

Pioneering innovation in healthy Estonian oat milk drinks: Let's YOOK it

15 jobs were created by an investment project in Estonia producing oat milk as a healthy plant-based food with lower emissions.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Järva County, Estonia

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P3. Food chain and risk management

Focus Area: 3A. Agri-food chain integration & quality

Measures: M04. Investments in physical assets

Funding: Total budget 4 658 000 (EUR)

EAFRD 849 666 (EUR)

National/Regional 149 941 (EUR)

Private/own 3 658 393 (EUR)

Timeframe: 01/01/2021 - 31/12/2023

Project promoter: YOOK Production AS

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Summary

CAP funds helped create 15 jobs at the Estonian food firm YOOK, following their investment in a new factory producing nutritious plant-based oat drinks. This project was an ambitious and innovative pioneering initiative in Estonia's food sector.

Estonia is a perfect setting for producing low-emission milk drinks from oats, and yet no businesses had realised this opportunity. This project was designed to create a highly innovative production line.

The factory is now operational, producing oat drinks and offering six different plant-based food products. These give consumers choice, more variety for people's diets, and promote a sustainable solution in the agrifood industry.

Consumers show high levels of satisfaction with the products and new export markets are opening in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, as well as Western Europe.

CAP support has helped the company attain world-class innovation, marketing and sales efforts, positioning YOOK in a top league of global food innovators.

Project results

- 15 jobs were created from a rural investment project costing nearly five million euros.
- The new factory's maximum production capacity is 20 million litres per year, with up to 36 tonnes per shift.
- Only organic whole-grain oat flakes from recognised mills are used. YOOK sources raw materials as locally as possible, with oat flakes coming from Tartu Mill in Estonia. Gluten-free oats are imported from Finland.
- The latest technological equipment creates an environmentally friendly facility which supports the company goal of achieving carbon neutrality.
- Establishing this factory away from the main population centre stimulated economic growth, reduced regional disparities, and encouraged a more balanced distribution of the national population.
- Award-Winning Products: YOOK products have won prestigious awards to demonstrate capability and drive to innovate further, introducing unprecedented plant-based food products that positively disrupt food system markets.
- Gender equality benefits are also positive.





Key lessons and recommendations

- Through perseverance, this project created the region's most innovative oat drink facility.
- Oat drinks offer sustainability and health advantages. They are plant-based, requiring less water and land than dairy production, thus contributing to environmental preservation. Oat drinks are often fortified with vitamins and minerals, making them a nutritious alternative for lactose-intolerant consumers, or those seeking dairy alternatives. These foods can enhance heart health by lowering cholesterol levels. Their creamy texture makes them versatile for various culinary applications, from beverages to cooking. Overall, oat drinks present a compelling option for consumers aiming to adopt healthier dietary practices while promoting ecological sustainability.

Context

Estonian food businesses are involved with international transitions towards better sustainability and resilience. The country's fertile agricultural land excels in growing crops, including oats, which provide opportunities to create innovative products that the world needs. Plant-based options are essential game changers for addressing the challenges of feeding a growing population.

Plant-based food systems offer numerous advantages that contribute to environmental sustainability, public health, and economic viability. These systems can greatly reduce greenhouse gas emissions compared to livestock agriculture (a major contributor to emissions affecting climate change). Transitioning towards plant-based diets can help mitigate these negative impacts by lowering the demand for resource-intensive animal products that create emissions.

Plant-based food systems also promote better health outcomes. Diets rich in whole grains, vegetables, and fruits are associated with lower risks of chronic diseases such as obesity, diabetes, and cardiovascular issues. As public awareness of the health benefits associated with plant-centric diets increases, it encourages individuals to adopt healthier eating habits.

Shifting towards plant-based agriculture can enhance food security by diversifying food sources and making them more accessible. By focusing on crops that require fewer resources and have shorter growing cycles than livestock production, society can create a more resilient food system capable of meeting global demands.

Reflecting these issues, Estonia's YOOK food company used CAP funds to help build a state-of-the-art factory and production line to produce oat drinks. YOOK exemplifies a commitment to environmental sustainability through its innovative business practices.

