

Kalocsa Irrigation Communities

Hungarian irrigation initiative harvests the benefits of farm cooperation.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Kalocsa, Hungary

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P5 – Resource efficiency & climate

Focus Area: Water use efficiency

Measures: M04 – Investments in physical assets

Funding:

Total budget	1 000 000.00 (EUR)
EAFRD	640 000.00 (EUR)
National/Regional	160 000.00 (EUR)
Private	200 000.00 (EUR)

Timeframe: 2021 to 2024

Project promoter: Kalocsa Irrigation Communities

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Summary

The region in Kalocsa in Southern Hungary is famous for its red pepper cultivation, yet production is declining and the old existing irrigation system near the city of Kalocsa, was not used anymore by many farmers. A role model farmer brought together peers to establish the 'Kalocsa Irrigation Community North and South Limited' with 38 members managing nearly 700 ha of productive land. The irrigation communities have received CAP funding for the maintenance and expansion of their irrigation networks.

Project results

The main results are:

- Doubling the size of irrigated area in just one year (from 300 ha to 600 ha).
- The operation of a central office for the irrigation communities covering management purposes and other agricultural consulting tasks for a period of three years.
- The creation of two full-time and two part-time positions, as well as one contracted position (manager, secretary, accountant, lawyer, driver).

Lessons & Recommendations

Changing perceptions and ways of operating from a competitive to a cooperative approach in farming requires determination and effort. However, persistent work and commitment can help inspire useful outcomes.

Context

When in 2020, the Ministry of Agriculture approved a new law promoting the creation and operation of irrigation communities, Tamás Szigeti had an idea. He lives near the city of Kalocsa in southern Hungary, a region that is famous for its red pepper cultivation, particularly for its ground red pepper production that received the «Protected Designation of Origin» label in 2010. 60% of the domestic red pepper production originates from this area in Hungary. However, production is declining due to the high water-demands of the plants and resulting high costs.

While in 1960 an extensive irrigation system covered approximately 4 000 ha of the land in Bática, Miske, Dusnok, and Fajsz, very few farmers are still using the system today. Tamás thought that with the new funding support in place, the old irrigation system could become viable again and help stop the decline in production.

Despite an initial mistrust and resistance of farmers to the idea, Tamás persevered and, after nearly two years, managed to convince enough people about the benefits of cooperation. As a result, two irrigation communities were created in 2021 under the name of 'the Kalocsa Irrigation Community North and South Limited'. Tamás is managing director and there are 38 members (both legal entities and individual farmers) covering nearly 700 ha of productive land.

The Kalocsa Irrigation Community was one of the first irrigation communities to be approved under the new law in Hungary. Since then, 144 further communities have been established.

Objectives

The main objectives of the project were to increase the economic viability of managing and improving the operations of the irrigation communities and thereby sustaining the red pepper production by:

- Reducing the high operating costs, the rising energy prices, and the high investment costs.
- Increasing the efficiency and safety of agricultural production.
- Increasing the size of irrigated area.



- Increasing product and income security.
- Improving the resilience of agriculture to climate change

Activities

The first phase of activities concerned the initial strengthening of cooperation between the farmers, who were competing with each other. Overcoming these issues and developing the new irrigation communities took Tamás nearly two years. After the irrigation communities were established, the CAP funding applications for their up-keep and investment for new equipment could now be prepared and submitted. Hungary's Rural Development Programme allowed for two types of projects:

- Operation and maintenance projects that support the ongoing core costs of irrigation communities (such as overheads, maintenance, human resources) with an intervention rate of 90% and up to a maximum of 250 000 euros per community over three years.
- Investment projects for equipment and tools. Here, the intervention rate was different for applications from individual farmers (50%) and for applications from communities (up to 70%).

The decision of how best to apply for funding to get the best possible support was already taken into consideration during the first phase of activities. Here, the fact that the funding for maintenance costs was restricted to one applicant per application, gave rise to the idea of setting up two irrigation companies (one for the northern and one for the southern part of the area of Kalocsa). Thereby two applicants were created, thus doubling the funding available. This separation into two companies was an acceptable decision for the authorities since the Kalocsa Irrigation Community covers a relatively large area and has one of the largest memberships in the country. Hence, two operation and maintenance applications were developed and submitted.

In addition, five applications were made for the investment-type project strand of the programme, of which three applications have received funding support so far.

Purchase of irrigation equipment such as drums, consoles, and linear sprinklers for 12 farmers covering a total area of 60 ha.

Main results

The main results so far are:

- Doubling the size of irrigated area in just one year (from 300 ha to 600 ha).
- Operation of a central office for the irrigation communities covering management activities and other agricultural consulting tasks for a period of three years.

- Creation of two full-time and two part-time positions, as well as one contracted position (manager, secretary, accountant, lawyer, driver)

The water is dispersed through new sprinkler technology: linear, irrigation drum, and conventional sprinklers irrigating field vegetables (peppers, cabbages, sweet corn, dill, potatoes) and cereals (wheat, sunflower, rapeseed). One of the key results of the project, which may show itself more prominently in the long-term, is the halting and eventual reversal of the decline in pepper cultivation. While still small, in comparison to the total size of the area (4 000 ha), the community believes that irrigation will continue to increase. At the moment, there are an additional seven farmers interested in joining.

Furthermore, an unexpected result occurred: the community was approached to participate in an Interreg project. If successful, parts of the project might fund the installation of a meteorological station aiming to optimise costs and further promote irrigation farming.

Key lessons

Changing perceptions and ways of operating from a competitive to a cooperative approach in farming requires determination and effort. However, persistent work and commitment shows good results. Since the Kalocsa irrigation community has been operating, useful and inspiring results have been achieved.

Additional information:

www.facebook.com/kalocsaontozesikozosseg

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