

LEADER invests in innovative farm tourism at 'The Home of Buckwheat' in Latvia

A Latvian family farm producing organic buckwheat diversifies into rural tourism activities.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Kļasica, Ilzeskalna pagasts, Latvia

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P6. Social inclusion and local development

Focus Area: 6B. Local development

Measures: M19. LEADER CLLD

Funding:	Total budget	55 274 (EUR)
	EAFRD	19 040 (EUR)
	National/Regional	8 960 (EUR)
	Private/own	27 274 (EUR)

Timeframe: 15/03/2021 - 21/02/2023

Project promoter: Farm Liepkalns

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Summary

Effective branding and advertising strategies based on well-known crops can help develop agritourism initiatives.

The Liepkalns farm is a family-owned business established in 1992. It specialises in organic grain farming, particularly buckwheat cultivation. To expand its activities in rural tourism, foster interest in rural life and promote organic farming and its products, the Liepkalns farm created the 'Buckwheat Residence' as an innovative environmental and rural tourism destination. This spacious, bright venue offers stunning views of buckwheat fields through large windows.

Visitors can walk along the path leading to the residence, where they can observe living, blooming buckwheat. The space hosts seminars, culinary masterclasses, presentations and tastings of organic products, as well as opportunities to learn about the various organic crops that are grown, processed and packaged on the farm.

The Buckwheat Residence also serves as a collaborative space for innovation, where new products are regularly developed using ingredients grown directly on the farm.

Project results

- The Buckwheat Residence integrated all key activities of the farm – organic grain farming, promoting organic agricultural practices, developing new products and attracting tourists.
- By 2026, the project is expected to generate at least EUR 12 000 in turnover from tourism. Furthermore, the net turnover of the farm is projected to increase by at least 30% compared to the last completed financial year, based on the eligible project costs.
- One new job position has also been created.

Key lessons and recommendations

- Early planning and market research are crucial before launching a diversification project. This allows project holders to understand the preferences, dislikes and needs of various target groups.
- While a proactive approach to understanding tourist needs is very important, improving flexibility in budgeting and risk management is also crucial for the project's successful implementation.





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Context

Effective branding and advertising strategies based on well-known crops in Latvia, like buckwheat, can help develop the country's agritourism sector. By focusing on such a crop's unique selling points (e.g. health benefits and culinary versatility) while fostering community partnerships, agritourism ventures can cultivate a loyal customer base eager to explore agriculture as a tourism offer.

The Liepkalns farm is a family-owned business established in 1992. Initially operating with just 10 hectares of land, the farm quickly expanded to 250 hectares within a few years. Its primary focus is organic grain farming, with a particular emphasis on buckwheat cultivation. Following the principles of sustainable agriculture, the farm operates without the use of mineral fertilisers or chemical plant protection products. This commitment enabled Liepkalns to become the first farm in Latvia to receive a certificate for sustainable agriculture.

The farm's rapid development has been fuelled by various funding sources, which have supported land purchases, machinery acquisition, transplanting equipment and infrastructure development, including a pre-cleaning and drying complex, warehouses and land reclamation projects.

To ensure the efficient sale of its produce, the farm processes most of its grains into finished products using only locally sourced, organically certified raw materials. Keeping pace with market trends, the farm offers innovative products like sprouted buckwheat bars with fruit and berry additives, buckwheat and pea pasta, crackers and muesli mixes.

To promote organic farming, sustainable thinking, healthy lifestyles and buckwheat as a superfood, the farm developed an innovative tourism project known as the Buckwheat Residence.

This facility features spacious, bright rooms with large windows overlooking the buckwheat fields. Visitors can walk along a path to observe blooming buckwheat and participate in seminars, culinary masterclasses, product presentations and tastings. The project also showcases various organic crops grown, processed and packaged on the farm. Additionally, the Buckwheat Residence serves as a hub for collaboration with scientists, creating new organic products.

Objectives

- The aim of the construction of the Buckwheat Residence was to expand the rural tourism activities of the Liepkalns farm, thereby contributing to the economic development of the rural area. Additionally, it aimed to boost the farm's product sales by increasing awareness and demand for its organic processed goods.

Activities

Project activities included:

- Constructing a building with an area of 110 m², equipped with electrical wiring, air conditioning and ventilation systems. A wooden pathway and terrace were also created, enhancing the site's appeal. This construction allowed them to establish an innovative environmental and rural tourism destination unique in the regional development region of Latvia and even neighbouring countries. It also introduced an effective method for promoting farm products.
- Building an open semi-professional kitchen to host joint cooking classes, focusing on showcasing buckwheat's versatility in various dishes. The spacious kitchen also functions as a venue for seminars, training sessions, presentations and other events.

The furniture of the kitchen was purchased from second-hand stores using their own funds, while the scenography and inventory design were developed in collaboration with graduates of the Latgale Academy of Arts.

Main results

- By 2026, the project is expected to generate at least EUR 12 000 in turnover from tourism. Furthermore, the net turnover of the farm is projected to increase by at least 30% compared to the last completed financial year, based on the eligible project costs.
- One new job position has also been created as part of this initiative.



- Thanks to this project, the Buckwheat Residence integrated all of the key activities of the farm: organic grain farming, promoting organic agricultural practices, developing new products and attracting tourists.
- The Buckwheat Residence hosts various activities such as educational seminars, children's workshops, product tastings and other events. The site also welcomes tourist groups, offering them a hands-on experience.
- Visitors to the Buckwheat Residence can buy farm products from Liepkalns as well as goods from local cooperation partners, supporting the regional economy.
- The Buckwheat Residence is the first environmental and rural tourism facility of its kind within Latvia and neighbouring regions. Its primary objective is to educate the public about organic farming, buckwheat and its properties, healthy nutrition and other organic cereal products.

Key lessons and recommendations

- The Liepkalns farm demonstrated the importance of early planning and market research by engaging with visitors two years before launching their project. This allowed them to understand the preferences, dislikes and needs of various target groups, which helped shape the project to cater effectively to diverse audiences.
- Adequate infrastructure, such as parking for buses, sufficient amenities for large groups and designated spaces like children's corners or outdoor areas for photos, were identified as essential for attracting and accommodating tourists.
- Offering a variety of activities, including master classes, presentations, tastings and seminars, ensured the project appealed to both adults and children. Their prior experience in managing and attracting tourists was highlighted as a key factor for successful implementation.
- Additionally, the project emphasised the need to anticipate potential increases in construction costs during implementation and plan for contingencies accordingly.
- While the proactive approach to understanding tourist needs was particularly insightful, improving flexibility in budgeting and risk management could strengthen future initiatives.



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Quote

"Buckwheat finally has its own home – a place where it is cherished and celebrated. We are also surrounded by buckwheat fields here. Visitors can see how we cultivate it and follow its journey from the field to the table".

Farm Liepkalns

Additional information:

Project website:

www.liepkalns.bio/residence

Project on YouTube:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=sEXMZhBOHI