



Diversified business models – Compendium of examples

Output of the Thematic Group on Farm Diversification

August 2026



Funded by
the European Union

Table of Content

1. Introduction	1
2. Farms diversifying their business models	2
2.1. Austria – Biohof Katona. Turning niche products into a sustainable business model	2
2.2. Austria – Biohof Lingenhel: Transforming a family farm into a high-value circular rural enterprise	4
2.3. Austria – Vielfalt am Hummelhof – Barrier-free multifunctional enterprise	6
2.4. Belgium – IJshoeve De Boey. From a family dairy farm to a direct-to-consumer ice cream business	8
2.5. Bulgaria – Bioselena Organic Farming Foundation: Urban Farmers’ Markets Network	10
2.6. Bulgaria – Bratanov Winery. Revitalising the Sakar region through wine tourism	12
2.7. Bulgaria – Foundation Pendaro.bg: turning family farms into gastronomic and rural experience destinations	14
2.8. Croatia – Young Farmers in Lika: Generational collaborative entrepreneurship	15
2.9. Croatia – PROcvjetaj (Cinija Cottage): Scale-resilient micro-farming and eco-labelled tourism	17
2.10. Czechia – AGRO SVOBODA s.r.o.	19
2.11. Germany – Landfrauen machen Schule: School-farm educational programme	20
2.12. Germany – Blauer Gockel – Farm and rural holidays network	22
2.13. Germany – Projekt ‘Auszeithöfe’: integrating social farming care and respite network	24
2.14. Germany – Bohnet Farm: reinventing an iconic dairy farm in the black forest	26
2.15. Germany – Andrea Göhring: Social farming and animal-assisted therapy	27
2.16. Greece – Tofillo Mountain Herb Farm – Experiential agritourism	29
2.17. Greece – Honey Farm – Apitourism and interactive beekeeping experiences	30
2.18. Greece – Agricultural Detention Facility of Agia – Social farming and vocational reintegration	31
2.19. Italy – Rurinnova: guiding farmers towards sustainable diversification decisions	32
2.20. Italy – Agriturismo Bergi – Le Delizie di Bergi: Sustainable and regenerative farming practices	33
2.21. Italy – Casale di Martignano – Peri-urban agritourism	35
2.22. Italy – Le Pianore: Wellness, organic farming and experiential eco-tourism	37
2.23. Italy – Le Tore Organic Farm. Closed loop gastronomy and organic farm hospitality	39
2.24. Italy – Sa Mandra: Agritourism and cultural farm diversification in Sardinia	41
2.25. Italy – ASCA Cooperative / La Porta dei Parchi – Mountain revitalisation through social shepherding	42
2.26. Italy – Agriturismo Biologico La Buona Terra: Plant-based agritourism	44



2.27. Italy – Campidarte: From a disused poultry infrastructure to a cultural rural hub	45
2.28. Malta – Green Thumb Farm: micro-green agriculture	47
2.29. Portugal – Bananika. Upcycling fruit surpluses in the Azores	49
2.30. Portugal – Utopia Space: Tech-driven organic farming and co-working	51
2.31. Portugal – Olijan: from olive orchards to climate-resilient pistachio	52
2.32. Portugal – Joseph’s dream: Nut orchard in Central Portugal’s abandoned land	54
2.33. Portugal – Project Egitânia: Regenerative landscapes, olivotourism and heritage	56
2.34. Portugal – Quinta da Cortiça: Rural tourism, pilgrim accommodation, and direct sales	58
2.35. Portugal – Pepe Aromas: A multi-functional, circular business model	60
2.36. Portugal – Salivtae: Diversified into the production of <i>Salicornia europaea</i>	62
3. Other resources	64



1. Introduction

This compendium presents a selection of examples showcasing how farm diversification can strengthen business incomes, enhance resilience, and create new opportunities for rural development. Members of the [Thematic Group \(TG\) on Farm Diversification](#) contributed a wide range of cases illustrating how farms and rural businesses are expanding their activities, developing multifunctional business models, and engaging with new markets and stakeholders to address common economic, social, and environmental challenges.

As structural changes, shifts in consumer behaviour, and market volatility increasingly affect agricultural holdings, diversification is becoming an essential pathway for strengthening rural economic resilience, fostering generational renewal, and securing the long-term viability of family farms, without requiring an expansion of their physical land base.

The examples included in this compendium demonstrate a variety of diversification pathways, ranging from agritourism, social farming, value-added processing, and educational activities to cultural regeneration, experiential tourism, and innovative marketing approaches. They show how farm businesses can capture greater value from the supply chain, improve financial sustainability, reduce market risks, and make better use of available farm resources. The cases also illustrate the important role of short supply chains, digital

platforms, advisory services, and enabling policy frameworks in facilitating access to funding, building capacities, and supporting the development of innovative business models.

The overall aim of the TG was to explore the success factors that can unlock the potential of diversification within the framework of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) to enhance competitiveness, resilience, and growth, particularly for small and medium-sized farms.

