

## SPAIN

# Improving competitiveness

### Location

LAG Adri Palomares. Zamora

### Programming period

2014 – 2020

### Priority

P6 – Local development

### Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 55 985

EAFRD 13 436

National/Regional 3 359

Private 39 190

### Project duration

2015 – 2019

### Project promoter

AGROBERRY Original from  
Zamora

### Contact

[nuria.alvarez@agroberry.es](mailto:nuria.alvarez@agroberry.es)

### Website

[www.agroberry.es](http://www.agroberry.es)

A young farmer introduced a blackberry plantation into a wheat and barley production area and created added value by developing a new range of products.

## Summary

A young farmer who returned to the countryside decided to innovate by introducing a new irrigated crop in a dry area. As a result, she created added value by developing a whole new range of products.



Support from the Rural Development Programme of Castile and León helped the young farmer to establish an organic blackberries plantation. The plantation is drip irrigated from a well that was drilled for this purpose and a workshop was set up to process the fruit and create a wide range of products. The creation of a store in the young farmer's village is also envisaged, in order to boost sales. The project promoter is AGROBERRY, an SME from Zamora (Spain) lead by Nuria Alvarez, a young farmer.

## Results

Created one full-time job and five temporary jobs.

Sales increased more than 15% in 2018.

The farm is becoming an attraction for agritourism. More than 30 people visited the farm in 2018.

Cultivation is free from both pesticides and herbicides and only organic fertiliser is used.

Water resources are protected, as each plant receives only about two litres in the three months of each harvest cycle.

The young farmer has received five awards at national and regional level.

## Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Entrepreneurship in rural areas is difficult, but it is also extremely satisfying.
- ❑ "If we want to promote organic agriculture we must reward those who do it well and discourage those polluting. I respect the environment. If my land is surrounded by others that do not respect the environment then the earth is contaminated anyway and restoring a clean environment is very complicated. For this reason, I strongly recommend that organic agriculture be promoted at no cost and that it be more expensive to grow for those who do not respect the environment."
- ❑ It is very important to encourage educated young people to begin to settle in small areas so that they can close the agri-food circle and thus offer producers more profit margin and improved competitiveness.
- ❑ To fight against rural depopulation it is essential to ask the opinion of people who live that situation and not make decisions only from political perspectives.

## Context

Nuria Alvarez is a young farmer from a family with a long tradition in agriculture. At the age of 13, she left her small village, Almendra del Pan, located in the province of Zamora. She went on to study communications; specialising in publicity and public relations and gaining an executive MBA whilst launching her career in marketing. One day she decided that she wanted to start over and run her own business in the countryside. So, after 20 years of absence, she returned to her place of origin and invested in her family's land. Her vision was to contribute to the development of a sector that she considers to be of essential importance in Spain, the agri-food sector.

The province of Zamora is primarily a barley and wheat-producing area, but Alvarez's idea was to innovate by cultivating something different; combining her family's know-how and experience in farming with her marketing expertise. Her father supported her in the preparation of the soil and the placement of the trellises and anti-grass mesh, in addition to other agricultural works. In parallel, she set about networking; participating in fairs, arranging closed meetings with large companies and generally trying to make herself known among the circle of red fruit producers in Spain.

## Objectives

The objective of this project was to innovate by introducing an alternative, high added value crop into a dry area that was otherwise specialised in cereals.

## Activities

The project activities focused on converting the farm into a blackberry cultivation and production facility. The choice to produce blackberries was made after an analysis of the farm's resources (soil, water, etc.), which indicated that the area would be ideal for this crop.

The goal is to eventually plant two hectares of land with 4500 seedlings. The estimated production at full capacity would be four kilos per plant. The plants are grown organically in the open air.

In 2015, a well was drilled and a drip irrigation system was set up. The first 400 blackberry plants were planted from two different varieties.

In 2016, another 400 seedlings were planted and the farm started selling fresh fruit and jam. In addition, the farmer started preparing gifts for weddings, baptisms and communions.

In 2017, another 400 blackberry plants were planted and additional trellises were installed on the plantation. In terms of commercial activities, the farm started selling frozen fruit and participating in gourmet food markets.

