

Spotlight

New perspectives for livestock farming?



**Prof. Dr.
Wolfgang Büscher**

Photo: private

The mood within the livestock sector has been very bad for some months now. Many livestock farmers have never before experienced such a recession, in milk production as well as in pig farming. The logical reaction is to try to avoid costs and postpone planned investments with the motto: hold out for better times. But it's a very hard strategy in today's difficult conditions. Especially depressing are the changes listed below:

- Through the EEG (Renewable Energy Act) adjustments in 2014 making a start-up in biogas electricity production unattractive.
- Because of the intense media spotlight and the enormous protests against nearly all livestock building development applications, livestock farmers find themselves with a real identity and motivation problem. They would really like to know precisely what society expects from them and how they can meet such expectations in the longer term.
- The media make themselves society's megaphone, drawing attention to the continual array of alleged new demands on livestock producers paraded before the public. In this respect, here are a few examples of themes that urgently require discussion and clarification:
 - respectful treatment of farm animals
 - more wellness and comfort in livestock housing
 - natural environments for farm animals that don't restrict inherent behaviour patterns
 - small family farms and no industrial standards
 - full transparency of management and handling
 - production that is both climate and environment neutral

This list could be lengthened by a number of points. Obviously, idealistic concepts imbued with nostalgia regarding the "good old days" can be considered. At closer inspection, however, anyone can quickly see that past living or working conditions for man and beast were substantially worse than present day ones. Completely ignored in the public discussion is the fact that farming as a profession still has to produce an income to cover the living expenses of those involved. I believe the expectation is unrealistic that, in our world increasingly based on division of labour, satisfaction can be achieved with self-sufficiency and idealism alone.

Unfortunately, it is all too often forgotten in media presentations that the conditions we have today developed through decades of meeting requirements and necessities. They represent a balance of interests for all those involved. And in no way does the livestock producer dominate this dynamic balance. Farmers have to prove their adaptability at every turn, according to the motto: There is nothing

permanent except change! Thus, we should not lose our optimism that it will always be possible to create satisfaction. Perhaps we are coming to the time when we should start advertising our primary products again ourselves and not leave the important subject of promoting external perception to the daily press and retail branch alone.

There are also positive signals that should be mentioned here. Firstly, there is the great creative potential of the livestock-technology industry in developing new products and solutions such as those to be seen in entries for the DLG innovation awards.

Another successful concept is the research initiative of the Federal Ministry's "Innovation Support" programme. Many new developments are already supported by universities, research institutes and industrial concerns towards meeting social expectations and giving future-oriented impulses within the business sector.



Prof. Dr. Wolfgang Büscher

Head of the Department of Lifestock Technology
at the Institute of Agricultural Engineering,
University of Bonn