

## SLOVENIA

### Biodiversity's restoration, & preservation & enhancement

#### Location

Vučja Vas

#### Programming period

2014 – 2020

#### Priority

P4 – Ecosystems  
management

#### Measure

M11 – Organic farming

#### Funding (EUR)\*

Total budget 1 089.18  
EAFRD 871.34  
National/Regional 217.84

#### Project duration

2017 – 2022

#### Project promoter

Grily Naturae – kmetija  
Osterc

#### Contact

[matej.osterc@gmail.com](mailto:matej.osterc@gmail.com)

#### Website

[https://najdistoritev.si/iskaln  
ik/izdelki-iz-sivke/](https://najdistoritev.si/iskaln<br/>ik/izdelki-iz-sivke/)

\* Payments for 2017 & 2018

A family farm converted to organic lavender farming in order to diversify their offer of products and services in an environmentally sustainable way.

### Summary

The Osterc farm is located in the village of Vučja Vas, north-eastern Slovenia, and has been managed by the family for over five generations. In recent years, they decided to convert to eco-friendly farming and use this as a catalyst for increasing their revenue and getting closer to their local community and customers. In spring 2016, they planted their first batch of lavender and in 2017 the lavender plantation started receiving RDP support for organic farming.

The family farm used the organic lavender production as a basis to enhance and diversify the range of products and services they offer, making a series of investments using their own savings.



### Results

Investments in organic lavender production have enabled the farm to create a new range of products (e.g. cosmetic products, dried flowers used in cooking or for decoration, cider vinegar seasoned with lavender, etc.) as well as a programme of hands-on experiences for customers. The farm organises events related to the lavender plantation including soap-making workshops and distillation process demonstrations; a festival; lavender yoga and meditation classes; a lavender Family Day; lavender photography and cuisine courses.

The farm increased its revenue by at least 100%. As the plantation is still young, its fertility is expected to increase over time, leading to increased volumes of lavender and lavender products.

### Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Marketing, cooperation and networking are fundamental in order to improve the farm's visibility and increase people's awareness of high-quality, organic products.

## Context

The Osterc family have been cultivating their land in the village of Vučja Vas, north-eastern Slovenia, for over five generations. In recent years, they decided to abandon cattle farming since they wanted to diversify, become more eco-friendly and get closer to their local community and customers. The farm continues its pig breeding, crop production and viticulture, but in spring 2016 they planted their first lavender plants. Today, they grow as many as 1 350 lavender plants spread over 0.28 hectares of land. The farm grows the species *Lavandula angustifolia* which is resilient and suitable for Slovenia's continental climate, as it can withstand temperatures as low as -25 °C.

No fertilisers are used in their organic plantation. In spring, when the lavender is trimmed, the small twigs that remain are left in the field to decompose next to the plants, thus forming a natural fertiliser. White clover is planted between the rows of lavender to provide bees with additional pollen during the flowering period. Since lavender is very resilient to pests and diseases, the plantation is completely organic. At the same time, mulching the clover helps create additional organic matter (humus) in the lavender plantation.

## Objectives

Converting to organic farming has enabled the farm to diversify its economic activity and increase its revenue, thus improving its competitiveness while protecting the environment.

## Activities

After becoming aware of the opportunities offered from growing lavender, Matej Osterc, studied lavender farming and attended various consultations and lavender festivals in Slovenia and abroad. He also established contact with a Hungarian eco-certified provider of seedlings, from whom he got the first seedlings he planted in March 2016. The farm started to receive its five-year RDP support for organic farming of the lavender plantation in 2017.

Organic lavender farming has opened up a new range of business opportunities for the farm. The lavender is harvested by hand in July and the main products are lavender water (hydrosol), obtained during the distillation process, and essential oil extracted in the subsequent separation process.

Lavender oil is used by the farm to produce various cosmetic products like soap, lip balm, deodorants, nurturing and massage oil. It is one of the few essential oils that can be applied directly to the skin and is useful for preventing and relieving insect bites, alleviating migraines, soothing nerves, scenting rooms and cooking. The hydrosol is used in cosmetics, in cooking, for soothing sunburnt skin, ironing, or scenting a room before sleeping.

