

SLOVENIA

Restructuring and
developing physical
potential and
promoting innovation

Location

Žiri

Programming period

2007 – 2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 1 – Competitiveness

Measures

M121 – Modernisation of agricultural holdings & M123 - Adding value to agricultural and forestry products

Funding (EUR)*

Total budget 131 615.28
EAFRD 49 355.73
National/regional 16 451.91
Private 65 807.64

Project duration*

2009 – 2015

Project promoter

Germana Pivk

Contact

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* All three RDP funded investments

An old abandoned farm through three separate investments was turned into an orchard with hail protection nets and a building to store the produce and equipment.

Summary

The Pivk family decided to buy an old farm that had been abandoned for 11 years and started fruit growing, which was quite untraditional for the area. Through 3 separate investments, the orchards were set up, hail protection nets were installed and a farm building for storage of fruits, equipment and marketing was constructed at the location of the old hayrack.



Results

Around 30 tonnes of organic apples are grown annually and sold mainly locally directly at the farm holding;

2.5 ha of fruit orchards with 6 000 apple trees were set up, all equipped with hail protection nets;

The whole production is sold already before Christmas.

With own funds additional 1.5 ha of the traditional high-trunk meadow orchard have been renewed.

Lessons & Recommendations

- It is important that decisions are taken in agreement of all involved parties and the long-term perspective and vision are clear;
- Demand for locally produced organic food seems to be increasing and this constitute an opportunity for investments in the primary sector.
- Being able to do direct selling from the farm is very cost efficient in terms of logistics and storage costs.

Context

The Blaževc Homestead is located in a very small hilly village of Izgorje at 650 m of altitude. The village is part of the Municipality of Žiri in the Upper Gorenjska region, western Slovenia.

The main reason why Germana Pivk decided along with her family to purchase the abandoned farm holding was because her mother used to live there and she remembers spending much time there as a child. The farm was owned by her uncle and after he passed away, his daughter who lived in America inherited it. However she decided to sell it after some years. The Pivk family invested all their savings and was supported by close relatives to be able to purchase the estate.

Germana Pivk works as agricultural advisor and has always been interested in fruit growing. Although the main farming activity in the area is livestock breeding, the family decided for fruit production, which was quite unusual for the area that only knew high-trunk meadow orchards. She studied the configuration of the terrain, the climate conditions and learned about similar fruit growing terrains in the Dolomites which encouraged her to realise her plans, despite the scepticism that was expressed by many surrounding farmers.

Objectives

The overall long-term objective was to modernise the farm estate and bring it back into production. The specific objectives were to carry out farm restructuring into organic fruit growing, which required:

- Setting up new plantations for apple growing;
- Setting up of hail protection nets; and
- Construction of the farm building to store equipment and the crop.

Activities

The investments were made in three phases.

The first phase concerned the preparation of the orchard and planting the first 3 000 apple trees. Germana attended several trade fairs and talked to experts to decide which would be the most appropriate apple varieties that would grow well on her farm and that would have a good taste. Thus she decided to choose from the modern and more resistant apple varieties: Topaz, Opal, Luna, Rubinola. This phase started in 2009 and was supported under M121. The planted orchard is 1.3 ha in gross and 1.1 ha in net surface.

In the second phase, in 2013, the owners applied to M123 for a construction of a building to store the farm equipment, and also to store and market the apples. The old hayrack on the farm that did not serve its purpose anymore, however it presented a valuable piece of the farm architecture. In cooperation with the Institute for conservation of cultural heritage a common solution on how to preserve these elements of the cultural heritage was found. The most valuable parts of the hayrack were preserved and integrated in the construction of the new building and thus partly preserving its external image.

Finally, in 2014, when already promising results were shown in the first plantation, the Pivk family decided to extend its production and applied once more for the RDP support under the same measure. Another 1.2 ha in gross (1.0 ha net) surface was prepared and planted with another 3 000 apple trees (Merkur, Topaz, Luna) and protected with the hail nets.

The family invested a lot of own work in the soil preparation. As much as possible they used own materials for setting up of the orchard, such as wood for the construction of the fence around the orchards and the poles holding the hail nets.

The total investment is estimated at 206 000 EUR. For the construction project, only part of expenditure related to ensuring space for storage of fruits and marketing was eligible for co-financing from RDP M123.



“The support from the RDP was of great assistance in development of our farm and we are grateful for having this possibility. We made a breakthrough in the area and proved that fruit can be grown as in typical fruit growing areas. One needs knowledge, financial means and courage - and to be prepared to work hard.”

Germana Pivk

Main Results

- The project supported setting up 2.5 ha (gross surface) of fruit orchards with 6 000 apple trees, all equipped with hail protection nets;
- Both fruit plantations are now close to optimum yields. Around 30 tonnes of organic apples are grown annually and sold mainly locally directly at the farm holding;
- The lower part of the new building serves for storage of the equipment and the upper parts is used for the storage of apples. Fortunately, they were so far able to sustain good storage conditions without investment in cooling facilities. On the other hand, they manage to sell the apples already before Christmas. However, with the expected increase in yield from the 2nd plantation they will need to ensure cooling capacities and also find new marketing channels;
- Part of the yield are sold locally to schools. The farm from time to time takes part at local markets or events to promote themselves. They were also happy to host children from local kindergartens and teach them about the apple growing and fruit processing;
- The family decided to transfer the farm to the daughter who has also entered the young farmers measure. She is now responsible for the promotion and marketing, while the parents still look over the technological part. All decisions on further investments are taken jointly;
- All family members are still employed outside farm and also live outside the farm. The old house needs to be renovated as well. In the future, they intend to start a supplementary activity on farm linked with education and training;
- With own funds additional 1.5 ha of the traditional high-trunk meadow orchard have been renewed as well. They also experiment with different sorts of vegetable production.

Key lessons

- The family was prepared to invest practically everything into reviving of the farm, what takes not only hard work besides the regular job in town, but also courage and determination in achieving the set plans. What was important is that decisions were taken in agreement of all family members and the long-term perspective and vision were clear;
- When deciding for the restructuring of the production it is important to take into account the overall conditions for production, the time needed for the reconstruction as well as to examine the marketing potential. Climate change effects were taken into account in several ways; they opted for resilient varieties and invested in the protection from hail. On the other hand, they could notice in recent years that the time-lag between the start of flowering period in traditional apple growing regions and in the local area of the farm has shortened, what is assumed to be linked with the climate changes. However, they could not avoid the damage from frost that practically covered the entire country early in 2017, what will also negatively effect the farm income;
- Trends in increased demand for locally produced organic food are favourable. This farm is able to sell practically everything in a relatively short time from the home door what is beneficial in terms of logistics and storage costs.



Additional sources of information

www.facebook.com/Ekološka-domačija-Blaževc-153495734841788/