in some cases.

Annett Latsch

Agriculture uses plant-protection products (PPPs) to safeguard crop yields and product quality. From both an economic and environmental perspective, it is important to apply these products at the right time, in the right amount and in the right place. This not only increases their effectiveness but also reduces unwanted inputs into the environment. Digital technologies support efficient and targeted crop-protection practices and can also help reduce the use of plant-protection products.

Savings of at least 25% are achievable

On just under 60 farms growing arable crops, vegetables, fruit and grapes, the resource project 'Plant Protection Optimisation with Precision Farming' (PFLOPF) conducted

A prototype tested under field conditions:
What contribution could Precision Farming technologies make to reducing the use of plant-protection products?

Methods such as spot-spraying for the targeted treatment of individual plants show great potential for significantly reducing the amounts of plant-protection products used in the future.

field tests to determine what contribution Precision Farming technologies could make to reducing the use of plant-protection products. The results at the end of an eight-year project run-time are positive: the aimed-for savings of at least 25 % are achievable for many crops.

Technologies such as automatic guidance systems and section control are fully developed, easy to handle and affordable, and are therefore already widely used in practice. Newer methods such as spot-spraying for the targeted treatment of individual plants are being continuously refined and show great potential for significantly reducing the amounts of plant-protection products used in the future. —

Further information:

Agroscope Transfer pflopf.ch

Conclusions

- Digital technologies make it possible to apply plant protection products at the right time, in the right amount and in the right place, thereby reducing their overall use.
- Automatic guidance systems and section control allow modest reductions. Spraying drones do not reduce application volumes directly but can decrease spray drift. These technologies are mature, practical and economically viable when properly used.
- Sensor-guided hoeing equipment can achieve substantial savings, has become highly effective, and is economically viable when combined with direct payments.
- Spot-spraying with individual plant detection and the use of mulching robots can significantly reduce the use of plant-protection products. As these technologies continue to evolve, they offer considerable potential for further reductions in the future.
- Forecasting and monitoring systems are well established in fruit and viticulture production and already make an important contribution to the efficient use of plant-protection products. Additional potential remains in arable and vegetable crops as system reliability continues to improve.

Reference Values for the Environmental Impacts of Eight Swiss Foods at a Glance

Agroscope researchers have developed and applied a method for determining reference values for the environmental impacts of eight frequently consumed foods produced in Switzerland. The results are published and freely available.

Mélanie Douziech, Eric Mehner, Justine Brun, Martin Stüssi, Jens Lansche, Thomas Nemecek

Reference values highlighting the environmental impacts of products are useful for food production, the retail trade and policymakers. Agroscope researchers have established a process for calculating these reference values and have made them publicly available for Swiss apples, carrots, potatoes, tomatoes, winter wheat, sunflower oil, milk and pork.

Objective comparisons are possible

The reference values are not direct targets, but rather an objective basis for comparisons. Examples: a farm wishing to produce apples in a more eco-friendly manner starts by calculating its own life cycle assessment and compares this to the reference values. This makes it clear whether the product lies above or below the Swiss average, and where improvements are possible. Furthermore, retailers can use the reference values as a basis for defining their own reduction targets (e. g. 10 % below the reference value) or for evaluating product ranges. Policymakers can, for example, use reference values to compare

Conclusions

- Agroscope has developed reference values for the environmental impacts of selected Swiss food products. These values enable objective comparisons along the value chain and can be used by farmers, retailers and policymakers.
- A large share of environmental impacts originates directly from agricultural production, particularly through the use of plant protection products and fertilisers and the associated emissions.
- Lower yields often result in higher environmental impacts per kilogram of product, for example in organic farming or in mountain regions.
- For milk and pork production, the choice of feed offers significant potential for reducing environmental impacts.
- The storage of apples, potatoes and carrots increases greenhouse gas emissions due to energy consumption and refrigeration requirements.

imports with Swiss products. Of course, care must be taken to use a consistent methodology here.

Selected results

The following results of the calculations are particularly important: Direct emissions from agriculture contribute to species loss potential from land use, freshwater ecotoxicity due to organic compounds (through the use of plant-protection products), greenhouse gas emissions and terrestrial acidification (mainly due to ammonia from fertiliser application). Inorganic fertilisers in conventional production particularly influence terrestrial acidification, inorganic freshwater ecotoxicity, freshwater eutrophication and global warming potential.

Lower yields often lead to higher environmental impacts per kg of product (e. g. for organic production or production in the mountain zone). For pork and milk, the choice of feed is crucial for reducing environmental impacts. The processing of sunflower seeds into oil has a negligible influence on the environmental impacts of sunflower oil production. Owing to the energy requirement and refrigerants, the storage of apples, potatoes and carrots increases greenhouse gas emissions by between 30 and 40 % per month. —

Scientific publication:
Zenodo, Dataset, 2 March 2026

How Profitable is Swiss Goat Milk Production?

Goats may be appealing, but very few goat farmers can make money from them. Dairy goats become economically viable only when annual milk production reaches at least 100 tonnes, which equates to around 120 to 180 dairy goats, depending on productivity.

Christian Gazzarin

In Switzerland as a whole, 90 % of goat farmers keep fewer than 25 goats – and very few are economically motivated to do so. It is not currently known whether goat milk production is indeed profitable at all. The aim of this study was to perform an economic analysis of this farming sector and identify the success factors.