The whole plant (stem, leaves, flowers) is used, however, some essential oil remains in the plant residues. These leftovers are not discarded by the farm, but dried and then used in the lavender plantation as weed-preventing mulch or as pig litter in the pigsties. The pigs enjoy rolling and lying in it and the family have noticed that this has a beneficial calming effect on the animals and prevents them from attacking each other. In this respect, lavender leftovers contribute positively to other activities carried out by the farm under measure M14 - Animal Welfare.

The lavender flowers with their stems and leaves are picked by hand, tied into bouquets and dried naturally. The farm produces flowers which are carefully dried in such a way that they remain food-safe and are suitable as ingredients in making pastries, homemade cured pork salami, lavender juice, etc. Class II flowers are used in scented sachets, pillows and as miscellaneous decoration. Leftover parts such as dry stems and larger leaves are used in masonry plaster for facades, floor foundations and inside plasterwork, as they improve the bonding of the plaster and mildly scent the rooms plastered with lavender residues.

The farm also produces homemade cider vinegar made from apples grown in its organic orchard and some of it is seasoned with lavender. The remaining apple pulp is added to pig feed. Pigs then produce manure, which is added in autumn to the soil in the apple orchard.

Lavender sprigs are also added to sweeten wines produced by the family's vineyard. They add a unique note to the wine, which makes it perfect for special occasions.

There is a total of 27 bee colonies on the farm, six of which are kept in a smaller apiary in the lavender field itself, providing the farm with homemade lavender honey.

The investment built around the organic lavender production used the farm's own savings and amounted to approximately EUR 30 000. This included purchasing the seedlings and the machinery for the processing and production. The investment is not yet completely amortised and according to the family's calculations, it will take five years for the investment to start generating a profit. Nevertheless, the family members enjoy this work, especially since they make a positive contribution to the environment.

## Main Results

Investments in organic lavender production have enabled the farm to create a new range of products (e.g. cosmetic products, dried flowers used in cooking or for decoration, cider vinegar seasoned with lavender, etc.) as well as a programme of hands-on experiences for customers. The farm organises events related to the lavender plantation including soap-making workshops and distillation process demonstrations, a festival, lavender yoga and meditation classes, a lavender Family Day, lavender photography and cuisine courses.

The farm increased its revenue by at least one 100%. As the plantation is still young, its fertility is expected to increase over time, leading to increased volumes of produced lavender and lavender products.



## Key lessons

Marketing, cooperation and networking are fundamental to improving the farm's visibility and increasing people's awareness of high-quality organic lavender products.

The farm, along with other farms in the Pomurje region, are part of the Pristno Pomursko association, through which they advertise, explore the market, share tourism connections, participate in fairs and events, share agricultural machines, sell their crops, etc. The farm is also a member of the Prlekija Local Action Group.

The farm's products are offered in local stores across the wider region and they cooperate with other eco-oriented producers. They participated in the project 'Inovativni mladi kmet' meaning 'Innovative young farmer', which was won by a neighbouring and good business partner, the Paldauf Farm.

There are quite a few organic farmers in the village. More than 30% of the farmland around the village is cultivated in an eco-friendly way. The farm is in the process of registering with the Vučja vas Ecological Association, which will allow for new opportunities in marketing and participation in fairs and events in other regions across Slovenia, as well as abroad.

The farm tries to be as active as possible in the local area and beyond. They are cooperating with regional thermal spas (Banovci, Radenci, Mala Nedelja, Terme 3000), with which they have organised a project for visits to the lavender plantation during blooming season, giving the spa clients an opportunity to take photos and collect bouquets of lavender.

## Additional sources of information

<https://www.facebook.com/Grily-Naturae-153804245186811/>  
[www.youtube.com/watch?v=gexa1EYFEao](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gexa1EYFEao)