

Food routes in Emilia-Romagna - a capacity building and promotion tool

LEADER organises capacity building and promotional activities to strengthen the role of regional 'food routes' as a tool for integrated rural development in disadvantaged areas.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: LAG Del Ducato territory, Italy

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P6 - Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: Local development

Measures: M19 - LEADER CLLD

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EAFRD: 41 376 (EUR)

National/Regional: 54 624 (EUR)

Timeframe: 06/2020 - 09/2021

Project promoter: LAG Del Ducato S.CON.S.R.L.

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Summary

'Food routes' have been created in several countries to promote local agricultural specialties and attract visitors to the countryside. The Del Ducato LAG operates on the high hills of the Parma and Piacenza provinces in the Emilia-Romagna region. In this LAG's territory there are three such food routes: 'Ham & Wine of the Parma Hills', 'Porcino Mushrooms of Borgotaro' and 'Wines & Flavours of the Piacenza Hills'. In order to revitalise these food trails, the territory's LAG organised a series of capacity building activities for local stakeholders and produced promotional materials for the three visitor routes under a common brand identity.

Project results

- The project improved the management of the three food routes by fostering closer collaboration between local stakeholders.
- The number of participating entities has increased by approximately 20% on each route.

Key lessons and recommendations

Food routes can play a central role in strengthening local identity and attracting visitors to a territory. However, their success relies upon strong cooperation and coordination between local stakeholders.

Context

Between the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the 21st century, several Italian regions set up food routes to help attract and direct visitor income. These routes connected local producers of typical specialties, including wine, olive oil, cheese, etc. The food routes play an important role in attracting visitors to the interior and less-well-known areas of Italy, and this was the case for the Emilia Romagna region, which in 2000 approved a specific law to enable this type of initiative.

However, over time, the food routes lost much of their original appeal, and with dwindling visitor numbers, their future viability came into question.





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The Del Ducato LAG operates on the high hills of the Parma and Piacenza provinces and has three food routes in its territory - 'Ham & Wine of the Parma Hills', 'Porcino Mushrooms of Borgotaro' and 'Wines & Flavours of the Piacenza Hills'. The LAG decided to make these routes a focal point of the territory's re-vitalisation strategy.

Objectives

The aims of this project were to re-think the route's role and organization to create a stronger base for successful local development. This would:

- Reinforce and re-launch the three existing food routes of the LAG's territory.
- Build, according to a bottom-up approach, a common strategy for communication and marketing of the three food routes under a unified brand.
- Foster stronger operational links between the bodies that manage the three food routes.
- Increase trust among local operators about the value and potential of the food routes.

Activities

Project activities included:

- Starting up a dialogue among the participants of the three food routes - mainly private operators like farms and agrotourism businesses, but also municipalities and public consortia - with a view to building a common strategy. Some 60 public and private operators were involved.
- Defining a programme of promotional online and live events at a regional scale, which would encompass all three food routes. The programme included 12 webinars, four cooking show events, and eight food and wine tastings.
- Organising three awareness-raising events and three capacity building meetings addressed to the food operators of the three routes, which also involved representatives of the regional authority.
- Designing and producing promotional materials under a common brand identity for all three food routes. In total, the project produced one common logo, 11 000 map guides of the three routes, four roll ups, 6 000 windows stickers, 10 500 paper placemats and 10 videos. The common brand was also aligned with and incorporated into the regional 'Destinazione Turistica Emilia' programme.

Main results

- Overall, the project has improved the management of the three food routes by fostering closer collaboration between public and private operators and by involving younger operators.
- The number of participating entities has increased by approximately 20% on each route.
- Representatives of each route now sit on the board of the 'Destinazione Turistica Emilia' promotional programme.

Key lessons and recommendations

- The project enabled a clearer description of the benefits and potential of the food routes in line with the current regional law (dating from 2000). This has fostered greater recognition of and support for the three food trails, whose success was stifled in the past due to unclear and burdensome administrative requirements, uncertainty about their economic viability and an overall management approach that favoured competition rather than cooperation.





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- When re-examined, in terms of their potential for uniting local economic operators around a common strategy and as a tool for strengthening local identity, the food roads can still play a key role in promoting traditional, high-quality food specialties - which are known to create a sound and strong basis for sustainable tourism.

Quote

“The project clearly highlighted the need for local operators to be assisted by a common and skilled technical management, often lacking in these initiatives. It also demonstrated that raising quality standards of the organised events can attract a relevant audience, willing to pay for them. Finally, the project represented just the first step towards a constant reflection and improvement of the Food routes as a tool for integrated rural development.”

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