

FINLAND

Farms' performance restructuring & modernisation

Location

Jokioinen

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P2 – Competitiveness

Measure

M7 – Basic services and
village renewal

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 39 458
EAFRD 10 379
National/Regional 24 404
Private 4 675

Project duration

2015 – 2019

Project promoter

Natural Resources Institute
Finland

Contact

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Website

www.sastavilja.fi/

A marketing project to promote the high-quality Finnish oats to the international market and increase the income of small farms.

Summary

Farm profitability has decreased steadily in Finland. Though the country produces the highest quality oat in the world, it is only just starting to be internationally branded. The project thus aims to create a high-quality brand for locally produced cereal crops (typically oat) through farmer cooperation circles. Farmers are taught to identify and separate the higher quality cereal crops for the export market.

Through the branding project, around 50 pilot farms expect to get a higher price for their product when sold to international cosmetic companies, the child food sector and baking industry, etc.



Results

50 farmers participated in the project, developing a marketing brand for Finnish oats, under the name FarmTopOats.

The project proved that there is a growing demand for clean, safe and healthy oat products both domestic ally and internationally.

The project contributed to the public discussion on oats in Finland.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Such branding projects are easily transferable to other areas that have high-quality local products.
- ❑ The key factor for success is the farmers' own initiative and commitment to the project – scientific capacity and knowledge is of secondary importance.
- ❑ Courage is needed to make farm-level investments and trials with different breeds during several growing seasons.

Context

The number of active farms in Finland is decreasing, and in 2017 there were for the first time in the country fewer than 50 000 farms. In this context, local farmers' associations from the Tampere region contacted Natural Resources Institute Finland to investigate whether higher quality cereal crops could be sold abroad at a higher price. This led to crop tracking and quality management schemes, where on-farm sampling technology allowed higher quality crops to be identified and stored separately. The focus soon turned to oats: key variables were the beta glucan content and purity (e.g. low level of *Fusaria fungi*). The highly available light energy increases the levels of antioxidants and bioactive compounds of Finnish oats, the No.1 crop in Finland. The country produces 12% of Europe's oats, making Finland the second largest oat-exporting country.

Objectives

The project objective aimed to create an own brand and product story for high-quality, locally produced Finnish oats. The brand will be based on the customer needs, knowledgeable farmers, innovative business partners and safe, clean, healthy and trackable oat crops. The project focused on different customer segments via social media and through company visits and food fairs in Germany, Sweden and the UK.

Activities

The project activities can be divided into three parts: i) building the oats story and brand; ii) setting up an international partnership with companies from abroad and organising food fair visits; and iii) raising awareness of the positive oats impacts in the media.

Building the oats story and brand has been done in close cooperation with local level farmer associations. Farmer events and field demonstrations quickly increased the number of participating farms in the project. For example, in Kaski farm in Sastamala an on-farm laboratory is able to analyse the technical (moisture, protein, starch and hectoliter using infra-red light NIT-technique) and safety (DON, T-2+HT-2 using rapid lateral flow tests) quality of oats right from the tractor trailer, so that it is possible to dry and store the higher quality oats separately.

International companies that are involved in the project partnership include Polar Glucan Ltd and Oat Cosmetics UK Ltd. In the autumn of 2017 the project attended the Food Ingredients fair in Frankfurt, where export deals

were discussed. In the autumn of 2018 the project will organise a study visit to Italy to learn about gluten-free oat production and branding.

The project has brought high-quality, locally produced oat crops to the public's and the media's attention: e.g. via the website <https://www.sastavilja.fi/> and Facebook group <https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=sastavilja>. Several local, regional and national level media articles have been published about the project and in March 2018 it was also featured in the national TV news: <https://yle.fi/uutiset/3-10093657>.

Main results

In a relatively short time the project has engaged some 50 farmers to create a marketing brand for Finnish oats, under the marketing name FarmTopOats. The project has shown the farmers that they can themselves raise the value of their product and not only depend on global market trends and Common Agricultural Policy conditions.

The project has also proved that there is a growing demand for clean, safe and healthy oat products both on domestic and international markets. Thanks to the specific agro-climatic conditions of Finland, the northernmost agricultural country in the world, it is able to produce the highest quality oats.

The project has contributed to the public discussion on oats in Finland. New product innovations such as oat-milk products are already on the market. Many oat products offer a healthier and more sustainable alternative to meat dishes. Smart specialisation (like gluten-free and organic products) represents the future for oat cultivation in Finland, and these areas have been steadily growing.

Key lessons and recommendations

The branding project is easily transferable to other areas that have a high-quality local product. The key success factor is the farmers' own initiative and commitment to the project – scientific capacity and knowledge are of secondary importance. Courage is required to make farm-level investments and trials with different types over several growing seasons. Public discussion and consumer needs (for healthier products, well-being and sustainable development) have also supported the project – and probably explain the surprisingly positive media coverage.