

## Mrs. Hildegard and Mr. Reinhard Schmalengruber, Aigen im Ennstal, federal province Styria, Austria

Mr. Schmalengruber inherited the farm from his parents in 1984 and has built up the Thonnerhof (most of the Austrian farms have a special vulgo-name) to a modern mountain farm. The Thonnerhof, located in the municipality of Aigen im Ennstal at 1,000 m a.s.l. is an organic dairy farm that is typical and representative for grassland farming in mountainous regions of Austria. The total agriculturally used area is 20 ha of permanent grassland (mown resp. grazed 2-3 times per year) of which 19 ha is own property. With the exception of the leased area that is located in the valley floor, the meadows and pastures in the surrounding of the farm house are extremely steep (up to 50%!) and it really is a big challenge to farm the grassland. Most of the area is managed with special and very expensive machinery which only can be used under dry conditions mostly along the slope line. The Thonnerhof has 295 points of the so called mountain farm cadastre system which classifies mountain farms in Austria according to the difficulties of management (steepness, distances, infrastructure etc.). The Thonnerhof is in the highest level of this system but there are farms in Austria with even more cadastre points (maximum of 570).



View from the Thonnerhof to the most wonderful Grimming mountain and to the Dachstein glacier in the background (picture: Reinhard Schmalengruber)

The Schmalengrubers manage a herd of 14 dairy cows (Simmenthal – this is still the main cattle breed in Austria) with the heifer calves (the bull calves are sold at the age of two weeks to fattening farms). The farm milk quota is 60,000 kg per year and the milk is collected at the farm and brought to the dairy company at Stainach (15 km distance) every day. In summer the cattle are on the pasture and are additionally fed with hay. In winter the ration consists of hay, silage and concentrates (maximum of 500-600 kg of a mixture of cereals per cow and year). Milk production is therefore mainly based on home grown forage which has to be of high quality. The grassland is fertilised with slurry which is spread with a special hose system in spring and after each cut. Some stable manure from young stock is applied in the autumn. In 2008 the existing stable was reconstructed and changed from a stanchion barn to a loose housing stable with an automatic dung removal system. Now the milking procedure is done in a swing over milking parlour.



Slurry application on steep slopes is nothing for cowards and needs good nerves and experience

Reinhard and Hildegard Schmalengruber are still full time farmers but additionally have to use other sources of income e.g. holidays on farm and forestry. They manage 50 ha of own forest – nearly all works are done by themselves. Round timber is sold to sawmill companies and pulpwood goes to the paper industry resp. to local heating stations. Since 40 years holidays on farms has been a main pillar of the total farm income. Over the last years some investments have been spent on this branch and nowadays some holiday flats are available – guests are warmly welcome to spend their holidays at such a beautiful, quiet place with an incredible view on the Enns-Valley and on the surrounding mountains. Traditional self-made products like yoghurt, soft cheese or rye doughnuts are served to the guests and a special programme is offered to children (children's zoo, forest pedagogy to impart knowledge about the function of forest ecosystems – Reinhard Schmalengruber is a certified trainer in this field of activity).

Mr. Schmalengruber also is the vice-chairman of the regional agricultural chamber and is actively fighting for the maintenance of mountain farming both to keep up the wonderful cultural landscape and the existing infrastructure.

In disadvantaged mountainous regions it becomes more and more difficult to find a successor who is willing to keep on farming under such hard site conditions. The Schmalengruber family has three sons who beyond their professional education are still strongly involved in the farm work. The youngest son Roland is attending an agricultural school and is highly motivated to follow his parents as a mountain farmer.



Hay and aftermath is traditionally dried on the meadow but alternatively an aeration system is available for bad weather periods

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