

The first EU project experience for blooming Latvia

Horticultural investment project creates new jobs in climate-friendly production systems.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Mārupes municipality, Latvia

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P2 - Competitiveness

Focus Area: Farm performance, restructuring & modernisation

Measures: M04 - Investments in physical assets

Funding:	Total budget	1 690 000 (EUR)
	EAFRD	374 000 (EUR)
	National/Regional	176 000 (EUR)
	Private/own	1 140 000 (EUR)

Timeframe: 10/2022 - 03/2024

Project promoter: Onava Ltd.

Email: vilnis@onaval.lv



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Summary

Three new jobs and climate benefits resulted from EUR 550 000 of Rural Development Programme (RDP) co-funding provided for a family horticultural farming business in Latvia. This investment project helped to build their resilience by constructing new smart greenhouses, a work hall and sustainable watering systems. The beneficiary, Onava Ltd., had been operating for 30 years and saw their productivity boosted by the RDP project, which helped them supply increased market demand. Outcomes increased greenhouse space by 117% and improved energy efficiency by 25%. The project also laid the foundation for future expansion, ensuring Onava can continue providing high-quality seeds, bulbs and seedlings to gardeners across the Baltic region. During this investment project, the company collaborated closely with the NGO Farmers' Parliament to share experiences and ensure successful implementation.

Project results

- Three new jobs were created.
- Greenhouse space increased by 117%.

- A smart, digitalised, precision watering and fertilising system was installed that uses rainwater and reduces risks of wastage or pollution by precisely applying nutrients.
- Energy efficiency was improved by more than 25% due to heat-retaining curtains.
- Onava now has increased capacity and confidence to expand.
- New networking within the agri-food value chain.

Key lessons and recommendations

- The project was purposely located in a hub position taking advantage of converging geographic markets and logistical networks.
- Business confidence has been reinforced and Onava plans to launch a second phase of development, including outdoor flower collections and new office spaces, to further solidify its position in the Baltic market.
- Family and farming networks were very useful during this project.





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Context

“Latvia should be blooming, healthy and resilient” is the belief of the family business Onava Ltd., which was established in 1994 to provide flower seeds, bulbs and seedlings. This horticultural company has been committed to its values set at the beginning. These centre around quality through ensuring the best products and cooperating with world-leading seed selectors, professionalism in people and technologies, personal attitude and competence with a stable place in the market. Important aspects of Onava’s work involve learning from the best experiences abroad and educating Latvian florists about gardening, flowers and introducing new flowers.

The company employs around 14 people, with about one-third being family members, but all employees are considered part of the Onava family due to shared values and dedication.

Specialising in seeds for gardeners, municipalities and educational initiatives across Latvia, Onava offers an attractive product range, allowing customers to experience the beauty and fragrance of flowers. In 2024, Onava celebrated its 30th anniversary by implementing its first EU-funded project, marking a significant step towards expanding its market reach while adhering to its core values.

The idea for EU funding emerged in 2019 when the company’s turnover increased by 15-20% annually. To maintain quality and continue growing, Onava established its own production facilities rather than rely on rented spaces. Learning from various international experiences, the company planned its first investment project to be located in a strategic hub at the crossroads of Baltic markets.

Objectives

To commemorate its 30th anniversary in 2024, Onava aimed to strengthen its presence in the Baltic market for seeds, bulbs, and seedlings. The project objectives included expanding production areas and establishing facilities that ensure automated, energy-efficient and precise production processes, thus enhancing the company’s competitiveness and sustainability.

Activities

Project planning started in 2019 and construction concluded in March 2024. Overall activities involved:

- Establishing multifunctional greenhouses - A 1 300 m² greenhouse was set up, equipped with advanced watering and fertilising systems, including 22 watering groups and 63 floating tables and automatic control. The greenhouse featured energy curtains and automated climate control, heating and ventilation systems to optimise growing conditions.
- Constructing a work hall - A 400 m² work hall was built to support various operational needs, providing space for handling, packaging, and other essential activities.
- Installing a canopy - A 190 m² canopy was constructed to create protection and enhance operational efficiency.
- Renovating the surrounding areas - The project included paving 2 200 m² of the surrounding area and the installation of a 476 m panel fence for security and amenity.
- Implementing watering systems - A borehole (110 m deep) and a pond (360 m³) were developed to ensure a sustainable water supply for the greenhouses.
- Collaborating with local stakeholders - As this was Onava’s first EU project, the company collaborated closely with the Farmers’ Parliament to share experiences and ensure successful implementation. Additionally, all construction and equipment were sourced from another family business in Europe, supporting similar values and sustainable practices.

Main results

- The project created three new jobs.
- Energy efficiency was improved by more than 25% due to heat-retaining curtains.
- Results led to a 117% increase in greenhouse space (from 600 m² to 1 300 m²).

- A smart digitalised precision watering and fertilising system was installed, which uses rainwater and reduces risks of wastage or pollution by using resources more precisely.
- Onava now has its own dedicated facility, allowing for more efficient and sustainable operations. The warehouse is designed for flexibility and to adjust the specific needs of the different workload and seasons, with movable dividing walls and adjustable tables, enabling it to adapt to varying storage needs. The ability to control temperature, light and humidity further supports the production of high-quality plants and flowers.

Onava plans to launch a second phase of development, including outdoor flower collections and new office spaces to further solidify its position in the Baltic market.

Key lessons and recommendations

- The project was purposely located in a hub position taking advantage of converging geographic markets and transport arteries.
- The successful implementation of the project was a significant milestone for the entire family. Owner Mr Vilinis Onkelis, who took over the company from his mother, highlighted the importance of involving family members in the business and building generational heritage. His daughters participated in experimental phases, caring for plants in their gardens and assisting during major events, such as the annual flower day, experiencing how successful and rewarding hard and persistent work can be.
- The project emphasised the value of trusted colleagues and service providers who understand the business needs. When internal resources were insufficient, extended family members and other supporters helped plan and implement the different phases of the project. Without this network, successfully building and customising the facilities would have been challenging.



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Quote

“Long-term sustainable development and success of Onava is rooted in the constant wish to do better and more efficiently”.

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“This project optimised daily work in the highest quality possible for all processes including accounting system, sales process, homepage, warehouse management programs etc”.

Onava Ltd.

“Onava ensures continuous educational activities to gardeners and others, as well as educating themselves. Our next step is to gain practice with benign microorganisms for cultivating seedlings and strengthening plants’ natural immunity”.

Onava Ltd.

Additional information:

Website:

www.onava.lv

YouTube:

www.youtube.com/@onavasia

Facebook:

www.facebook.com/siaonava/

Instagram:

www.instagram.com/siaonava/



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