The TG brought together different stakeholders, including farm-based businesses, small farmers, farmers in disadvantaged and marginal areas, farm advisers, Managing Authorities, Paying Agencies, National Networks, researchers, and other relevant actors. Their collective experience and expertise have informed the examples presented in this compendium, which aims to inspire farmers, advisers, policymakers, and rural stakeholders seeking to develop more diversified, resilient, and future-oriented farm businesses.

It serves as a source of inspiration and practical learning, demonstrating that diversification can provide viable pathways for strengthening farm resilience while generating economic, social, and environmental benefits for rural areas.



2. Farms diversifying their business models

2.1. Austria – Biohof Katona. Turning niche products into a sustainable business model

Description

Biohof Katona is a small-scale, part-time family farm in Austria that achieved economic resilience and growth through high-value diversification. Spanning four hectares of forest and containing nine beehives, the farm offers a diverse organic model focused on niche, premium products and agritourism.

The operators, Bernd and Christine Katona, deliberately decided not to produce food on a large scale. Instead, they focused on two areas: making unique organic products and offering health tourism experiences. Their products include raw honey, handmade beeswax food wraps based on a family recipe, traditional pine sprout syrup (Wipferlsaft), birch water, and locally-bred Roman snails.

To increase value creation, the farm integrated educational tourism and health-related services (apitherapy), allowing visitors to experience bee colonies and, under medical supervision, inhale therapeutic beehive air. This combination transformed the Katona's micro-farm into a diversified wellness and learning destination.

Rationale

Biohof Katona builds its diversification strategy by focusing on high-quality niche products, making full use of its resources and creating additional income streams.

The farm's core approach is hyper-local product differentiation. Instead of producing large quantities of honey, the farm sells premium raw honey from specific forest and meadow locations. The honey is minimally processed and packaged in reusable glass jars for environmentally conscious customers. This allows strong product identity and premium pricing.

A circular production logic strengthens efficiency. The beeswax left over from honey production is turned into handmade beeswax food wraps, based on an old family recipe. This reduces waste and creates another product to sell.

A further diversification layer is introduced through micro-livestock production, particularly Roman snail farming, which provides a high-value gourmet product that requires very little space to produce.

Visitors can take guided tours of the farm, learn about beekeeping, and interact with the animals.

By combining speciality food products with wellness and tourism activities, Biohof Katona has transformed itself from a traditional farm into a unique health and nature destination.

Stakeholders include: the Katona family as primary operators; external medical professionals supervising apitherapy; regional tourism bodies supporting positioning within eco-tourism networks; and organic certification bodies ensuring compliance with EU and national organic standards. These actors collectively enable both market credibility and service diversification.

Achievements

Biohof Katona has successfully transformed a very small and traditional 6th-generation agricultural holding into a resilient, multi-revenue enterprise. It has developed a recognised local brand based on forgotten traditional goods such as niche honey products, wellness-oriented syrups and gourmet snails.

It has also created an eco-tourism hub in Lockenhaus by offering farm tours and wellness services such as apitherapy.

The farm showed that a very small farm with limited land and a few beehives can be profitable and resilient without needing large investments or land expansion.

Furthermore, the farm supports regional biodiversity by keeping bees exclusively in untreated wooden hives and maintaining them within protected organic forest areas.

Lessons and recommendations

Biohof Katona's success comes from focusing on premium niche products, adding value to raw materials by turning them into finished products, and combining farming with tourism and health-related activities. Strong storytelling also plays a key role in this approach, which is based on maximising value rather than volume.

As a small farm, it cannot compete on volume. Instead, it increased income through direct-to-consumer sales, high-quality artisanal products, and unique experiences and services.

Key challenges relate to regulatory complexity, particularly in food processing and health-related services. Early cooperation with certified medical and regulatory bodies is essential.

Farmers interested in replicating this model should first check the legal and hygiene requirements for products such as snails, and for health-related services such as apitherapy. Partnerships with qualified healthcare professionals are important when offering therapeutic services. Strong communication is also essential to help customers understand and value unusual products and experiences, such as beehive-air therapy or snail-farm visits.



Funding: No CAP funding, but private investment and income generated through direct sales of farm products and experiential tourism services.

Timeframe: 2013- ongoing

Lead organisation: Biohof Katona

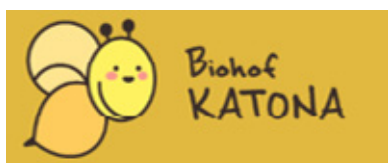
Further information:

> <https://meinhof-meinweg.at/at/3223-biohof-katona>

> <https://www.biohof-katona.at>

Contact: michaela.kaineder@bmluk.gv.at

Copyrights: Biohof KATONA





2.2. Austria – Biohof Lingenhel: Transforming a family farm into a high-value circular rural enterprise

Description

Biohof Lingenhel is an organic family farm in the Bregenzerwald region of Austria that expanded its business by converting a former storage barn into a multifunctional hub for direct sales, education, and hospitality.

