



For Max Rabensteiner, one thing matters above all else in his butcher's shop: traceability. He knows every farm his animals come from.

—INTERVIEW

The value in short supply chains

Metzgerei Stefan, Seis am Schlern.

Together with his sister Anna, Max Rabensteiner has been running their father's traditional butcher's, Metzgerei Stefan. The siblings have also been running the local abattoir in Kastelruth since 2024. The beef and veal originate from the nearby surrounding farms. All about trust, short supply chains and why we eat so little local meat.

alma
From our farms.
For our tables.

It's often cheaper to buy animals from large-scale farms, located further away. You work almost exclusively with animals from the local area. Why is that?

It's true that it would be cheaper, but it's not about that. We don't want to work with just any old animals: we want to use animals from here. For me, the best thing about it is that it's easy to keep track of. We see the animals from day one: on these farms that we work so closely with, we know the barn, we see the young calves and watch them grow over the course of two or three years. All of this is just impossible when it comes to imported stock.

These many years of partnership have created a local economic cycle, which is constantly being joined by new businesses. How does the initial contact grow into a reliable collaboration?

Through trust that deepens over time. When somebody comes to us and offers us ani-

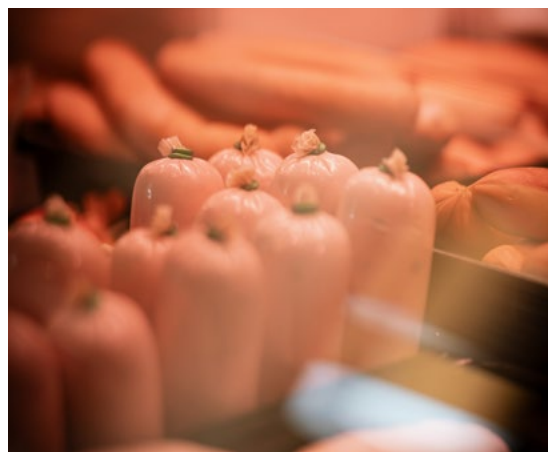
mals, my father will take a look at them himself. Once it's clear that the animal is suitable, a photo of the animal ready for slaughter is often all that's required – and on some farms, not even that, because they know exactly what our priorities are. What's decisive for us is that the partnership is mutually beneficial. If the farm doesn't benefit, the collaboration won't go anywhere, meaning we'll be left without a foundation. That's why we ensure that the livestock farmers are paid a fair wage.

You believe in keeping the supply chains short, and have been running the local abattoir near Kastelruth since early 2024.

The vast majority of animals that end up with us travel less than 20 kilometres between the farm, the abattoir, the butcher's and the shop. Short supply chains mean less stress for the animals, and a calm animal results in meat that matures better and stays fresh for longer.



Max Rabensteiner in the cold store at the abattoir: "The key thing is for the partnership to work for both sides – the farm and us. Only then can the partnership be sustained in the long term".



Local sourcing works well for beef and veal. What's the story for other meat products?

As far as that goes, it's significantly harder. Despite the fact that we've been getting a bit more pork in recent years, we never get the quantities we need – rearing pigs is labour-intensive and barely pays off for us. When it comes to poultry, it's even more difficult – there's very little, and what is there is expensive. On the other hand, we can easily get lamb from local farms, especially around the Easter period.

—We don't want to process any old animal, but animals from this area

You sell the majority of your meat to private customers through your shop, and then the rest to catering and hospitality. How important is this sales channel?

The alpine huts are particularly important for us. They take the entire animal off our hands, and with it, the parts that are less easy to get rid of: meat for goulash, sausages and soup. Hotels, on the other hand, generally only want the finer cuts of meat: fillet, roast beef, sirloin, shoulder. If only the prime cuts

of a 400-kilo animal are in demand, the vast majority of it goes to waste. A local economic cycle is only sustainable if even the less sought-after items can find buyers.

One thing that locally sourced meat cannot offer is the high degree of consistency often expected in the catering industry. How do you handle that?

This consistency comes in handy in the kitchen, since portions can be calculated almost to the gram. In our case, each farm feeds its animals differently, and there are multiple different breeds – so the meat varies accordingly. This variety, however, is rarely the actual reason why local meat does not end up on the plates of local hospitality businesses. In many cases, it comes down to the price.

How do you handle a guest or hotel business that is hesitant because of the price and prefers to source stock from further afield?

The price difference is often just a teething problem – once people do the maths, they realise it's all relative. For example, a difference of two Euros per kilo amounts to just 40 cents for a 200-gram portion. In return, the business receives meat from the immediate local area – from a butcher they know personally.

How much of this relies on the kitchen staff, i.e. the individuals who actually work there?

A huge amount. Some have been ordering from us for many years, regardless of the company for which they work. After all, the menu is put together by people too: anyone who offers ‘braised beef’ rather than specifying a particular cut can use a wide variety of cuts and make much better use of the animal. Planning becomes especially hard for us when the team bases its orders primarily on trends: one year everyone will be asking for the same product, and then the next, hardly anyone. What’s harder is the opposite case, which we’re also encountering: the restaurant specifically requests meat from a particular local farm, and the staff tell guests where the animal was reared.

Small farms that keep animals as a sideline are increasingly opting for beef cattle, since they require less work than dairy cows. Do you see any potential in bringing together local meat producers to raise their profile?

A huge potential, in fact. In terms of volume, that would certainly be feasible in this case too: we process several hundred animals a year for our shop alone; that figure’s significantly higher when it comes to the abattoir. It’s quite a volume: a foundation on which something can be built. It’s difficult for individual catering businesses to highlight what goes into the meat – the short supply chains, the relationships with the farms, and the on-site processing. A unified approach, backed by clear guidelines that ensure consistent quality, would change all that.

Three things you can learn from the Metzgerei Stefan

Value creation and appreciation go hand in hand. A local economy can only remain sustainable in the long term if everyone involved is paid fairly.

Local means embracing variety. Differences in breed, diet or rearing are not a flaw, but instead a reflection of origin and quality.

The menu is a decisive factor. If you focus on dishes rather than individual cuts of meat, you can make far better use of the animal.



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