



**EAFRD-funded projects**

# Red cow breed

Genetic resources in animal husbandry: Important actions for the local community and the environment to promote traditional, extensive livestock farming, and the protection of biodiversity.

In Northern Greece, it was a common practice for livestock breeders to randomly cross domestic breeds with imported males of different breeds. This practice eroded genetic resources and created animals that were vulnerable to disease and injury and that needed significant volumes of feed and antimicrobials to maintain production. The project sought to reverse this trend and restore the Greek Red Kastoria-Kristallopigi breed by establishing a pedigree certification to highlight the quality of the meat and build consumer demand.



**Location**

Kastoria (Greece)

**Programming period**

2014 - 2020

**Priority**

P4 - Restoring, Preserving and Enhancing Ecosystems

**Measure**

M10 - Agri-environment-climate

**Funding (EUR)**

Total budget 173 475

EAFRD 116 831

National/regional 38 944

Private 17 700

**Project duration**

2017 - 2023

**Project promoter**

Agricultural Cooperative for Cereals & Livestock Products of Kastoria

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gred-cow.gr

## Results

The project brought important economic benefits since the start. It started with 27 breeders and 1700 animals. Now there are 85 breeders rearing 5200 pedigree certified animals. It helped breeders to maintain their jobs and to encourage them to stay in the rural area. The pedigree animals born within the framework of the project are better adapted to the local conditions and terrain and are more resilient to injury and disease. Finally, because of the project, it was possible to make Greek beef more competitive by focusing on quality rather than quantity.



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## Context

This project is an important initiative for the conservation of rare and endangered local animal breeds and is specifically focused on the protection and promotion of the Greek Red Kastoria-Kristallopigi cow. Over the years, this traditional breed has been gradually crossed with varieties of cattle that are better suited to intensive farming. This practice eroded genetic resources and created animals that were vulnerable to disease and injury and needed significant volumes of feed and antimicrobials to maintain production. The project sought to reverse this trend and to restore the Greek Red Kastoria-Kristallopigi breed by establishing a pedigree certification to highlight the quality of the meat and build consumer demand.

The project's activities supported a return to local traditions that are more environmentally friendly, and the results so far, are particularly encouraging as new practices have been embraced by breeders and have made a positive contribution to the local economy and society through a variety of multiplier effects.

## Objectives

Their aim was to establish a pedigree certification that would highlight the quality of Red Kastoria-Kristallopigi cow meat, build consumer demand, and protect the breed. Overall, the project sought to encourage the inhabitants of remote rural areas to remain in the area. In addition, since most beef consumed in Greece is imported, there are great opportunities for profitability and the project sought to maintain jobs and attract young people to beef cattle farming. Finally, by embracing alternative breeding practices, it was possible to make Greek beef more competitive by focusing on quality rather than quantity.

## Activities

The Agricultural Cooperative of Cereal and Livestock Products of Kastoria was founded in 2014 by the farmers and breeders of the Kastoria Prefecture.

In 2017, the Cooperative applied for funds from Action 10.2.1 «Genetic Resources in Livestock» of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020 in order to restore the Greek Red cow breed. The main actions of the project include collecting and keeping of animal genealogy data and establishment / keeping of herd books and registers; controlling the qualitative and quantitative performance of the animals; as well as informing livestock farmers about the dissemination and use of the appropriate genetic material.

As part of the project, the Cooperative hired a livestock technician to collect and manage genealogical data relating to the Greek Red breed. The technician is also responsible for the selection and breeding of the most productive animals, ensuring the best economic and animal welfare outcomes for the breeders. All calves born after September 2017 in the participating farms have been recorded as purebred in the pedigree register. These practical support measures aim to ensure that farmers can manage their livestock profitably.

Around 35% of the cows included in the project do not give birth every year, which is a major problem for breeders, so part of the task of protecting and promoting the Greek Red breed is to work towards achieving one gestation per cow per year. This objective is carefully combined with that of selecting breeding females based on their suitability for the particular terrain of the Western Macedonian pastures. In addition to this, the project insists upon the use of local male Greek Red cattle only, for breeding, in place of imported bulls, and it is worth noting that thanks to the project, purchases from abroad have now stopped.

In January 2018, the Cooperative hired a specialist to oversee the quantitative control of the animals by building a database of somatometric measurements. For the needs of these actions, the Cooperative purchased a computer, specific software and 15 specialist scales for weighing newborn calves.

In April 2018, a consultant was hired to organise the project's communication and dissemination actions. This included workshops and information sessions for breeders and consumers, a presence at industry exhibitions, the launch of an official website and the establishment and management of a social media presence.

From September 2018 the Cooperative has participated in the designing/writing of several EU project proposals (Erasmus+, H2020, Life) and has built an international network of contacts engaged in similar research and promotional activities.

In October 2019 the project embarked upon an ongoing collaboration with the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, participating in several research partnerships concerning issues related to safety and hygiene, accounting, monitoring and project management, as well as meat quality analysis, market research, consumer behaviour research etc.

## Main results

The pedigree animals born within the framework of the project are better adapted to the local conditions and terrain and are more resilient to injury and disease. They graze freely outdoors for more than eight months a year and require no additional feed during this time.

The production cost is about the same in euros as for conventional beef because the Greek Red cow produces a smaller amount of meat. However, its superior quality and organoleptic characteristics, give it a comparative economic advantage.

The project started off with 27 breeders and 1700 animals. Now there are 85 breeders rearing 5200 pedigree certified animals. Currently, another 10 breeders have applied to participate. Moreover, the local economy has been enhanced through the provision of 40 new jobs for agricultural workers. This is in addition to the 85 participating breeders and the 160 family members that they are already employed either directly or indirectly in the farms.

The Red Kastoria-Kristallopigi cow meat is currently sold in six local butcher's shops.

## Key lessons

This project represented a paradigm shift in local farming practices, as it enhanced product quality, reduced production costs, created additional jobs and improved biodiversity by restoring the genetic pool of the Red cow breed.

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### Additional sources of information

[Video - Presentation of the project](#)

This project has been categorised under 'Resilient futures' by the nominating National Rural Network