Operating under organic standards since 1999, the family transformed a building into a modern seminar room, teaching kitchen, and organic farm shop (Bioladen). A small dairy processing facility (Sennerei) and storage areas were integrated into the structure. Everything was constructed sustainably using untreated silver fir wood from their own forest. The farm processes hay milk from 25 'Original Braunvieh' cows and fruit from traditional orchards into high-value products such as schnapps, cheese, liqueurs, jams, chutneys, and veal products. It offers adult cooking classes, rents out rooms to companies, and runs 'Schule am Bauernhof' educational programmes for children.

Before its 2016 renovation, the farm did not have enough space to welcome visitors, even though interest was growing. By developing a formal business plan with the Chamber of Agriculture (LK), it was able to secure investment funding. The new infrastructure improved competitiveness by enabling direct sales on-site and higher-value visitor experiences. By combining education, tourism, and direct sales, the farm avoided long supply chains and greatly increased its financial resilience.

Rationale

The project is based on a straightforward idea: bringing consumers directly to the farm and integrating production, processing, and consumption in one location. Infrastructure conversion was the central driver.

In 2015, the family decided to repurpose their underused old barn. By planning carefully and running economic simulations through a formal business plan, they secured CAP investment subsidies. Construction started in February 2016.

Building the processing dairy directly beneath the farm shop and kitchen created short, highly efficient daily workflows. Milk and fruit go straight from production to processing, and then directly to the shelves or the cooking pan.

Income diversification is achieved through linked activities such as corporate seminars, cooking workshops, educational farm visits, and direct product sales. These are often combined into a single visitor experience, increasing revenue per customer. The new

infrastructure works as a cyclical system: a corporate group may rent the seminar room for a workshop, take part in a customised team-cooking event using the farm's organic veal and dairy, and then buy traditional artisanal products from the shop before leaving.

Educational programming is a key pillar. The farm works with children, young people, and adults. Through the 'Schule am Bauernhof' initiative, it offers 2-3-hour workshops on milk, apples, bees, herbs, natural cosmetics, and baking. This positions the farm as both producer and learning site.

The farm shop sells its own products, as well as regional organic goods from neighbouring eco-friendly farms. It also collaborates with the 'Lebenshilfe' organisation, employing a person with disabilities two days a week to work on the farm.

Using their own untreated silver fir wood for the interior design aligns with their philosophy. Their daily work is guided by the holistic principle of Dr Hans Peter Rusch: "We can never be healthier than the plants and animals from which we draw our food."

Stakeholders include the farming family who manage the production, shop, and events, and neighbouring regional organic farmers supplying the shop. Key institutional actors include the Chamber of Agriculture (LK) and the Rural Institute for Further Education (LFI), who provide advisory services and business concept development. Social stakeholders include the 'Lebenshilfe' organisation, local schools, eco-conscious consumers and corporate clients booking workshops.

Achievements

The diversification strategy has delivered strong qualitative, economic, and social results. Direct sales of value-added farm products performed better than expected, creating a stable full-time farm income (2 labour units) with high internal efficiency. Demand for events was always high. Today, the seminar and kitchen spaces are fully booked for corporate workshops, private events, and educational tours.

The dedicated processing dairy ('Sennerei') significantly improved product quality, hygiene standards, and production workflows.

The farm shop provides a stable sales platform for nearby organic farms. It also includes an inclusive workplace through cooperation with 'Lebenshilfe'.

The farm's sustainability work has been recognised with the Animal Welfare Award ('Tierschutzpreis'), the Meadow Championship ('Wiesenmeisterschaft') and was nominated for the national Climate Protection Award ('Klimaschutzpreis').



Lessons and recommendations

The main driver of success was creating an authentic, high-quality environment. Using natural homestead timber and offering exceptional hospitality helped build a clear brand identity. This generated strong word-of-mouth recommendations, removing the need for paid promotion.

The main challenges were financing the construction and navigating strict building regulations and bureaucracy. Meeting modern safety and accessibility standards (the facility is fully wheelchair accessible) also increased costs and made the project more complex than initially planned.

Recommendations:

Get professional advice and use regional advisory services (such as LK/LFI) early to develop a strong business plan, which is required to access investment grants.

Plan a significant financial buffer for unexpected regulatory changes during construction.

Ensure good access by public transport and provide free parking for cars and buses to attract schools and corporate groups.

Funding: Funding sources include CAP Strategic Plan support under Measure M06 (Development of agricultural holdings), and diversification into non-agricultural activities (6.4.1), combined with private investment.

Timeframe: 2014–2020 (conversion completed in 2016)

Lead organisation: Biohof Lingenhel

Further information:

- > <https://www.biohof-lingenhel.at>
- > <https://meinhof-meinweg.at/at/themen/innovative-betriebe/3504-biohof-lingenhel>

Contact: michaela.kaineder@bmluk.gv.at

Copyrights: Biohof Lingenhel



2.3. Austria – Vielfalt am Hummelhof – Barrier-free multifunctional enterprise

Description

Hummelhof is a certified organic family farm in a mountainous region of Austria that has transformed itself from a labour-intensive, low-income holding into a multifunctional enterprise combining agriculture, education, tourism, craftsmanship, and social innovation.

