

FRANCE

Agri-food chain integration & quality

Location

La cavaliere

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P3 Food chain & risk management

Measure

M04 – Investments in physical assets

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 5 127 901
RDP contribution 500 000

Project duration

2015 – 2016

Project promoter

Cooperative BERGER DU LARZAC

Contact

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Website

www.bergersdularzac.fr

A cooperative focused on quality cheese production, used Rural Development Programme support to expand its facilities and thus ensure the continuous growth of its business.

Summary

The cheese cooperative BERGERS DU LARZAC was founded in 1996, allowing 20 local producers to come together to create a range of strong sheep milk cheeses. Between 2014 and 2016, the cooperative showed a steady positive increase in financial results as demand has kept growing. This resulted in the need to extend the cooperative's facilities and improve its working conditions.



Rural Development Programme (RDP) support was used to finance the expansion of the soft cheese workshop with the creation of a semi-automated line. The investment plan also included the construction of new administrative premises, storage, packaging and refining areas and the modernisation of the production facilities.

Results

By the end of 2016:

- The cheese dairy had an additional 2300 square meters of space, including 560 square meters of cellar space in the basement;
- 8 new jobs were created; and
- The 42 members of the cooperative processed nearly 4 million litres of sheep milk into cheese and have a turnover of 10 million euros.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ The cooperative has focused significantly on quality and for this reason it only processes whole sheeps' milk using traditional milk curdling methods (rennet and lactic ferments only), no ultrafiltration of the milk, no homogenisation and no skimming.
- ❑ A key success factor is the strong demand from resellers, creamers and cheese makers, who represent 70% of sales (665 tonnes delivered in 2015).

Context

The Causse du Larzac is a limestone karst plateau in the south of the Massif Central, located between the cities of Millau and Lodève in the Occitania region of France. Agriculture is mainly focused on the breeding of ewes for milk, which is primarily for the production of Roquefort cheese.

Larzac is also famous for a large non-violent civil disobedience action led by farmers resisting the expansion of an existing military base. The action lasted from 1971 to 1981 and ended in victory for the resistance movement when the newly elected President François Mitterrand formally abandoned the project.

During these ten years of joint action, a general solidarity movement was initiated all over France in order to help the farmers resist the military's land expansion. Over this period the opposition always remained nonviolent. A lot of people came and occupied the land and as a consequence, many neglected, insulated hamlets or farms were transformed into agricultural production sites. Through this revitalisation of the land, farmers and local residents managed to safeguard the exceptional cultural and patrimonial heritage in the area.

After 1981 the local economy evolved around quality products and short supply chains, where handicrafts and green tourism were encouraged. Experimental and local initiatives were favoured in which ecology, nonviolence and international solidarity values were promoted. The Larzac plateau is one of the few regions in France where the number of farmers is increasing.

The cheese cooperative BERGERS DU LARZAC was founded in 1996 and 20 local producers came together to create a range of strong sheep milk cheeses. To do this their 'Tommes' are matured in a natural cellar with four underground levels, which gives them a unique floral taste and crusting. For over 11 years, all the cheeses have also been available as organic products.

The number of farmers participating in the cooperative is growing steadily along with product diversification with many new specialty cheeses being launched. Between 2014 and 2016, the cooperative showed a steady positive increase in financial results as demand has kept growing. This resulted in the need to extend the cooperative's facilities and to improve its working conditions.

Objectives

The key objective of this investment was to enable the cooperative to expand its capacity in producing quality products, which in turn helps sustain the continuous growth of the local supply chain.

Activities

The project concerned the expansion of the soft cheese workshop with the creation of a semi-automated line to optimise the use of the raw material and obtain more homogeneous cheeses. This increase in the maturing capacity and space in the cellar, made it possible to improve the quality of the products.

The investment plan also included the construction of new administrative premises, storage, packaging and refining areas and the modernisation of the production facilities.

Main results

By the end of 2016 the cheese dairy has an additional 2300 square meters, including 560 square meters of cellar space in the basement.

34 employees currently work in the cooperative, including 8 new jobs which were created in 2016.

Today, the cooperative has 42 members, processes nearly 4 million litres of sheep milk into cheese and has a turnover of 10 million euros.

Key lessons

Today, the cooperative solely processes whole sheep's milk using traditional milk curdling methods (rennet and lactic ferments only), no ultrafiltration of the milk, no homogenisation, no skimming.

Its success is due to strong demand from resellers, creamers and cheese makers, who represent 70% of sales (665 tonnes delivered in 2015).

"Thanks to European funds, an ambitious, successful, regional and social project was born and now shines throughout the country! Nearly 80 Farmers (50% of whom are organic) deliver their sheep's milk to the cooperative! And this with a real appreciation of their work! Our farmers are regaining a taste for their profession, investing, preparing for the future, without forgetting the men and women who work to transform milk into cheese!"

André Parenti, Co-founder and General Manager of the Larzac Shepherds' Cheese Cooperative.

Additional sources of information

www.europe-en-occitanie.eu/Cooperative-fromagere-des-bergers-du-Larzac