

ITALY

Restructuring and
developing physical
potential and
promoting
innovation

Location

Sansepolcro Arezzo

Programming period

2007 - 2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 4 – LEADER

Measure

M124 - Cooperation for development of new products, processes and technologies in agriculture, the food sector and in forestry

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 73 704
EAFRD 25 703
National/Region. 32 713
Private 15 288

Project duration

2013 – 2015

Project promoter

Cooperative Extravaganti and University of Pisa, Department of Veterinary

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The members of a cooperative in Tuscany, worked together with a university to investigate the possibility to produce cheese, yogurt and possibly cosmetics from donkey milk.

Summary

The members of the Extravaganti cooperative operating in Tuscany, are mainly involved in tourist activities in the area and manages mountain lodges and camping areas. In 2011 its members decided to expand their activities by restructuring an old farm and starting an donkey-breeding business combined with milk production.



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This combined with the short life-cycle of the product and its rapid deterioration raised an issue of food waste. Finding a solution to this issue could represent the possibility to additionally diversify into the production of innovative food products, possibly suitable for particular categories of consumers. Having cooperated already in the past with the University of Pisa in other projects, mainly related to environment and preservation of the biodiversity, they decided to investigate the possibility to produce cheese, yogurt and possibly cosmetics from donkey milk.

Results

The cheese produced with the combination of goat and donkey milk had a discreet success in the market. It is sold in local shops, restaurants and agri-tourism, and represents for the cooperative an important source of income.

As for the yogurt, some issues were highlighted in its production. In fact, according to the results of the products testing phase, one type of yogurt produced was very much appreciated by customers but its production was too expensive and as a consequence also its market price would have been too expensive.

Overall, the implementation of the project had positive effects for the cooperative. Cheese production ensured an additional source of income and number of visitors increased, also as a result of the dissemination activities related to the project.

Lessons & Recommendations

- Measure 124 in Tuscany was almost entirely managed by LAGs, in this case the LAG Appenino Aretino. Beneficiaries considered the assistance of the LAG particularly helpful for the implementation of the project.
- Better planning of the projects phases is suggested, particularly it would help to plan more realistically the activities taking into account possible issues that are likely to happen in an innovation project.
- Better coordination between the administrative and implementation phase.
- The beneficiary would implement again a similar project as it as a very good opportunity to improve competitiveness of the business even taking in consideration the possibility that not everything within the project works as planned in the beginning.

Context

The Extravaganti cooperative operates in Tuscany, near the village of Sansepolcro within the natural reserve Alpe della Luna, in the Appennine mountains. It groups those involved in tourist activities in the area and manages mountain lodges and camping areas within the Alpe della Luna reserve. Environment preservation and forestry protection are the main patterns that characterize this touristic offer.



In 2011 cooperatives' members decided to expand their activities by restructuring an old farm within the natural reserve, in agreement with the municipalities in the area, and starting an donkey-breeding business combined with milk production. They realised that this type of milk is often requested in the market, due to its organoleptic properties, and decided to diversify their activities increasing at the same time the offer of touristic-related activities. After some initial restructuring of farm buildings, 15 female donkeys with their haddocks and a male donkey were purchased. This new activity turned out to be successful, both in terms of increased touristic and economic potential. However, not all milk produced was sold as fresh milk. This combined with the short life-cycle of the product and its rapid deterioration raised an issue of food waste. Finding a solution to this issue could represent the possibility to additionally diversify into the production of innovative food products, possibly suitable for particular categories of consumers. Having cooperated already in the past with the University of Pisa in other projects, mainly related to environment and preservation of the biodiversity, they decided to investigate the possibility to produce cheese, yogurt and possibly cosmetics from donkey milk.

Objectives

Main goal of the project was to develop innovative food products starting from she-ass milk and combining it with

goat milk. This would have solved the issue of food waste arising from the difficulty to sell the whole production of donkey milk as fresh product.

Furthermore, the implementation of the project was expected to generate new income sources of the cooperatives, other than increase tourists' interest to visit the area.



Activities

The project started with a number of activities aiming to identify the right composition of feed for goats and she-asses and the microbiological analysis of the milk produced. The scope was to identify the best milk's characteristics to obtain good quality cheese and yogurt. This first phase of the project took more time than envisaged, due to the several attempts needed to identify the right microbiological composition for milk and the best composition of goat and donkey milk.

The second phase of the project focused on the production of cheese and yogurt. Cheese was produced in the farm Valle di Mezzo S.A.S, since the cooperative did not have milk processing facilities. This second phase was also characterised by several attempts to produce the right products, both in terms of organoleptic characteristics and appreciations from final costumers. For this reason a number of taste panels, both for yogurt and cheese, were organised. This enabled to adjust the characteristics of the products in order to increase the chances of success in the market.

The third phase was dedicated to the dissemination of results through the organisations of workshops and tasting panels to present the new products and the preparation of dissemination materials.

Main Results

The cheese produced with the combination of goat and donkey milk had a discreet success in the market. It is sold in local shops, restaurants and agri-tourism, and represents for the cooperative an important source of income. Cooperative's members have been thinking to invest in the creation of processing facilities in the farm (cheese is still produced by the Valle di Mezzo farm that assisted during the implementation phase).

As for the yogurt, some issues were highlighted in its production. In fact, according to the results of the products testing phase, one type of yogurt produced was very much appreciated by customers but its production was too expensive and as a consequence also its market price would have been too expensive. For this reason the production of yogurt was abandoned, but it is not excluded the possibility to continue working on it with the University to improve the product and obtain a good quality yogurt that could be successfully sold in the market.

Overall, the implementation of the project had positive effects for the cooperative. Cheese production ensured an additional source of income and number of visitors increased, also as a result of the dissemination activities related to the project.

Key lessons

Measure 124 in Tuscany was almost entirely managed by LAGs, in this case the LAG Appenino Aretino. Beneficiary considered the assistance of the LAG particularly helpful for the implementation of the project.

Better planning of the projects phases is suggested, particularly it would help to plan more realistically the activities taking into account possible issues that are likely to happen in an innovation project (i.e. higher quantity of she-ass milk than planned was required and this obliged to ask for an extension of the project to wait for the next milking period).

Better coordination between the administrative and implementation phase.

In spite of these minor issues, the beneficiary would implement again a similar projects (also in the view of improving the yogurt production) since he considered it as a very good opportunity to improve competitiveness of the business even taking in consideration the possibility that not everything within the project works as planned in the beginning.

Additional sources of information

n/a