When Tanja Moser took over the farm in 2013, she was confronted by low profitability, high physical labour demands, and outdated buildings. To secure the farm's future, she transformed the 17-hectare agricultural and 5-hectare forestry operation into a multi-functional business integrating livestock farming, experiential education, workshop activities, accommodation, and on-farm value creation.

The farm diversified by combining innovative agriculture with education and tourism. It operates traditional Original Braunvieh cattle under ethical cow-calf rearing practices, rare Mohair and Cashmere goats for high-quality wool production, and innovative mealworm breeding for sustainable protein production. Farm infrastructure was modernised in 2017 and 2021 to support diversification, including the renovation of buildings into seminar spaces, a modern seminar kitchen, overnight guest accommodations, a farm shop, and a glass-crafting workshop.

Hummelhof also functions as an educational and experiential farm, offering guided tours, biodiversity activities, school programmes, and craft workshops. The entire site has been designed with accessibility and barrier-free principles, ensuring inclusivity for visitors and workers.

Rationale

Hummelhof's diversification strategy began with a strategic planning phase based on 'barrier-free thinking'. Before any construction took place, Tanja Moser spent years mentally planning the ideal state of the farm. She visualised a lifestyle in which work-life balance, health, and landscape aligned perfectly, developing her vision for an accessible, efficient, and multifunctional farm system, without letting financial constraints block her creativity. This strong vision helped overcome internal family scepticism during the transition and guided all subsequent investments.

The infrastructure was updated in phases to strengthen resilience and asset value. First, the animal housing was rebuilt in 2017 to optimise animal welfare and simplify daily chores. In 2021, the 45-year-old agricultural building was fully renovated using solid wood sourced directly from the farm's own forest. The project preserved historical features while integrating a sustainable photovoltaic system.

The layout of the converted building was designed to accommodate multiple independent businesses. In line with the farm's core values, the entire facility is wheelchair accessible and designed with an awareness of ageing.

Combining her background in pedagogy, agriculture, and crafts, the manager turned the farm into an educational and experiential hub. The farm generates revenue through diverse, high-value income streams including school programmes ('School on the Farm'), biodiversity walks, and creative workshops (such as soap-making and glass-fusing) organised in cooperation with regional adult education centres (VHS).

Institutional partnerships played a key role in professionalising these services. The manager completed certified training courses ('Green Care' and 'School on the Farm') delivered by the Chamber of Agriculture (LK Vorarlberg) and the Rural Institute for Further Education (LFI). Looking ahead, the farm is partnering with regional health organisations to launch specialised health seminars for pregnant women, focusing on how early exposure to farm environments boosts children's immune systems.

The initiative's long-term development relies on a well-integrated network of actors. Key stakeholders include the farm family (central actors), the Chamber of Agriculture (LK Vorarlberg), the Rural Institute for Further Education (LFI), adult education centres (VHS), biodiversity and ecological organisations, regional health networks, and visitors, including schools, tourists, and social institutions.

Achievements

Hummelhof has successfully transformed a marginal, labour-intensive farm into a financially viable, multifunctional rural enterprise generating stable income through diversified activities.

A major achievement is economic independence, with the farm now operating as the main full-time occupation for the owner, while supporting approximately 1.7 labour units. Diversification has reduced dependence on agricultural commodity markets and weather-related risks.

The farm has developed innovative niche markets, including educational tourism, experiential learning programmes, sustainable food innovation (mealworm production), and specialised craft-based workshops. These activities have expanded its customer base and strengthened economic resilience.

The farm has also become a recognised regional centre for inclusive and barrier-free education, contributing to social and educational value in rural development. Infrastructure design prioritises accessibility and long-term usability, supporting intergenerational continuity.



Lessons and recommendations

Hummelhof demonstrates that successful diversification depends on long-term vision, structured planning, and willingness to redesign the farm system as a whole.

A key success factor is the 'barrier-free thinking' approach, which prioritises functionality, accessibility, and long-term sustainability before financial constraints. Institutional training programmes and advisory services played a critical role in professionalising new activities.

A key challenge is managing resistance to structural change within family farming systems. The case shows that such challenges can be addressed through clear communication, persistence, and a strong long-term vision.

The model highlights the importance of integrating infrastructure planning with social, educational, and environmental objectives, ensuring that diversification contributes to both economic viability and quality of life.

Funding: The funding and support sources include the Austrian CAP Strategic Plan (Measure M06 – development of agricultural holdings, 6.4.1 diversification into non-agricultural activities), national rural development funds, and advisory programme support.

Timeframe: 2013 – ongoing

Lead organisation: Hummelhof

Further information

> <https://meinhof-meinweg.at/at/3498-hummelhof>

> <https://www.zukunftsraumland.at>
(Vielfalt am Hummelhof network reference)

Contact: michaela.kaineder@bmluk.gv.at

Copyrights: n/a





2.4. Belgium - IJshoeve De Boey. From a family dairy farm to a direct-to-consumer ice cream business

Description

IJshoeve De Boey is a multifunctional, family-run dairy farm located in Flanders, Belgium.

