

## **Erasmus exchange experience on a farm near Lake Milstatt**

In the period from 31.3.2025 to 11.4.2025, I took part in an Erasmus exchange at the Zgurnig farm in Carinthia, Austria, in the village of Öttern, near Lake Milstatt, on the slopes of the Milstatter Alps.

The Zgurnig farm, owned by Martin Glabischnig, is about 1000 meters above sea level. Their primary activity is the breeding of sheep for meat. They have about 300 suckler sheep in their stables and many lambs of all ages. In addition to the sheep, the farm also has about 20 head of cattle, 10 goats, ducks, cats, and a dog trained to help graze the sheep. The sheep are housed in two larger barns, which are divided into an inner and outer part. At the same time, on the central part of the farm, there is also a small barn for breeding sheep and a small barn with goats. Another small sheep stable is rented in a neighbouring village. Cows graze in one of the meadows below the farm, spending the whole year in the open air.

The farm has 15 hectares of meadows and just as much forest. Since this is not enough to feed all the animals, they have an additional 15 hectares of meadows. In summer, the sheep graze in the meadows below the Großglockner, where a shepherd takes care of the sheep.

The owner, his parents, and one of his sisters live on the farm. His parents work on the farm, and his sister is employed elsewhere, but she helps when needed.

The family's working day begins around five o'clock in the morning. Over coffee, they divide the day's tasks and then start working. The barn must be cleaned every morning. They throw the previous day's feed between the litter, adding straw if necessary. Then, in the indoor barns in the manger, a mixture of grain corn, ensiled corn, minerals, and hay should be added. In addition to the mixture, alfalfa hay should be added to the outer part of the barn, which is richer in protein and, therefore, more suitable for feeding lambs.

This task takes a lot of time, as the same process must be done in a barn at another location. Typically, work is interrupted around nine o'clock for breakfast and then resumed. I joined the family a little over seven o'clock. In addition to the usual chores, my task was to feed the lambs with milk replacer, as the sheep was too weak to care for her young ones after giving birth.

Farmwork never runs out. In addition to the stables, they have many other tasks. Each day of the week is dedicated to specific tasks. Mondays are meant for the slaughtering of sheep in spring and autumn. In addition to the owner, this work is done by a local butcher at the slaughterhouse they have on the farm. On average, 35 lambs are slaughtered per week between 4 and 8 months of age. However, they slaughter not only their own livestock but also the sheep of the surrounding farmers. It was also one of the first jobs I joined them on.

Tuesday is the day to deliver meat to local customers, including three supermarkets, a butcher specializing in sheep meat processing, and smaller caterers nearby. In addition, after each slaughter, certain remains must be disposed of at the communal hall in Klagenfurt, which is the only location where this is allowed.

The remaining days are devoted to other farm chores. Since spring had just begun at the time of my visit, the sheep had to be sheared and vaccinated against blue tongue disease, fences had to be erected or repaired around the meadows, one flock of sheep had to be released to pasture, and I could go on and on.

I spent the free weekend seeing Lake Milstatt and the Milstatt Alps. Nature and a peaceful environment added a special charm to the whole experience and made it even more beautiful.

Thus, the internship in Carinthia, passed as if in the blink of an eye. The experience was truly memorable, as I had the opportunity to gain new knowledge every day. Despite the busy days, they were full of interesting challenges and good people. My family well-received me, and I quickly became a part of their everyday life. I realized how vital cooperation and goodwill are, but work on the farm never runs out. I am glad that I could spend time on the farm on the picturesque slope of the Milstatter Alps, from where there is a beautiful view of the lake and the surrounding hills. Working in such a peaceful and naturally prosperous environment was especially enjoyable. This is one of the reasons why I would repeat this practice immediately if offered the opportunity again. I also recommend it to anyone who wants to expand their expertise, get to know a different culture and work processes, and gain new work experience that they can use on their home farm or a further study path.