To this end, twelve farms were selected from among the 40 largest farms affiliated with the Swiss Goat Breeding Association (SZZV) having herds of at least 50 dairy goats. The chosen farms had annual production volumes ranging from 35 to 240 tonnes, and most were in the hill region. The average herd size in the sample was 141 dairy

goats. The valley and hill farms in the sample were diversified and engaged in other activities in addition to goat milk production. Only the three mountain farms were genuine specialists. The farms underwent a detailed full-cost analysis, having first submitted their accounts and provided additional information during an interview.

Successful farms save on concentrates and machinery

The larger farms in the sample spend significantly less time per goat than the average. They also farm more intensively with higher stocking rates and higher yields per goat. However, in addition to one large farm, the economically successful farms also include medium to small farms with more moderate milk yields of between 500 and 600 kg per goat and year. Accordingly, there is also no correlation between milk yield and work income.
Increased use of feed supplements tends to reduce income. For example, three of the four most profitable farms have only moderate supplementary feed costs. Similarly, farms with low or moderate machinery costs tend to have higher incomes.

Production costs almost double the milk price

The production costs calculation showed that no farm was able to cover their full costs. Production costs amounted to CHF 2.40 per kg of goat milk for an average milk price of CHF 1.28, corresponding to a cost recovery ratio of just 53 %. In contrast, production costs correlated strongly with production volumes; the average cost recovery ratio was almost 80 % when farms with a production volume of less than 100 tonnes were excluded. Profitable farms achieve high incomes per hectare of CHF 3,000 to 5,000. Furthermore, farms producing more than 100 tonnes of milk have significantly lower production costs and thus offer greater potential for profitable goat milk production.

Conclusions

- Around 90 % of goat farmers in Switzerland keep fewer than 25 goats, so profit can scarcely be considered a motivating factor.
- The bigger the farm, the more intensive, efficient and cost-effective the production of one litre of goat's milk.
- However, profitable farms do not necessarily have to be particularly large – above-average incomes per hectare can be obtained with moderate per-head yields and moderate use of concentrates.
- Low machinery costs on goat farms also lead to higher incomes per hectare.
- More-extensive production, i. e. lower stocking rates over a larger area and simultaneous reduction in concentrate use may lead to higher incomes based on the current direct payment system.

Profitability comparable with other types of dairy production

From an economic perspective, goat milk production per se is no less profitable than cow or sheep milk production. However, the dairy goat farms in the study were run more intensively than comparable dairy cow or sheep farms. This resulted in higher concentrate costs and lower direct payments per livestock unit, which was offset by somewhat lower machinery costs. —

Scientific publication:
Recherche Agronomique Suisse, 17, 56–64, 2026

Corinne Jud Khan, head of Agroscope, answers questions about the savings measures at Agroscope and about the Posieux research campus.

Various saving measures approved by the Swiss Parliament and the Federal Council have significantly reduced Agroscope's ordinary budget, forcing it to make drastic spending cuts. How is Agroscope implementing these saving measures?

Sadly, we are having to reduce staff and material costs by around 10 million Swiss francs from 2027 onwards by scaling back our research topics. This is extremely painful, because we believe that every topic and project we have to drop is important for the Swiss agriculture and food sector.

Which research fields and how many jobs are being cut?

Research activities in the fields of healthy eating and novel food products, alternative niche crops, aromatic and medicinal plants and vertical farming will be discontinued. Some activities in other areas will be scaled back and adapted. These measures will lead to the loss of 58 full-time jobs, which we deeply regret. We feel particularly sorry for the employees affected by these changes.

The Federal Council approved the Agroscope Site Strategy in May 2020. Is this also affected by the budget cuts?

No, the Agroscope Site Strategy with a central campus in Posieux (Canton of Fribourg), research centres in Changins (Canton of Vaud) and Reckenholz (Canton of Zurich) and various experimental stations will still go ahead.

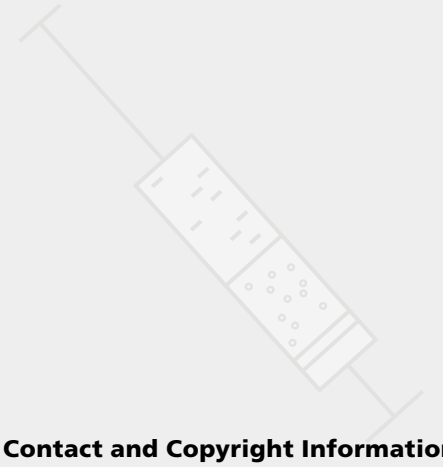
Talking of Posieux: the keys to the new building have just been handed over. What is the aim of centralising the research infrastructure?

The building bundles most of the previously decentralised laboratory activities and research technologies on a central campus. This will significantly reduce running and maintenance costs. The building also houses two experimental cheese dairies. One is specifically designed for research work requiring a highly controlled and secure environment. We are very much looking forward to seeing the building and new laboratories come to life.

What are you plans for relocating to the new laboratory building?

The move is an extremely complicated project that will start in September 2026 and take several weeks. It will involve the relocation of many employees from other sites, as well as numerous highly sensitive laboratory instruments and equipment. We are relying on the expertise of many specialists to coordinate this operation – a science in itself!

Research campus in Posieux (FR): new laboratory building with reddish-black facade (right in photo) and new staff restaurant with integrated conference rooms in single-story timber building (centre).



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“Digital technologies create new opportunities: more-precise control, more-efficient use of resources and more well-founded decisions.”

Nadja El Benni
Head of the ‘Sustainability Assessment and Agricultural Management’ Research Division

▶ Editorial, page 1