The De Boey family has a long tradition of mixed farming. In 1975, 14-year-old Marc De Boey took over family responsibilities following his grandfather's death. Due to limited opportunities, the farm was relocated in 1989 to its current site, just 500 metres away. To ensure financial sustainability, the business gradually expanded, and today manages about 90-100 dairy cows, 60-70 young cattle, and 500 pigs.

For over 20 years, the family had a vision of producing their own ice cream. This became reality in 2015 with the launch of IJshoeve De Boey, focused on products made from farm-sourced ingredients. By embracing a short supply chain, the farm processes its own milk into ice cream and dairy products, while also operating an ice cream parlour and a summer terrace for visitors.

Today, the farm keeps around 90-100 dairy cows, 60-70 young cattle and beef cattle, pig farming having been discontinued in 2015. Marc manages overall farm operations, while his wife Christine and daughter Liselotte oversee ice cream production and sales. Their daughter Eline joined the business full-time in 2021, with their son Maarten gradually taking over animal care and supporting the transition of Marc's responsibilities.

The farm now specialises in Jersey A2A2 milk, suitable for people with lactose intolerance. The cows graze on herb-rich meadows that support both animal welfare and milk quality. Looking ahead, the family aims to expand both business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-consumer (B2C) activities, while further developing educational and tourism offers, including tiny houses, combining tradition with innovation and a strong focus on animal welfare, people, and nature.

Rationale

The evolution of the unique selling proposition (USP) of IJshoeve De Boey reflects a continuous process of innovation, diversification, and adaptation, driven by both necessity and long-term vision.

Originally, the farm operated as a conventional dairy business with Holstein cows, supplying milk to the dairy industry through a traditional B2B model. However, following two serious work accidents in 2013 and 2015, the family was forced to rethink the organisation of the farm and explore more sustainable and manageable business opportunities.

This transition was strongly supported by external advisory and knowledge networks. Key advisors from Boerenbond, including Patrick Pasgang (specialised in short food supply chains and farm diversification), Charlotte Cobbaert (generational renewal), and Bart Thoelen (cost calculation), together with legal and food safety expertise from Steunpunt Korte Keten through Ann Detelder, played

an important role in enabling access to knowledge, structuring the business model, and supporting decision-making throughout the diversification process. These advisors were instrumental in facilitating innovation and strengthening the farm's capacity to adapt.

The shift led to a strategic transition towards a short supply chain model focused on the on-farm production and sale of artisanal ice cream. Initially, products were sold directly to consumers visiting the farm, strengthening the connection between producer and customer. Over time, distribution was slightly expanded through the regional platform 'Smaak van Waas,' supplying local businesses and hospitality establishments.

To generate additional income and create future opportunities for their two daughters, the business gradually evolved into a multifunctional farm, combining food production with recreation, tourism, and education. The terrace was expanded to allow on-site consumption, while the product range broadened to include pancakes, waffles, and other farm-based refreshments. Educational activities also became an important pillar of the business, with schools, groups, and companies regularly visiting the farm for guided experiences and workshops.

The development of a long-term strategic vision was supported by advisor Patrick Pasgang through the Interreg project 'Fish & Chips' and the LEADER-funded project 'Ondernemerscoach', focused on business development. During this phase, additional diversification initiatives were introduced, including a flower-picking garden and early concepts for farm tourism and overnight stays through the LEADER project 'Toerismeboeren.'

Based on Marc De Boey's scientific interest in healthier dairy alternatives, the farm made the strategic decision to convert its dairy herd from Holstein to Jersey cows, fully committing to A2A2 milk production. A2A2 milk is known for its higher protein and fat content and is considered easier to digest, offering a potential alternative for people with milk intolerance. To further explore the scientific, technological, and commercial potential of this transition, an EIP Operational Group, 'A2A2milk,' was established to study health claims, recipe adaptations, and market opportunities.



Achievements

Multi-family income generation: Successfully secured and sustained full-time livelihood streams for four independent family units across two generations.

High-volume direct sales: Built a robust customer base, drawing 100–300 visitors on weekdays and 300–500 visitors per weekend day, with an average transaction value of EUR 10–15.

Product diversification: Formulated approximately 25 distinct artisanal ice cream flavours alongside a suite of yoghurts, desserts, and over 100 localised items, marketed via regional networks.

Tourism and education expansion: Established a functional flower-picking garden and structured educational farm tours for schools and corporate groups, with ongoing plans to introduce overnight tiny-house accommodations.

Lessons and recommendations

Key learnings include the importance of diversification, innovation, and maintaining a strong connection between production and consumers. By combining traditional farming with value-added activities such as on-farm dairy processing, direct sales, and tourism, the business has achieved greater financial resilience, while strengthening customer trust. The shift towards a short supply chain also demonstrated how local processing of farm products can enhance sustainability, product quality, and profitability.