In 2018, the plantation was expanded to 1 800 plants. During that year, a workshop was constructed to process the fruit into jams, chocolates, honey, etc. A research and development contract was signed to explore the potential for producing wine from the fruit.

The farm welcomes visitors and openly shares knowledge with interested farmers in the area. The farm also aims to become a destination for agritourism. It is located only two km away from the Visigothic Church of San Pedro de la Nave, a very important tourist attraction.

The plantation is not yet certified as organic, because its current year-by-year expansion would require a step-by-step process of certification, and this would be far too expensive. The organic certification will be acquired as soon as the plantation is at full capacity.

The products are sold directly to consumers and to stores.

## Main Results

### Economic benefits:

- Created one full time job and five temporary jobs.
- Revenue is increasing every year and more than two tonnes of blackberries were harvested in the last season.
- The farm is becoming an attraction for agritourism, which makes the whole area more visible as a destination. More than 30 people visited the farm in 2018.
- Sales increased by more than 15% in 2018.
- The economic impact will be much greater when the farm's store is established in the village and when all 4500 plants are planted and reach their full production capacity.
- If the company keeps growing it will need another permanent employee. The job is not only agricultural work but work in the factory.

### Environmental/climate action benefits:

- The cultivation methods respect the environment as they are free from pesticides and herbicides.
- Only organic fertiliser is used, once a year, from her father's cattle.

- It is estimated that each plant receives only two litres of water in the three months of each harvest circle.
- The blackberries are cultivated outdoors and mature with the natural resources of the sun. This makes them especially natural and benefits the environment by not using any artificial resources to stimulate their growth and maturation.
- For drip irrigation they use only the energy of the sun with solar panels that perform direct irrigation reinforcing the use of renewable energies.



### Social benefits:

- Introducing an alternative irrigated crop into a dry area that only grows barley and wheat, is itself an innovation. At present, there are several companies that sell blackberries in the area, but they only sell wild fruit.
- The project will have an impact on the economy of the area as it contributes to broadening the tourist offer.
- The generation of jobs attracts people to the area and promotes rural revitalisation.

### Networking value:

- The project launched a new crop in the area, so it was necessary to get to know people in different parts of the country who could provide advice and share their experiences.
- The young farmer has received several awards and she is very visible in the media, which is of significant networking value for the farm.

### Awards received:

2018 - *Excellence Award for Innovation in Agricultural Activity* by the Ministry of Agriculture; *Best Rural Entrepreneurial Idea Award* by the Junta de Castilla y León; *Surcos Joven Award* by RTVCYL (Regional Television).

2017 - *Young Business Woman Award* by AZME (Zamorana Association of Women Entrepreneurs).

2016 - *National Finalist Young Innovative Farmer Award* by ASAJA (National Agrarian Union), received at the award ceremony from the Minister of Agriculture himself.

### Transferability:

- The initiative is highly replicable to other areas in Europe.
- A great number of enquiries are received from people, both in the region and across the country, expressing their interest in this type of cultivation.
- During a visit to the European Parliament for the Congress of Young Farmers, Nuria met an entrepreneur who has a similar farm in Poland.

### Synergies with other EU policies:

- As an organic farm, the project aligns with several pieces of EU environmental policies and legislation in such fields as soil, water quality and biodiversity, among others.
- The project is now a sustainable economic activity, contributing to local development and is fully in line with the objectives of the EU 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.
- Being led by a young farmer, AGROBERRY is also an example encouraging the settlement of young people in rural areas.

*“What is sown with hands, is collected from the heart.”*

Nuria Alvarez, AGROBERRY

### Additional sources of information

- <https://es-es.facebook.com/agroberry/>
- [https://twitter.com/Agroberry\\_N](https://twitter.com/Agroberry_N)
- <https://www.instagram.com/explore/tags/agroberry/>
- <https://es.linkedin.com/company/agroberry>
- <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCDxRG6re8h8Ukji6MxPZHIA>

\*This project has been categorised under ‘Improving Competitiveness’ by the nominating National Rural Network