

Business development through an innovative, 24/7, safe form of selling natural local products

An easily accessible, cash-free, fruit vending machine establishes a holistic approach to healthy living, business development, and good relations with the local community.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Rabowice, Poland

Programming period: 2014–2020

Priority: P6 – Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: Local development

Measures: M19 – LEADER CLLD

Funding:

RDP contribution:	11 085 (EUR)
EAFRD:	3 373 (EUR)
National/Regional:	1 928 (EUR)
Private/own:	5 784 (EUR)

Timeframe: 04/03/2022 – 02/03/2023

Project promoter: Apple Valley Karolina Dębska - Zeidler

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Summary

During the pandemic, the owner of a farm shop in Rabowice near Swarzędz in Poland had a new business idea. Although direct contact with customers ceased and shops were closed, the project enabled the business to continue serving the local community with an uninterrupted supply of fresh farm produce. This enabled the business to grow and contribute positively to the environment and the health of its local customers. The project involved the installation of a cash-free fruit vending machine that provided 24/7 access to local products, such as fresh fruits and fruit preserves.

The vending machine is powered by photovoltaic panels, providing the right temperature for storing fresh fruit. It is located in a public space in the village, and is accessible at any time of the day / night, including in crisis situations. It also suits the different working hours of local residents, who appreciate the convenience of the service.



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Project results

- Improved customer service was established in the village, whereby the community has 24/7 access to fresh, healthy food products.
- Sales growth was estimated at approximately 14% per year.
- Many customers were attracted to the business thanks to the fruit vending machine.
- The project has been replicated in other areas in Poland.

Key lessons and recommendations

The project strengthened customer relations, as customers appreciated the vending machine as a service designed for them. The unlimited access to food products accommodates flexible working hours / shift workers when other shops are closed.

Context

In 1975, the Dębski family founded an orchard in Rabowice near Swarzędz, Poland. Since 1996, the orchard management has applied the Integrated Production (IP) methodology, which is confirmed and awarded with a certificate each year.



In 1999, the farm opened a store selling the fruit from its orchard, in order to establish a closer relationship with the local community. A non-agricultural business was founded, named Apple Valley Karolina Dębska-Zeidler, with the aim of increasing the range of products sold. The business processes the fruits from the orchard on-farm, and produces apple mousses, fruit juices and jams. These products represent low-processed, healthy foods, with no sugar added.

The business is committed to promoting healthy nutritional habits, such as eating fresh fruit, in particular apples. The business owner organises tours of her orchard for community groups, including children. The business operates as a socially responsible business, engaging in local initiatives and building relationships with customers.

During the pandemic, the store and all community-related activities needed to stop, leaving the local community without direct access to the healthy product range offered by the farm. The idea was born to provide local customers with continuous access to fruit and fruit preserves, even if restrictions were to apply due to a crisis situation, such as COVID-19. The solution was to sell the products through a vending machine.

Objectives

The main objective of the project was to increase the availability of local farm produce on offer to customers through an innovative selling method, as an alternative to direct sales. The innovation of products being for sale 24/7 aimed to foster company growth by increasing turnover. In particular, the project aimed at maintaining company development during the pandemic years.

Activities

Project activities included:

- Preparing the site for machine installation.
- Purchasing the fruit vending machine.
- Installing the fruit vending machine in an accessible and public space (in front of a store in the village of Rabowice).
- Preparing the range of products from the farm on offer in the fruit vending machine: natural juices in cartons and bottles, apple mousses, jams, roasted and fresh apples.

Main results

- One fruit vending machine with 51 cabinets installed.
- An improved customer service was established in the village, whereby the community has 24/7 access to fresh, healthy food products. This increased the number of customers.
- Sales growth was estimated at approximately 14% per year.
- User-friendly, convenient, cash-free payment process available.
- Use of green energy to power the vending machine.
- Many customers were attracted to the business thanks to the fruit vending machine.
- The project has been replicated in other areas in Poland.

Key lessons and recommendations

- The project strengthened customer relations, as customers appreciate the vending machine as a service designed for them. The unlimited access to food products accommodates flexible working hours / shift workers when other shops are closed.
- At a low cost, the company can improve its image and customer trust, while simultaneously taking care of the climate: the fruit vending machine is powered by a photovoltaic installation, and people buy the product close to their homes, which in turn reduces their carbon footprint.
- The unlimited access to healthy farm produce in the fruit vending machine builds mutual trust between the business and its customers.

Additional information:

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