Another important lesson is the value of adapting to changing consumer needs. The transition to Jersey A2A2 milk, alongside a stronger focus on animal welfare and natural grazing practices, illustrates how responding to health and quality expectations can help create a distinct market position. Gradually reducing less profitable or more resource-intensive activities also enabled the farm to concentrate on long-term sustainability.

Recommendations for similar businesses include investing in diversification beyond primary production, strengthening direct relationships with consumers, and exploring opportunities in education and agritourism. Succession planning and early involvement of younger generations are also essential to ensure continuity and ongoing innovation. Finally, balancing tradition with modern practices can support both economic viability and environmental responsibility, while preserving the identity of a family farm.

Funding: The transformation was backed by a mixture of public grants and leveraged private finance:

- > **CAP / RDP Funding:** Multiple LEADER projects covering agritourism and business development (65% funded).
- > **EIP Operational Groups:** Research on short food supply chains and A2A2 milk parameters (90% funded).
- > **Interreg & Horizon Europe Funds:** Strategic long-term business advisory (80% funded) and innovation piloting (100% funded).
- > **Federal & Private Capital:** Federal subsidies for food safety/cost calculations (100% funded) backed by private bank loans.
- > **Total Budget Split:** 40% CAP Funds, 5% National Funds, 50% Private/Own Funds, 5% Other sources.

Timeframe: 2015 – 2026 (Generational expansion ongoing)

Lead organisation: Boerenbond / IJshoeve De Boey

Further information

- > [IJshoeve De Boey Official Website](#)
- > [IJshoeve De Boey Video Documentary](#)
- > [Project info – A2A2 Milk](#)

Contact: patrick.pasgang@boerenbond.be

Copyrights: Boerenbond / HE Corenet





2.5. Bulgaria – Bioselena Organic Farming Foundation: Urban Farmers' Markets Network

Description

The Bioselena Organic Farming Foundation is a pioneering non-governmental organisation in Bulgaria that has championed sustainable agriculture since 2017, organising regular farmers' markets. The initiative was created to support small farmers in improving the market access and visibility of their products, while strengthening direct links between producers and consumers.

The farmers' markets provide opportunities for small-scale producers to sell their products directly, receive immediate feedback from customers, and better understand consumer preferences. Participation in the markets also encourages farmers to diversify their product range, improve product presentation and packaging, and develop new value-added products.

In addition to farmers' markets, Bioselena promotes farm diversification through educational farm visits, open farm days, and activities for children and families. These initiatives allow farms to open their doors to the public, present their production methods and products, and create interactive experiences connected to agriculture, local food, and nature.

As a result, many farms have invested in improving their infrastructure by creating recreation areas, small farm shops, tasting spaces, and visitor facilities. Some farms have also started offering tourism and experiential activities, including participation in seasonal agricultural practices such as rose picking.

These activities contribute to the promotion of local farms and products, generate additional income opportunities, and strengthen the social connection between rural producers and urban consumers.

Rationale

Bioselena's model targets a critical vulnerability for small-scale and organic farmers: restrictive wholesale supply chains that squeeze producer margins. The farmers' markets organised by Bioselena are located in urban areas and bring together registered farmers who sell their own products exclusively. This approach enables small-scale producers to connect directly with consumers, promote their products, and build long-term customer relationships. Participation in the markets encourages farmers to diversify their product range and adopt new marketing approaches. It also creates opportunities for networking, participation in agricultural exhibitions and public campaigns, and exchange of experience among producers. The initiative is coordinated by the Bioselena Organic Farming Foundation, which acts as the lead NGO responsible for logistics, urban market permissions, and training frameworks.

It involves small family farms, mainly certified organic growers and small-scale traditional food processors, as well as urban consumers, including eco-conscious shoppers, and children and families seeking educational experiences. Public and media partners such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Food, the Sofia Municipality, and regional media outlets also support visibility and outreach. In its early phase, the foundation secured international funding to help smallholders overcome limited access to capital by financing basic infrastructure, market logistics, and farmer training. These activities strengthen farmers' confidence, enhance entrepreneurial skills, and support the development of new business initiatives beyond primary agricultural production.

Open farm days and educational visits for children and adults represent another important diversification mechanism. Through these activities, farms become spaces for learning, recreation, and interaction with agriculture and nature, while also generating additional income through tourism, educational services, and on-farm experiences. As part of this process, many farms have invested in infrastructure improvements to accommodate visitors, including meeting areas, small farm shops, tasting spaces, and recreational facilities.

The initiative demonstrates how small farms can diversify by combining agricultural production with direct sales, public engagement, education and rural tourism.

Achievements

The initiative has contributed significantly to the diversification and visibility of small farms and local producers. Through participation in farmers' markets, producers have expanded their product range, strengthened direct relationships with customers, and gained access to new market opportunities beyond traditional sales channels. Many participating farms have developed additional activities and services, including on-farm processing, educational visits, tasting events, recreational areas, and direct sales facilities. Some have also invested in small processing units and visitor infrastructure to increase product value and enhance the overall customer experience. The initiative has strengthened cooperation between producers, raised public awareness of local and organic food production, and promoted short supply chains and more sustainable consumption practices.

