

Sector Cross Visit Report

Grass-fed organic cattle production

Estonia

27-28 August 2025

Introduction

The cross visit in Estonia brought together 18 participants from ten European countries – mostly advisors, but also farmers and researchers – to explore **grass-fed organic beef production** and **regenerative grazing practices** in the northern conditions. The event was hosted by the Estonian Organic Farming Foundation.

The two-day visit focused on three exemplary organic beef farms – *Allika*, *Puutsa*, and *Vilsi* – each representing different stages and systems of grass-fed livestock management. Through presentations, farm walks, and lively discussions, participants exchanged experiences on sustainable beef production, animal welfare, soil health, and on-farm processing.



Image 1: Visit to Allika farm, August 2025. Photo by Merit Mikk

Day 1: Allika farm – Diversification as a Path to Growth

[Allika Farm](#), located in northern Estonia, is a family-run organic business managed by young farmers Argo and Aigi Allikmets. The farm raises around 40 beef cattle and 80 sheep on approximately 160 hectares of land. The owners moved from city life to full-time farming in 2016 – and today they combine grass-fed beef and sheep production with on-farm meat processing and direct sales.

The farm practices adaptive multi-paddock grazing, using 1–5-day paddocks where beef cattle and sheep are kept together. Animals are kept outdoors year-round, and during winter feeding outdoors is implemented by unrolling hay bales directly on pasture. This method leaves manure on the fields, enriches soil fertility, and minimises machinery use.

As land availability limits herd expansion, increasing turnover and income required diversification. A major milestone was the construction of an on-farm slaughter and meat processing facility, supported by the LEADER programme. The farm now offers beef and lamb cuts, minced meat, dog snacks, and body lotions and candles made from lamb fat – a full “nose-to-tail” approach to value creation. They also provide sheep slaughtering and meat cutting services to other farms.

Despite this inspiring progress, Argo shared the challenges of farming – work overload/labour shortages, high debts, and the difficulty of competing with urban salaries. His presentation conveyed both determination and realism: *“You have to act boldly and not worry too much – if there’s a will, there’s a way.”*



Image 2: Meat tasting at Allika farm, August 2025. Photo by Merit Mikk

Day 1: Puutsa farm – Farming in rhythm with nature

The afternoon visit took participants to [Puutsa Farm](#), managed by Airi Külvet, one of the early adopters of grass-fed beef systems in Estonia. She manages a 350-hectare farm with 170 animals (Red Angus, Hereford, Simmental, and Wagyu). The farm is part of the [Liivimaa Lihaveis organic grass-fed beef quality scheme](#) and has been actively involved in [the Grass-fed Cattle Innovation Cluster](#) – both of which are led by Airi. The quality scheme includes a social component and, with CAP support, offers participating farms training, cross visits, and peer-to-peer learning to improve technical skills and encourage collaboration.

The farm practices adaptive multi-paddock grazing, winter bale grazing, and relies entirely on home-grown feed. In addition to regularly renewed grasslands, the farm also maintains a substantial share of species-rich semi-natural grasslands, managed exclusively through grazing without ploughing or reseeding. The philosophy is deeply rooted in working with nature rather than against it.

Airi emphasised that *“fighting nature does not have any payoff – even if you win, you lose.”* Her approach highlights biodiversity enhancement, low external inputs, and economic efficiency through simplicity. The farm has also started to produce high-value Wagyu beef, sold directly under the new brand *Puutsa Wagyu*.

Participants appreciated Airi’s strong communication on soil–plant–animal–human health linkages and her evidence-based message that nutrient density is the key to healthy food and ecosystems. She emphasized the need to be involved in networks and learn from others through inspirational events e.g. as [Groundswell Festival](#) in UK and [Northern Roots](#) in Estonia.



Image 3: Farmer Airi Külvet with her cattle, August 2025. Photo by Merit Mikk

Day 2: Vilsa farm – breeding and calm weaning

The second day featured [Vilsa Angus](#), an organic beef farm managed by Tiina and Ivo Tomson in South Estonia. With 80 suckler cows and 475 hectares of land, the farm specialises in pedigree Aberdeen Angus breeding and grass-fed beef production.

The Tomsons presented a well-organised farm structure combining rotational grazing, careful animal grouping, and a stress-minimising weaning system. Calves are weaned at eight months through gradual separation, allowing contact across fences and ensuring calm behaviour and steady growth.

During summer, cattle are grazed in herds of 45–50 animals, moving every one to three days. In winter, bale grazing continues whenever weather permits, keeping manure in the fields and reducing the need for heavy machinery. The system aligns with their philosophy of “healthy soil, healthy animals, healthy food.”

Vilsa Farm markets part of its production through the Liivimaa Lihaveis organic grass-fed beef quality scheme, part through direct sales, and sells breeding animals across Europe. The farm’s attention to detail – from fencing to genetic selection – impressed the visitors, demonstrating how efficiency, animal welfare, and environmental care can go hand in hand.



Image 4: Ivo Tomson is explaining the housing system at Vilsa Farm, August 2025. Photo by Merit Mikk



Image 5: Cross visit participants with Vilsa Farm cattle, August 2025. Photo by Merit Mikk

Day 2: Group discussion and feedback

The final discussion session (“Symposium”) gathered impressions from the visits and featured reflections on the organic advisory systems in the participants’ countries.

Participants reflected on common challenges and innovative solutions observed in Estonian grass-fed beef systems in visited farms. The main discussion topics were:

- Grazing practices
- Weaning and animal welfare

The PPP (Pearls, Puzzles, Proposals) method proved to be an effective tool for collecting feedback. Participants were most enthusiastic about sharing “*pearls*” – inspiring ideas and best practices – while “*proposals*” received fewer responses.

Feedback confirmed that participants learned a lot, valued the organisation, and enjoyed the friendly, open atmosphere. The hosts were appreciated for their preparation, the quality of farms, and the balance between learning and networking. The group particularly appreciated direct contact with farmers who were willing to share both their successes and struggles.

The hosts from the Estonian Organic Farming Foundation expressed gratitude for the participants’ enthusiasm and shared insights: *“It was truly enriching to connect with such diverse and knowledgeable colleagues from across Europe.”*



Image 6: Discussion during the plenary session, August 2025. Photo by Merit Mikk

Lessons learned

The cross visit offered insights into grass-fed beef production under northern conditions and demonstrated how organic and regenerative principles are applied in practice.

Key lessons:

1. Grazing management matters. Adaptive rotational systems combined with winter bale grazing improve soil structure, biodiversity, and feed self-sufficiency.
2. Animal welfare and calm management enhance performance. Gradual weaning and stress reduction pay off in animal growth and health.
3. Integration of value chains strengthens resilience. On-farm processing and direct sales provide economic stability and consumer trust.
4. Diversity of systems leads to innovation. Each farm adapted grazing, feeding, and marketing to its local conditions.
5. Networking across borders drives improvement. Exchange among advisors and farmers helps overcome isolation and promotes new ideas.

Authors

Airi Vetemaa, Estonian Organic Farming Foundation