How has a collective farmer initiative helped maintain active communities in rural Estonia while enhancing biodiversity, the management of semi-natural grassland habitats, carbon sequestration and animal welfare?

**ACTORS**

NGO Liivimaa Lihaveis, Nordic Beef Ltd, members of grass-fed beef quality scheme, a meat processing company, slaughterhouses, retailers, restaurants and other caterers, chefs, and consumers.

**ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIAL BENEFITS**

- Achieving or maintaining active and socially resilient rural communities
- Achieving (or maintaining) the presence of diverse and sufficiently plentiful *species and habitats*
- Maintaining or restoring a high level of *landscape character and cultural heritage*
- Achieving (or maintaining) minimisation of greenhouse gas emissions
- Achieving or maintaining the implementation of *high farm animal welfare practices* on farms

**IN BRIEF**

Responding to low prices in conventional supply chains, a group of Estonian organic beef farmers founded the NGO Liivimaa Lihaveis and developed a quality scheme label to differentiate their grass-fed beef products on the market. Progressively it grew to cover the whole supply chain, increasing added value to farmers.
**WHAT ARE THE MAIN DRIVERS?**

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<td>National co-funding of Rural Development Programme (RDP)</td>
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<td>National environmental legislation</td>
<td>Domestic and foreign consumer demand for organic quality beef, but purchasing power and awareness an obstacle</td>
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**WHAT SUPPORT IS RECEIVED?**
The NGO Liivimaa Lihaveis has chosen a whole supply chain approach. All private actors involved are organically certified. Although a private initiative, the beef farmers behind the label receive – and to a certain extent depend on – public funding. This includes CAP direct payments (Pillar 1) and Rural Development payments (Pillar 2) for specific measures including:

- Agri-Environment-Climate measures for managing semi-natural habitats
- Organic farming payments
- Payments from the cooperation, LEADER and establishment of producer groups measures
- Quality scheme payments
- Natura 2000 payments

Market development and promotion are considered crucial for successfully marketing the labelled beef products and this is supported by EU and national funds. In 2015, a 3-year project with a budget of €600,000 was launched to promote marketing activities in neighbouring markets (Latvia and Sweden). In total, through a mix of public funding and self-contribution, about 1 million euros is committed until 2018 for market development and promotion.

**BARRIERS TO OVERCOME**
Livestock exports to Turkey and Central and Eastern Europe has pushed prices up, flooding the domestic market with cheaper meat imports. Business is on shaky ground following a sudden slump in export markets exacerbated by low consumer awareness and farmers’ scepticism for collective action. Meanwhile, bureaucracy is stifling innovation and beef cattle farmers also face competition with real estate companies for land.

**TRANSFERABILITY / KEY SUCCESS FACTORS**

1. Shift in farmers’ mind-sets regarding the benefits that can arise from collective action, cooperation and bottom up initiatives in enabling non-conventional systems of production to emerge.

2. Changes in consumer behaviour and awareness with regards the origin and production methods of food products, and associated benefits.

3. Presence and motivation of strong local leaders who are able and willing to start and develop such an approach.

4. Availability and stability of publically funded support measures, especially in relation to agri-environment measures, organic farming, quality schemes, cooperation and promotion and marketing.

5. The approach appears to be transferable to other sectors, contexts and countries and still has a high potential to further expand in Estonia.

6. Preservation of semi-natural grassland habitats is highly supported by public policies in Estonia. The involvement of the private sector through the organic grass-fed label was found to provide, in this case, a more efficient and effective way to ensure their maintenance and enhancement.