Educational farm visits and open days have further reinforced links between urban consumers and rural communities, helping children and families better understand agriculture, food production, and environmentally friendly farming practices. Overall, the initiative has improved the economic sustainability, visibility, and long-term development potential of participating small farms.



Lessons and recommendations

One of the key success factors of the initiative is the direct connection created between farmers and consumers. Farmers' markets and open farm activities help build trust, improve product visibility, and create opportunities for small producers to develop value-added services and long-term customer relationships.

Another important factor is the combination of agricultural production with educational, tourism, and community-oriented activities. This allows farms to diversify their income sources while preserving their local identity and traditional farming practices.

The main challenges are related to administrative requirements, limited financial resources, marketing capacity, and the need for appropriate infrastructure to receive visitors and organise public activities. In the initial stages, the activities were supported mainly through international projects and partnerships, which helped establish the organisational and logistical framework of the initiative.

Funding: It has been financed via international development grants and municipal programmes: Swiss Cooperation and Development Programme; Europe Programme of the Sofia Municipality.

Timeframe: 2017 – Present

Lead organisation: Bioselena Organic Farming Foundation (NGO)

Further information:

> [Bioselena Official Website](#)

> [Facebook](#)

Contact: bioselena@abv.bg

Copyrights: Bioselena Organic Farming Foundation





2.6. Bulgaria – Bratanov Winery. Revitalising the Sakar region through wine tourism

Description

Bratanov is a pioneering family-run winery established in 2010 by a father and his two sons in the South Sakar Mountain region near Harmanli, Bulgaria. Aiming to restore ancestral viticulture traditions, the family gradually planted 44 hectares of vineyards between 2006 and 2019. The estate cultivates international varieties (Merlot, Syrah, Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Chardonnay, Viognier) alongside autochthonous Balkan grapes (Tamianka, Rubin, Mavrud, Gamza). The farm has transitioned from raw grape production into a high-value, multi-service enterprise that champions regional wine tourism, cultural festivals, and direct-to-consumer commerce.

The Sakar Mountain region in Bulgaria is increasingly developing wine tourism and direct-to-consumer sales as innovative approaches for diversifying vineyard farms and strengthening the local rural economy. A successful example is the development of small wineries that combine grape production with winemaking, tasting experiences, wine festivals, gastronomy, and online sales.

Through the creation of tasting rooms, participation in wine events, and the organisation of wine festivals and vineyard experiences, local producers attract visitors to the region and create additional income opportunities beyond primary agricultural production.

The development of wine tourism has encouraged farms to invest in visitor facilities, hospitality services, branding, and direct marketing channels, including online wine sales and digital promotion. This diversification model enables vineyard farms to increase the added value of their production while building direct relationships with consumers and promoting the identity of the Sakar wine region.

The initiative also contributes to the visibility of local grape varieties, regional traditions, and rural cultural heritage. Cooperation between wineries, local businesses, and tourism stakeholders further strengthens the attractiveness of the region as a destination for wine, gastronomy, and authentic rural experiences.

The model demonstrates how vineyard farms can successfully diversify their activities through wine production, tourism services, cultural events, and direct sales, while improving their economic sustainability and regional visibility.

Rationale

The diversification model in the Sakar wine region is based on combining traditional vineyard farming with value-added activities linked to wine production, tourism, gastronomy, and direct sales. Vineyard farms in the region have expanded their activities by establishing small wineries, tasting rooms, and visitor spaces where guests can experience local wines, regional cuisine, and the cultural identity of the area, enabling producers to move beyond raw grape production and develop higher-value products and services.

Wine festivals, vineyard events, and organised tastings play an important role in attracting visitors and promoting the Sakar region as a destination for wine tourism and authentic rural experiences. Seasonal events and direct interaction between producers and consumers strengthen local engagement while increasing the visibility of regional products and traditions. Digital marketing and online wine sales further support diversification by enabling producers to reach wider national and international markets and improve profitability through direct-to-consumer channels.

The initiative brings together a wide range of stakeholders, including vineyard farms, small wineries, tourism businesses, restaurants, accommodation providers, local producers, cultural organisations, and visitors participating in wine tourism activities. Additional actors such as local municipalities, regional tourism organisations, gastronomy partners, marketing and communication specialists, and businesses supporting e-commerce and direct sales further strengthen the ecosystem. This cooperation contributes to the promotion of the Sakar region as a destination for wine, gastronomy, and authentic rural experiences, while supporting the long-term sustainability of vineyard farms and rural communities.

An important element of this process is participation in professional networks and knowledge-sharing initiatives. Through membership in the Association of Wine Producers, wineries gain access to specialised training, peer-learning opportunities, and international exchanges of good practices, complemented by Erasmus+ study visits and projects that support the adaptation of successful European models of wine tourism and rural entrepreneurship.

The Bratanov model exemplifies this approach by integrating the full value chain, from cultivation and processing to hospitality and bottling, within a single estate. The family has transformed the winery into a destination hub with tasting rooms and visitor infrastructure, combining on-site wine tourism with an omni-channel strategy that links direct physical sales, online commerce, and participation in regional clusters organising festivals, tastings and gastronomic events.