Objectives

YOOK's investors aimed to update the food industry landscape in Estonia and the Baltics by establishing a unique oat drink product. The goal was to ensure this product could be internationally competitive and that production was sufficiently scalable. Business, social and environmental goals for YOOK's investment project included:

- launching a new environmentally friendly branded plant-based drink with export potential worldwide;
- increasing export volume of the oat drink;
- creating 80% more jobs within the company and generating new employment opportunities in oat production;
- reducing greenhouse gas emissions from food systems by offering an alternative to environmental impacts from dairy production systems.

Activities

Project actions involved:

Market Validation and Idea Development: YOOK started by thoroughly analysing the market and crafting a compelling oat drink concept.

Securing Resources: The team assembled investment capital, securing funding and forging strong financial partnerships.

Building the Production Line: YOOK's chief technologist and product developer sourced the best equipment from across Europe. This state-of-the-art line features a Tetra Pak filling line, a Dutch Van Beek mill, a German Flottweg decanter, and more.

From Prototype to Production: After meticulous installation, the factory began producing test batches to ensure quality and consistency. This paved the way for full-scale production.

Building a Strong Brand: YOOK invested in brand development to establish a strong identity in the marketplace for the new products.

Driving Sales and Growth: With a solid brand foundation, YOOK launched sales, setting its sights on conquering international markets.

Main results

New jobs: 15 jobs were created.

Investment in rural area: An investment of nearly five million euros was made from investors, the CAP, and grants from other sources.

Production capacity: The factory's maximum production capacity is 20 million litres per year, with up to 36 tonnes per shift. Only organic whole-grain oat flakes from recognised mills are used.

Sustainable sourcing: YOOK's sources raw materials as locally as possible, with oat flakes coming from Tartu Mill in Estonia. Gluten-free oats are imported from Finland, with a 100% gluten-free chain guaranteed.

Climate and environmental benefits: By using the latest technological equipment in building a new factory, YOOK created an exceptionally environmentally-friendly facility which supports the company goal of achieving carbon neutrality.

Economic benefits: By establishing this factory in a different part of the country from the main population, YOOK stimulated economic growth, reduced regional disparities, and encouraged a more balanced distribution of the population.

Gender equality benefits: YOOK actively strives to maintain a high proportion of women in the company. This commitment to gender equality ensures a diverse and inclusive workplace where everyone has an equal opportunity to succeed.

Award-winning products: YOOK products have won prestigious awards such as the Gulfood Innovation Award and the Superior Taste Award. These accolades demonstrate the capability and drive to innovate further, introducing unprecedented plant-based food products that positively disrupt food system markets.

Key lessons and recommendations

Innovation and Achievement: Through perseverance, this project successfully created a highly innovative and healthy oat drink facility in the Baltic region.

World-Class Team: YOOK's team is truly exceptional, comprising world-class talent. This enables them to expand confidently into new markets and showcase Estonian oat products on a global scale.

Plant-based diets: Oat drinks offer advantages in terms of sustainability and health. They are plant-based, requiring less water and land than dairy production, thus contributing to environmental preservation. Oat drinks are often fortified with vitamins and minerals, making them a nutritious alternative for lactose-intolerant individuals or those seeking dairy alternatives. These foods can enhance heart health by lowering cholesterol levels. Their creamy texture makes them versatile for various culinary applications, from beverages to cooking. Overall, oat drinks present a compelling option for consumers aiming to adopt healthier dietary practices while promoting ecological sustainability.

Quote

"At YOOK Production, we're driven by innovation and a commitment to excellence. That's why we built the most innovative oat drink facility in the region, from the ground up. It wasn't easy, but with a world-class team behind us, we've been able to not only create award-winning products like our oat drinks, but also expand into new markets like the Baltics, and soon, the Middle East and Western Europe. We're proud to be Estonian pioneers, offering a sustainable solution in the food industry and bringing more variety to people's diets. This is just the beginning, and we're excited to keep positively disrupting the market with even more innovative plant-based food products".

Katre Kõvask, CEO of YOOK Production

Additional information:

Project website:

<https://yook.eu/>

Project on Facebook:

www.facebook.com/YOOKeestieu



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