



Simon Kompatscher in his ox barn: he is the third-generation owner of the elegant Zimmerlehen estate - with farm stays, the Törggelen harvest feast, and events providing additional sources of income.

—INTERVIEW

Appreciation for the entire animal

The Zimmerlehen manor, Völs am Schlern.

Twenty years ago, the first oxen arrived at the farm that Simon Kompatscher went on to take over from his parents in 2022. He discusses the decision to rear his animals slowly, his cooperation with the butcher and the potential in local meat.

alma
From our farms.
For our tables.



The Zimmerlehen estate has been family-owned for over a hundred years. Oxen have been raised here for meat production since 2006 - without any silage, but with plenty of exercise and time to grow.



During the period of over a century in which your family has owned the estate, grain was grown here, cattle were cultivated and a silver fox breeding farm was run. Before the oxen that you rear for meat production arrived in 2006, the farm was a dairy farm. Why this change?

As a taxi driver, my father was away a lot - until four or five in the morning, even on weekends. The cows needed to be milked regularly and always at the same time, which was harder and harder to organise alongside his night shifts. There was also the pressure within the dairy industry, where animals are often forced to grow and produce milk with the use of high-performance feed. Our oxen lead a quiet life, and they do less work than dairy cows.

You decided to stop using silage. What has been the impact?

If the animals are fed silage, more water is retained in the meat, which is noticeable when cooked. Schnitzel shrinks in the pan, and the meat often has a sour smell. Without silage, the oxen develop in a more natural way - they have plenty of room to move and grow more slowly. This has an impact on the quality and the flavour of the meat.

Apart from a small amount that you cook yourself, all your meat goes to Metzgerei Stefan. How did this cooperation come about, and how's it going?

My father was the one who started it, back when he started rearing oxen. We make sure we're on the exact same page: at the start

of the year, I tell the butcher the number of animals we can provide. Once the animals are ready for slaughter, he has them collected or we bring them a couple of kilometres down the road to the abattoir. The meat is then sold exclusively through the butcher's shop, from where it's supplied to restaurants and private customers, labelled with the animal's ear tag, the farm name, and the date of slaughter.

—Tourism plays a key role in preserving the rural character of the area.

How do you agree on a price?

The butcher gives me a set kilo price, which is based on market prices and takes into account the added value of regional marketing. This price remains the same even if an animal happens to be a little on the plumper side. I might get a bit more for one or two of the oxen at auction, but with the butcher, I know what I'm getting: it's a straightforward, reliable cooperation with short pathways. That's more valuable to me.

In addition to the oxen, there are other main sources of income at Zimmerlehen: farm holidays, the Törggelen harvest feast, various events. What economic role does the beef play?

Even though farming takes up most of our time, meat production's really just a sideline for us. This year, 19 oxen will be going to the butcher; at an average weight of 300 kilos per animal, that's a total of nearly six tonnes of meat. But that's not enough to live on. Our main source of income comes from the holiday homes, which in turn allows us to invest in the farm. This means that tourism plays a key role in preserving the area's rural character.

Why is it that, despite being locally sourced, domestic beef rarely finds its way into restaurants?

We can't deliver much in the way of finer cuts: each ox might yield about twenty portions of fillet – that's not enough for a hotel with a hundred beds. Besides that, restaurants generally want to offer all their guests a schnitzel of the same quality: domestic beef is less even in texture, and the cuts vary in consistency – one could be more tender, the next could be a bit tougher. For that reason alone, it makes sense to choose meat from a wholesaler.



What's the story for the other cuts of meat?

When it comes to minced meat, goulash and roasts, there's still plenty of scope for using locally sourced meat. It's up to the hospitality industry to guide guests and, by extension, to guide consumption. The ideal situation would be if restaurateurs or chefs dropped by, took a look at the oxen in the barn, selected an animal and agreed with the butcher on how they want it cut up. This would involve taking into consideration the entire animal, and less about "I need five fillet strips right now".

There was an attempt to establish the "Völser Rind" beef brand and market it collectively. What's your stance on a comprehensive market?

At the time, the idea was floated that the meat produced by these farmers – most of whom have only a small barn with just a few animals – should be marketed collectively. Meetings were held with restaurateurs and people in the hotel industry to organise a set of criteria for Völser Rind beef – husbandry, rearing, and so on. In the end, this didn't work out. These days, I would take a broader view: rather than focusing on Völser Rind beef, I would suggest an overarching brand for producers across the entire Dolomites Region Seiser Alm. Essentially, it's about visibility, about ensuring guests recognise where their food comes from. I'm experiencing this already: our guests firstly encounter our meat at our guest house, and then come along to our farm to see how the animals are reared. For me, that's high praise indeed.

What you can learn from the Zimmerlehen manor

Demand can be shaped. If only the prime cuts are on the menu, the rest of the animal goes to waste. It is up to the hospitality industry to introduce its guests to the full range of options.

Many small amounts add up to an overall range. For small farms, meat production is only viable as a sideline. A joint structure could pool their volumes and make it easier for businesses to get started.

An open stable is the best policy. Seeing how the animals are reared helps people understand the meat's origin in a way that no professional accreditation can. Transparency comes from insight – not just from labelling.



Behind each of these portraits is the **alma** network. The food that ends up on plates in the Seiser Alm region of the Dolomites doesn't happen by chance - it's the result of a close collaboration between farmers and restaurateurs. They discuss quantities, adjust logistics, and decide together what can be grown and how it makes its way from the farm to the table. This creates a local economic cycle in which supply and demand come together - underpinned by trust and reliability.

alma is neither a label nor a campaign, but a network that makes this collaboration visible: specific and closely tied to the daily lives of the people who work and do business here.

—seiseralm.it/alma