

Embracing Sustainability

Although it still requires some explanation, the “Qualivo” concept has already been successfully launched on the market. It offers retailers an opportunity to showcase their value chain as well as quality. **Jens Hertling**



Successful marketing of Qualivo meat at Rewe supermarkets (in Germany's southwest region).

> Not all beef is the same -

quite the opposite. There are differences in taste and color, says Martin Russ, a cattle farmer and one of the managing directors of the producer and marketing association Qualivo Deutschland GmbH. He has a background in agriculture, and also keeps Qualivo fattening bulls and calves on his farm. "It's not just the lowest price that

According to Martin Russ, Qualivo meat has a special color and taste.



matters. German consumers are increasingly making their purchasing decisions based on the conditions in which their food is produced, and on the values that the producers and retailers stand for," explains Mr. Russ. That is why the producer and marketing association Qualivo Germany offers retailers and butchers premium meat that comes from the respective region, and the quality of which consumers can trust. "You need to have a story to sell meat, and that only works if the meat is better," says Mr. Russ. According to Mr. Russ, there is an overall concept behind the "Qualivo" brand for the production of premium meat. The brand product "Qualivo", originally from Switzerland, is also available in Bavaria. The Qualivo concept was launched in 1995 by animal feed expert Jürg Hofmann. The feed system Qualivo ("vo" for veau = French: calf) had fascinated the Swiss.

For this, Hofmann developed a special feed mixture that ensures that the animals develop well and remain healthy. According to Russ, however, Qualivo also means valuing the entire animal. Thus, not only the preferred tenderloin, but all cuts are to be used. According to Russ, Qualivo is a branded meat whose production must meet a variety of standards. An essential criteria is feeding the animals with a special, purely natural and GMO-free feed. Keeping the animals on straw is also mandatory. "Qualivo lies between organic and conventional farming. However, the quality of the meat is above that of organic products," says Martin Russ. The entire value chain is located in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. For example, regional farmers supply the meat producer Adler in Bonndorf in the Black Forest. The company is not only an abattoir, but also cuts and produces sausage and ham products at the same time. These are sold, apart from specialist butchers, mainly by retailers based in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria. Thanks to the regulated feeding and husbandry of the animals, the meat is of consistent quality, tastes of grain and nut, and, according to the managing director, is pink in color. It is the ingredients in the feed that determine the color. At his company, these include not only inexpensive standard feeds such as silage, but also fresh hay, straw as well as high-quality corn- and wheat-based muesli, all naturally free of any GMO. "These are the hallmarks of tender quality veal with excellent marbling and a particularly aromatic flavor," says Martin Russ. "We know Qualivo meat is more expensive than other products, but because we can explain to consumers what's behind it, we have credibility.



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People recognize and reward that", explains Martin Russ. Russ believes that finding farmers for the Qualivo concept is not so easy, because they usually have to "rebuild their entire farm to meet the 'Qualivo' requirements." This includes keeping the cattle (the Fleckvieh/Simmental breed) in open stables with straw litter, four square meters of space per animal, as well as plenty of air and light. When it comes to feeding, farmers must completely avoid silage because, according to Mr. Russ, the acid has a negative effect on the shelf life and taste of the meat. The animals receive only milk, hay and "Qualivo" feed – a mixture of cereals, grain maize, herbs, minerals, and vitamins. Soy meal or genetically modified feeds are prohibited. The cattle's age at slaughter is usually between eleven and thirteen months, weighing between 270 and 330 kilograms. "As a result, the animals have the weight of a full-grown bull, but also tender meat because they are still relatively young," as Mr. Russ points out. A three-stage inspection system is in place to ensure that no farmer can cheat, including checks by the association's own inspectors and a neutral body. As compensation for the quality requirements, Qualivo farmers are paid a higher price by butchers and retailers. Butchers and retailers, in turn, can advertise to consumers that they source their meat from premium meat suppliers in the region.

HIGH LEVEL OF SECURITY THROUGH PURCHASE GUARANTEE

But does the increased effort pay off for farmers at all? "We offer farmers a great deal of security through a purchase guarantee," says Mr. Russ. The prices are also very constant throughout the year, he adds. All the farmers – and butchers, too – who have been with Qualivo" from day one are still part of it today, according to Mr. Russ. "There is certainly still room for growth, as Mr. Russ explains, but there are no "excessive expansion plans" for "Qualivo". This would go against the principles of quality, regionalism and sustainability, he believes. Around 60 beef, veal and pork producers have now joined the association.



The Russ family produces 1,000 veal calves for Qualivo Veal per year on their farm.



25,000 Qualivo pigs are slaughtered each year.

These producers supply 70 butchers in Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria, as well as 20 branches of Rewe in the southwest region of Germany, where end consumers can buy the Qualivo meat.

SPECIAL MEAT

"The meat is really special. At least, I've rarely seen anything better," says Rudolf Müller, who works in supply chain management and purchasing for the full range of meat products at Rewe Southwest and who is fully confident about the quality and philosophy behind "Qualivo". "The meat is about a third more expensive than conventional products, which means we always have to work hard to convince new customers," explains Rudolf Müller. He adds that training the staff behind the counter is therefore key, and they are required to attend a workshop once a year. "Customer feedback has been consistently positive," says Mr. Müller. "Finally, someone's paying attention to quality. We prefer the good beef", customers often tell the staff. "Once customers have been sold on the idea, they'll keep coming back", points out Mr. Müller, adding that this is why staff training is his top priority. Fresh meat is sold exclusively over the counter, and the ham and sausage products are also available at the counter. Rewe Southwest is already planning to expand the concept. "The value chain must be able to grow gradually and, above all, in tandem. My vision is that Qualivo meat will be available at all Rewe counters in the Southwest region within the next ten years," says Mr. Müller.



Jens Hertling is an editor of LP (Lebensmittel Praxis) and believes that any concept that does justice to the issue of animal welfare is a real improvement.

What is Qualivo?

Qualivo is a premium meat program developed by the Swiss feed company Hofmann AG in Bützberg. In 1998, consultants and farmers founded Qualivo Deutschland GmbH and introduced the program in southern Germany, primarily for cattle. Its guidelines provide for feeding animals grains without silage, but with a lot of roughage (hay and straw). Participating farmers contractually agree to rear their animals in accordance with the Qualivo guidelines. The program has held its own since then, albeit at a modest level. Every year, around 4,000 bulls are produced and marketed in Germany under Qualivo criteria.