

PORTUGAL

Agri-food chain integration & quality

Location
Mértola

Programming period
2014 – 2020

Priority
P3 – Food chain & risk
management

Measure
M16 - Cooperation

Funding (EUR)
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EAFRD 21 145.24
National/Regional 3 731.51
Private 24 876.75

Project duration
2018 – 2018

Project promoter
Câmara Municipal de
Mértola

Contact
[rosindapimenta@cm-
mertola.pt](mailto:rosindapimenta@cm-mertola.pt)

Website
www.cm-mertola.pt

An integrated municipal strategy to build a sustainable development model for the local economy based on the agri-food identity of the territory.

Summary

In an area suffering from demographic decline and low economic potential, 'Mértola Com Gosto' is an integrated municipal strategy for the valorisation of local food production and empowerment of the local community through the progressive implementation of a local-based agri-food system.



Through a series of awareness-raising activities, such as organising events, street markets and workshops, and developing promotional materials, the strategy aimed to revive the agri-food identity of the territory and establish it as one of the pillars for a sustainable development model for the local economy. The project also focus on intergenerational knowledge transfer.

Results

Increased awareness among local people about the need to incorporate local products into their eating habits and the local gastronomic traditions.

High level of participation in the already developed initiatives, namely the street markets and the active involvement of local actors (collectives, association of entrepreneurs) in organising the different activities carried out.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ It is necessary to always develop strategies in partnership with local actors and the community.
- ❑ Avoid complicated approaches, rather develop a simple approach that is appealing and with an accessible language.
- ❑ Take advantage of social dynamics and spaces of social interaction with loyal participants and use them to introduce the themes to be addressed.
- ❑ Adopt a progressive training approach for the various actors involved in local food production, short chains and local markets. People need to be able to gradually decipher the underlying message.
- ❑ Especially in low-density and ageing territories, make sure to include an inter-generational work perspective.

Context

Mértola is a Municipality in the Alentejo region with an area of 1279 km² and a population density of 5 hab / Km². About 35% of its population is over 65 years old. The municipality is faced with an ageing population, along with a particularly weak production and economic structure. The demographic and economic situation resulted into a collective sense of lack of appreciation of the economic, nutritional, cultural and identity potential of local products and their non inclusion in local eating habits. In local canteens, restaurants and local lodgings, as well as stores and supermarkets, the presence of local products is very limited. Small-scale local producers find it very difficult to position themselves both in the local market and abroad. In this context, a movement of consumers that are more demanding and focused on local, seasonal and organic products started to emerge.

Objectives

The objectives of this project were to:

- Promote a local economy that values local products, contributes to the flow of production, strengthens the local economy, ensures the retention of added value in the territory and promotes its sustainable development.
- Raise understanding and empower local consumers to the consumption of local products.
- Stimulate a local, organic, seasonal and Mediterranean food economy in its different phases (production, processing, distribution and consumption).
- Provide intergenerational knowledge transfer by recognising that the senior population has basic knowledge of the production and collection of traditional food.

Activities

The project supported multiple awareness-raising actions to promote the consumption of local, traditional and organic produce.

Promotional events. Four promotional events were organised in the municipal market of Mértola and two in the mine market of S. Domingos. These events included discussions about a theme related to food and local products and then socialising sessions for sharing and tasting local, seasonal food. Indicatively, themes of these events were "Local Eating" (Launch of the International

Campaign on the Slow Food Movement); "Remedies and Medicines from Local Medicinal Plants"; "Traditional Christmas Sweets"; "Super Local Foods"; etc.



Street markets on a specific theme were organised quarterly such as the Mercado Natural; Christmas Market; Rural Market of the XIX Century, etc.

Workshops. The project also financed local community training workshops on the consumption of local products. Themes addressed during these workshops included: awareness and capacity-building sessions for the consumption of local wine; how to prepare and communicate making breakfast using local products; training for local tourist accommodation operators on the integration of local products in the breakfast service; training on the consumption of seasonal products; a workshop to combat food waste; introducing the principles of the Mediterranean diet.

A collection on local gastronomy. Produced an ethnographic collection with text, photos and videos on the local gastronomy. The collection includes recipes, a lexicon and descriptions of the production of local food, from utensils to rituals and festivities. It was prepared by the Senior University of the county of Mértola that identified key people in the community who have the knowledge and know-how on agricultural production, agri-food and traditional cuisine.

Actions for school audiences. In addition to the collection, the project foresees in continuity, its evolution towards an intergenerational educational project where this knowledge will be transmitted in a school context to younger generations. One of such actions included a session to teach school students how to collect and cook wild asparagus.

Promotional material. Another activity carried out was the creation of informative and promotional material, e.g. a shopping guide for local wines and an educational flyer on local food in several languages (PT/ ES/EN/ FR); a shopping bag with the logo "I Buy Local!"; a calendar based on local products; a series of videos about recipes demonstrated at the workshops for online dissemination at www.visitmertola.pt.

Main Results

It is still too early to assess the impact of the project on local consumption patterns. However, awareness has already increased among local people about the need to incorporate local products into their eating habits and the local gastronomic traditions.

The success of the project is reflected by the level of participation in the already developed initiatives, namely the street markets and the active involvement of local actors (collectives, association of entrepreneurs) in organising the different activities carried out.

With regards to local producers it is necessary to continue the effort to raise awareness on the need prepare for and scale up their response to the growing demand for locally produced, organic products.

Key lessons

It is necessary to always develop strategies in partnership with local actors and the community.

Avoid complicated approaches, rather develop a simple approach that is appealing and with an accessible language.

Take advantage of social dynamics and spaces for social interaction with loyal participants and use them to introduce the themes to be addressed.

Adopt a progressive training approach for the various actors involved in local food production, short chains and local markets. People need to be able to gradually decipher the underlying message.

Especially in low-density and ageing territories, make sure to include an inter-generational work perspective.

Additional sources of information

n/a