

The 'Friül di mieç' District of Solidarity Economy - Setting up a short supply chain for organic wheat

Italian short supply chain for producing and marketing organic wheat combines social, economic, and environmental benefits.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Udine, Italy

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P3 - Food chain and risk management

Focus Area: Agri-food chain integration & quality

Measures: M16 - Cooperation

Funding: Total budget: 250 635 (EUR)

EAFRD: 21 286 (EUR)

National/Regional: 28 079 (EUR)

Private/own: 139 070 (EUR)

Other sources: 62 200 (EUR)

Timeframe: 01/03/2017 - 01/09/2018

Project promoter: Società Cooperativa Agricola di Comunità Località San Marco

Email: info@des-mediofriuli.it



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Summary

The District of Solidarity Economy was an experimental short supply chain established to respond to consumer demand for locally produced food, while also promoting social inclusion and environmental protection. This project brought together four municipal administrations with producers, processors and researchers. Their collaboration addressed all aspects of an organic wheat production supply chain, starting from the cultivation of ancient grain varieties, storage and milling, packaging, processing in bakeries, and marketing to the consumer.

Project results

- The project successfully established the 'District of Solidarity Economy' short supply chain, which increased the income of all economic actors involved.
- There are 16 bakeries and 36 local shops that sell bakery products using the flour produced by DES.
- Five people have found employment in the short supply chain.

Key lessons and recommendations

- Short supply chains are important for rural areas, as they bring not only economic benefits, but also promote solidarity and contribute to local food security.
- A successful short supply chain needs to be based on the cooperation and collective responsibility of the different actors in the chain, who work together towards set objectives, motivated by cooperation instead of competition.



Context

In the central Friuli region, some agri-food sector companies approached their public administration to raise the issue of strengthening local short supply chains in order to also strengthen the area's social fabric. In the context of the current socio-economic crisis, the social cooperative of the San Marco community decided to establish an innovative production process based on the principles of solidarity. Their solidarity economy model is based on the need to connect communities to the places where they live; support the local economy in an active relationship with its territory; and to protect the landscape and common goods as essential components for quality of life.

Objectives

Through research and cooperation, the project aimed to consolidate local socio-economic relations through a short supply chain to create employment opportunities for people in need; provide a fair rate of pay for producers and inform consumers about the quality of local products; and promote sustainable land management.



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Activities

Project activities included:

- Setting up the 'District of Solidarity Economy' (DES) supply chain, which consists of companies producing organic cereals from ancient grains that are typical of the area, flour stone mills that process the grain, and bakeries that use the flour. The DES also set up a series of sales points, and organises a public information campaign which informs consumers about the origin and quality of the locally produced flours. The University of Udine (Uniu) and the Italian Association for Organic Agriculture (AIAB) supported



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the initiative with consultancy and development services relating to the validation and launch of the product.

- Implementing and managing the operational and logistical aspects of this innovation project, which involved the production, storage, milling, packaging, processing, promotion and marketing of organic wheat products.
- Evaluating the quality of the wheat by examining the total proteins (Kjeldahl method) and the rheological properties of the dough (pharynographic analysis). Ancient grains are cereals that were grown before the so-called 'green revolution'. These grains contain a low percentage of gluten compared to those defined as modern, as in these types of grains the presence of gluten is counterbalanced by starch. Furthermore, the gluten contained in ancient wheats is naturally more easily digestible. However, because of their softness, ancient grains are more difficult to process. For this reason, a phase of research and development was necessary to improve the characteristics of the grains and flours in order to facilitate their processing without impacting upon their unique characteristics.
- Collecting and sharing good practices. The research partners (Uniu, and TEC4I FVG) organised meetings and study visits for the farms and producers involved in the project.
- Monitoring and evaluation of the supply chain set-up and the DSE.
- Establishing an educational programme in collaboration with AIAB which was offered to comprehensive schools throughout the territory. The programme involved five meetings with actors in the supply chain in order to establish further collaboration and exchanges.
- Creating promotional print material as part of a communications campaign to raise awareness during the project, and a digital and printed 'project legacy' booklet to share the outcomes and findings.



- > Organising 13 open public meetings to enable citizens to hear from expert speakers on the subject of solidarity economies and short supply chains.
- > Creating and managing a website to disseminate information about the project.



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Main results

- > The project successfully established the DSE short supply chain, which consists of 15 farms, 16 bakeries and 36 local shops, and produces flour and sells bakery products made from ancient grains to consumers. The income of all parties has increased thanks to the project.
- > As a result of this project new partnerships were established and new financing was secured. Thanks to the support of local stakeholders, a community bakery was opened which is directly managed by the new cooperative.
- > 37 800 kg of flour were produced in the first year of production.
- > Five people have found employment in the cooperative. One of whom, thanks to a collaboration with the prison of Trieste, is hired by the bakery to work normal shifts before returning to prison each day. In addition to this inclusive employment initiative, one holder of international protection with disabilities joined the cooperative for a six-month internship.

Key lessons and recommendations

- > Short supply chains can play a key role in developing a sense of community and solidarity, as well as ensuring food security.
- > The implementation of this project demonstrated that the local dimension should always be taken into account when promoting cultivation practices and production techniques that protect the environment and preserve and/or promote biodiversity.
- > The cooperative underlined the importance of creating synergies and collaborations between the agricultural sector and the sectors of culture, art, expressive skills, food & wine and tourism.
- > A successful short supply chain needs to be based on the cooperation and collective responsibility of the different actors in the chain, who work together towards set objectives, motivated by cooperation instead of competition.

Quote

"This project is not just flour and bread, it is made by the smiles of the people who work with us, who follow us and who support us. It's the search for the best for ourselves and for the community we're in."

Società Cooperativa Agricola di Comunità Località San Marco

Additional information:

www.des-mediofriuli.it/

www.facebook.com/PANeFARINE

<https://youtu.be/MoGHvGxGuxk>



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