

Rental of summer houses with a mini spa and apitherapy services

Establishing a unique wellness business to bring agritourism to the rural community of Lelkowo in Poland.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Lelkowo, Poland

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P6 – Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: Diversification & job creation

Measures: M06 – Farm & business development

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|-----------------|--------------|---------------|
| Funding: | Total budget | 228 955 (PLN) |
| | RDP support | 120 000 (PLN) |
| | Private/own | 108 955 (PLN) |

Timeframe: 2022 – 2023

Project promoter: Katarzyna Rynkun

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Summary

Interested in developing their forest land in the village of Lelkowo in Poland, Katarzyna and Andrzej Rynkun explored possible development options to diversify and generate income. The main idea was to utilise the underdeveloped potential of their forest plots and tap into the evolving tourist market with a particular focus on providing health-promoting services and activities. The project involved the construction of an overnight accommodation, a sauna, a hot tub and an apitherapy lodge offering professional treatment services. Additional outdoor activities and relaxation areas in the forest and alongside the lake were also developed.

Project results

- The tourist offer in the area was improved and extended with regard to health and wellbeing services and outdoor activities.
- The use of apitherapy products positively impacts local beekeeping and thereby the natural environment.

Key lessons and recommendations

- The availability of EU funds for project activities fosters entrepreneurship in rural areas to generate sustainable income. However, the procedure and process from submitting the application to getting refinancing is challenging and takes a long time.

Context

Forest owners Katarzyna and Andrzej Rynkun live in the rural community of Lelkowo in the Warmian-Masurian Voivodeship in Poland. While agriculture is the dominant activity, tourism is becoming increasingly important due to the natural asset of the area formerly known as Natangia, the land of flowing waters.

The forest plots of the Rynkun family extend to several hectares. However, at the time, the plots had not yet been utilised for tourism purposes despite the good potential due to their location within an area of natural beauty and near the Green Velo bicycle path.



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Looking for new forms of activity and additional sources of income, the couple finally turned their attention to their forest land and decided to start an agritourism business that would provide accommodation with an emphasis on health and well-being and connect visitors to the forest and other activities. Because the area is very large, they decided to implement their ideas gradually.

On the plots designated for the first developments, they chose an area with a large pond with an island in the middle, which could be made accessible by bridges in the future. In addition, access to the surrounding natural forest would need to be further developed in the future by creating forest paths.

The main idea was to provide accommodation for tourists, including a sauna, hot tub (mini spa) and access to an apitherapy facility. This new and increasingly popular health therapy focuses on health and well-being treatments using bee products.

Objectives

The main aim was to create an agritourism business offering accommodation and health services linked to the surrounding natural resources, including water, forest, apitherapy and outdoor activities.

The immediate project objective was to build the accommodation, a garden sauna and a hot tub. In addition, another building was to be constructed for the apitherapy services to tap into the growing well-being market. This represented an innovative development because health-promoting apitherapy services were rare and not available in the area at the time.

Further aims included the development of outdoor activities such as renting bicycles and offering a space for people to practice health-promoting cold-water bathing outside.

The main target audience of the development were overnight tourists. However, the facilities such as the sauna, hot tub, apitherapy and walking areas were also available for local guests or day visitors.

Activities

At the outset, the beneficiaries accessed help from experts to complete and submit the funding application.

Once the project was approved, the main activities involved procuring, purchasing and constructing the accommodation: a summer house for short-term stays, a sauna with a lockable vestibule for non-residents' use and a hot tub with additional lighting after dark. The summer house was installed with additional insulation and a heating system to welcome guests in winter, especially those who swim in cold water.

In addition, a ready-made apitherapy lodge was procured, purchased and constructed. The lodge was also equipped to high standards to provide the relevant services professionally and in tune with the natural environment.

Further activities involved the construction of piers at the lakeside and preparing a place for parking and renting bicycles.

Main results

- The tourist offer in the area was improved and extended with regard to health and wellbeing services and outdoor activities.
- The use of apitherapy products positively impacts local beekeeping and thereby the natural environment.
- The project attracts overnight visitors, which extends the time tourists stay in the area. The accommodation and additional activities on offer contribute to attracting a larger number of visitors to the area, which will create new jobs in the future.
- In mid-2024, it was still too early to report measurable results as the new agribusiness had just commenced its operations. However, a preliminary assessment and first estimates showed that the offer was being increasingly noticed. An encouraging number of reservations suggests that there might be a good potential for further job creation.
- The apitherapy service was becoming increasingly popular with guests, so a more permanent provision of this service was being considered.

Key lessons and recommendations

- The most important experience for the landowners was becoming aware of their land's potential. Considering and planning its use led to more and more creative ideas. They talked to neighbours who encouraged them to do so, and they gained a lot of new contacts, for example, with beekeepers who will supply them with their products.
- The availability of EU funds for project activities fosters entrepreneurship in rural areas to attract guests and tourists, who provide residents with the opportunity to generate sustainable income. However, the procedure from applying to getting refinancing is challenging and takes a long time.
- Interest in the new tourist and health offer is slowly starting to develop. However, the owners noted that their promotional activities needed strengthening. Therefore, they are in the process of creating a professional website.

Quote

"We would like our activities to connect the past with the present. Formerly, this area was known with the historical name Natangia, the land of flowing waters. It is considered one of the more mysterious areas of Poland with beautiful natural values".

The project holders

