

SPAIN

Local development

Location

Mariñas Coruñesas e Terras do Mandeo

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

Measure

M19 - LEADER/CLLD

Funding

Total budget 142 418.66 (EUR)

RPD contr. 110 082.70 (EUR)

Other 32 335.96 (EUR)

Project duration

2014 – 2020

Project promoter

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A Local Action Group (LAG) developed a multi-agency partnership programme to create a consolidated food system that stimulates organic production, processing, and consumption.

Summary

The Mariñas Coruñesas e Terras do Mandeo Biosphere Reserve covers an area of more than 116,000 hectares and 17 municipalities. The internationalization of food production and the increasing abandonment of traditional agricultural activities have led to a loss of biodiversity and environmental heritage. In

response to this, the area's LAG developed a multi-agency partnership programme which brought local farmers, agri-food industries, distribution companies, consumer groups, the hotel and catering industry, research centers, foundations, and the public administration together to create 'The Food Plan': a consolidated food system that stimulates local organic production, processing, and consumption.



Project Results

The Food Plan has led to the creation of six new organic farms, the launch of two nurseries for agricultural entrepreneurship, a network of restaurants that use local products, and the development of the local market in six municipalities.

The Eco Comedores school canteen programme has brought together 12 schools, reaching more than 2,000 children.

The link between the rural environment and the city of A Coruña has been strengthened through the development of the service economy with greater awareness of and visibility for the Biosphere Reserve.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ The Food Plan owes its success to more than 10 years of consistent strategy actions that preceded it, which have built trust between local actors and set the scene for a strong partnership.
- ❑ One of the key cost factors of the transition from conventional to organic production is the initial setup of logistics systems and supplier networks.

Context

Mariñas Coruñesas e Terras do Mandeo was declared a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in May 2013. The Reserve covers an area of more than 116,000 hectares and 17 municipalities. Historically, these municipalities were the orchards of the city of A Coruña due to the quality of their soils, mild temperatures, and strategic position. However, as is the case in many parts of rural Spain, agricultural activities have been increasingly abandoned in recent years as food production has become increasingly internationalised. This has contributed to a reduction in biodiversity, the erosion of the traditional landscape and the loss of heritage assets of significant cultural and social value.

Objectives

The aim of this RDP funded initiative was to enhance the value and market access of local agri-food products from the biosphere reserve by promoting short supply chains.

Activities

The 'Mariñas – Betanzos' Local Action Group has promoted a Sustainable Food Plan to stimulate the production, processing, and consumption of local products through short distribution channels and the promotion of a quality label. To achieve this, a participatory design, definition, and development process brought together local farmers, agri-food industries, distribution companies, consumer groups, restaurants, the hotel and catering industry, research centers, foundations, and the public administration.

The development of the quality label acted as a central point for many of the programme's activities, which include: encouraging producers to engage in agro-ecological transformation, promoting the use of abandoned agricultural land, encouraging the installation of wildlife refuges on certified farms, and 'recovering' local varieties of fruit and vegetables.

Also, under the umbrella of the quality label brand, the project piloted the Eco Comedores Programme in three school canteens. Its aim was to test the financial viability of reducing animal protein in the lunch menu, in favour of vegetable protein and to increase the consumption of organic, seasonal, and local products in school canteens, without placing additional costs on schools and families. The operating structure and network of contacts built during this pilot project has allowed the LAG to identify producers according to the type of product, season, etc.

The fact of having its own quality mark has also been a stimulus for the development of ecotourism, with producers, caterers, hotel, and service companies choosing to adhere to the brand's sustainability requirements for water, waste management, and the use of renewable energy. The LAG is now working with these companies to calculate - and then reduce and/or offset - their CO2 footprint in protected areas in order to achieve emission-neutral tourist areas.

Main Results

The initiative has resulted in the creation of six new organic farms; two nurseries for agricultural entrepreneurship; a network of restaurants that supply local products; the offer of 35 plots for land exchange; the installation of 33 nesting boxes for birds, 18 shelters for bats and eight hotels for insects; and the development of local markets across six municipalities.

The Eco Comedores programme has brought together 12 schools and reached more than 2 000 children. With increased awareness among school management, catering staff, parents' associations, and teachers, there is now greater support for the programme and more collective effort to meet its objectives.

With greater synergies between agri-food production and the biosphere reserve, the growth of the service economy has brought the city of A Coruña closer to its rural environs. An example of this is the "Territorio Atlántico": a group of restaurants committed to devoting two weeks a year to using only products from the Biosphere Reserve.

Key lessons

An important lesson learned by the LAG has been that of patience: the management of ambitious, multi-agency partnership projects such as the Food Plan requires time and commitment. Success has been underpinned by over 10 years of consistent strategy actions to understand local interests, needs and sensitivities. This has generated trust across the territory as a whole and allowed the LAG to develop a comprehensive environmental, agrarian, economic, social, touristic, and administrative vision.

One of the key cost factors of the transition from conventional to organic production was not related to the products themselves, but rather, the logistics of the distribution process where no organised network of local suppliers previously existed.

“The continuity of the Local Action Groups is essential to keep projects such as the Food Plan alive. If this learning process is broken, it will take another 20 years to build society and recover knowledge.”

LAG member

Additional sources of information

n/a