

MALTA

Restructuring and
developing physical
potential and promoting
innovation

Location

Gozo

Programming period

2007 – 2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 1 - Improving the competitiveness of the agricultural and forestry sector

Measure

M124 - Cooperation for development of new products, processes and technologies in agriculture

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 164 633
EAFRD 51 192
National/Regional 17 064
Private 96 377

Project duration

2015 – 2015

Project promoter

Magro Group S.A.

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Website

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Local farmers and agro-processors came together to carry out this research project to test and develop a niche product.

Summary

Summer in Malta is synonymous with the production of tomatoes. In particular those for processing and most of this produce is exported across Europe. Thorough checks are undertaken and this leads to considerable amounts of waste due to damaged tomatoes or those which do not fulfil certain standards. As most farmers do not see an alternative, unutilised tomatoes were discarded as waste.



This project builds on an innovative idea to use the discarded produce by transforming it into tomato vinegar. Local farmers and agro-processors came together to carry out a research project to test and develop this niche product so that it can be effectively placed on the market, once its commercial viability has been established.

Results

Transformation of a waste by-product into a niche gourmet quality product.

This innovation helps preserve jobs in the farming and agro-food sector.

The producer group gained a stronger positioning by consolidating its representation of the tomato-producing farmers.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ In order to remain competitive it is important for farmers to innovate and find alternative ways to develop new business opportunities.
- ❑ One of the key lessons learnt through this project was that by developing mutual trust and confidence amongst the actors in the food supply chain, they started to recognise the potential business opportunities arising from such a partnership.

Context

Tomato production is one of the key sub-sectors of Maltese agriculture. On average, around 13 000 tonnes of tomatoes are produced annually; the largest share going to the processing industry. Tomatoes represent the main income for a significant number of Maltese farmers. In order to ensure a consistently high value product, thorough checks are undertaken on all tomatoes reaching the processors, starting from the field and continuing at several stages along the production line. As a result considerable amounts of tomatoes are discarded as waste. Most farmers did not have an alternative way to use the unutilised tomatoes.

Objectives

Local farmers and agro-processors initiated a joint research project to test and develop the idea of the niche product of tomato vinegar, which could effectively be placed on the market once its commercial viability was established.

Activities

The project activities started just before the tomato season in May 2015 and went on until the end of November 2015. Various activities were carried out simultaneously such as market research and feasibility studies which also considered aspects of further commercialisation. The main project activities were the following:

Environmental research and field trials on tomato varieties: This activity involved field trails organised jointly by the processors and the producers to identify specific varieties of tomatoes that would be most suitable for this type of production. The tests focussed on plant resistance to disease, drought, productivity and attributes of the fruit itself.

Laboratory testing and analysis of the fermentation process: This activity aimed to establish the technical fermentation process based on the fermentation of crushed fresh tomatoes. It was examined how to keep the fermentation going in order to avoid the risk of spoilage.

Machinery and equipment: Specialised equipment was purchased in addition to other processing machinery already available to carry out trial runs and testing of various processing approaches and product quality.

Market Research and feasibility study: An assessment of potential markets, subsequent share and anticipated penetration of the new product to market in order to demonstrate its economic viability and contribute to the definition of indicators for the marketing strategy was undertaken.

Packaging development: Since gourmet vinegar from Maltese tomatoes is a novel product, the right type of packaging had to be developed to differentiate it from traditional vinegars. Also the right market placement and recommended distribution channels were researched.

Main results

The results achieved through this project can be summarised as followed:

- Transformation of a waste by-product into a niche gourmet quality product;
- Cooperation amongst farmers and agro-processors to pursue this joint research and development initiative;
- Stronger positioning of the producer group by consolidating its representation of the tomato-producing farmers;
- Development of an innovative agro-food product and the manner of processing;
- Development of potential for accessing new niche markets, increased income for farmer and;
- Processors, preservation of jobs in the farming and agro-food sector; and for maintaining agricultural land in good agricultural and environmental conditions.

Key lessons

The project demonstrated that in order to remain competitive in the market, it is important for farmers to innovate and find alternative ways to develop new business opportunities.

One of the key lessons learnt through this project was that by developing mutual trust and confidence amongst the actors in the food supply chain, they started to recognise the potential business opportunities arising from such a partnership. The prevalent negative perception of farmers being exploited by processors decreased. Farmers recognised that both ends could benefit from each other's experiences, commitments and resources and that capacities can be capitalised through cooperation.