Achievements

The diversification model has enabled vineyard farms in the Sakar region to generate additional income streams beyond primary agricultural production. By combining grape-growing with winemaking, wine tourism, cultural events, and direct sales, producers have significantly increased the added value of their products and services.

The development of tasting rooms, visitor facilities, and wine-related experiences has attracted new customer groups and increased the visibility of local wineries. Wine festivals and organised events have contributed to the promotion of the Sakar region as an emerging wine tourism destination and strengthened its regional identity.



Online sales and direct-to-consumer marketing have expanded market access and improved customer engagement, reducing dependence on traditional distribution channels. Many wineries have also strengthened their brands through storytelling, digital promotion, and direct interaction with visitors.

The initiative has encouraged cooperation among local businesses, tourism operators, restaurants and cultural organisations, generating positive spillover effects for the wider rural economy.

Overall, the model has improved the economic resilience, competitiveness, and long-term sustainability of vineyard farms while contributing to rural development, regional branding, and the preservation of local winemaking traditions.

Lessons and recommendations

A key success factor for the diversification of vineyard farms is the ability to combine high-quality agricultural production with value-added activities such as winemaking, wine tourism, direct sales, and visitor experiences. Strong regional identity, cooperation among local stakeholders, and continuous investment in customer engagement have been essential to the success of the initiative.

Participation in professional networks, training programmes, and international exchanges of good practices has also played an important role in strengthening the entrepreneurial and marketing capacities of producers. Access to knowledge and practical experience has enabled wineries to develop new products, services, and business models adapted to changing consumer expectations.

One of the main challenges faced by small and medium-sized producers remains limited capacity in marketing, branding, and market development. Future support measures should therefore focus on strengthening farmers' digital and marketing skills, branding capabilities, and access to modern sales channels.

There is also a need for more effective mechanisms to support market access and product promotion, including initiatives that facilitate direct sales, participation in tourism networks, cooperation between producers, and the development of regional brands. These measures can help farmers capture greater added value, improve competitiveness, and enhance the long-term sustainability of diversified rural businesses.

For successful replication, it is important to encourage cooperation, continuous learning, and innovation, while creating an enabling environment that supports both agricultural production and value-added rural entrepreneurship.

Funding: The winery expanded through consecutive co-funded projects under the Rural Development Programme and the National Support Programme for the Wine Sector. A fourth modernisation investment project has been submitted and is pending approval.

- Total Joint Project Budget: EUR 714 097
- National Public Funding: EUR 214 229
- CAP / European Agricultural Funds: EUR 499 868
- Private / Co-invested Family Funds: EUR 378 174

Timeframe: 2010 – Present

Lead organisation: Hristo Bratanov

Further information: [Bratanov Winery Profile & Balaban Platform](#)

Contact: hristo@bratanov.wine

Copyrights: Bratanov Winery





2.7. Bulgaria - Foundation Pendar.bg: turning family farms into gastronomic and rural experience destinations

Description

Pendar.bg is a nationwide digital and consulting platform in Bulgaria designed to enhance the economic sustainability of small family farms and rural households. It supports diversification strategies that enable farmers to complement traditional agricultural production with higher-value, non-agricultural activities.

Small family farms in Bulgaria are increasingly developing gastronomic and tourism-based services such as tastings, culinary workshops, and rural hospitality experiences, rooted in local traditions and farm-produced products. Through Pendar.bg, farmers receive guidance in designing and structuring these activities, helping them access new markets and attract visitors while maintaining their core agricultural production.

The model is particularly relevant for small family farms that struggle to compete in low-margin commodity markets but have strong potential in authenticity, local identity, and direct producer-consumer relationships. In this context, Pendar.bg acts as an incubator, helping transform farm assets, traditional recipes, and regional know-how into structured experiential offers for visitors.

Rationale

Small farms identify and build on their unique local resources, including traditional recipes, local products, crafts, farming practices, family stories, and the natural environment. Based on these assets, they develop additional non-agricultural activities such as tastings, culinary workshops, farm visits, and direct sales of local products. Pendar.bg supports this process through consulting, training, marketing, outreach to new audiences, and the development of sustainable tourism products.

The initiative brings together a range of stakeholders, including the Pendar Foundation as the lead non-profit organisation responsible for platform infrastructure, marketing, and training; small family farmers and rural households as the primary producers and service providers; local governance actors such as rural municipalities, community cultural centres (chitalishta), and LEADER Local Action Groups; and tourism stakeholders, including independent consultants, rural development experts, and eco-tourists seeking authentic regional experiences.

Some farms also benefit from funding under rural development measures for the renovation of premises, the purchase of equipment, and the development of tourism infrastructure.

As a result, farms reduce their dependence on low raw-material prices and create more stable and sustainable income sources. Diversification also encourages the involvement of women and young people in family businesses and creates opportunities for rural employment and generational renewal.

Achievements

The example demonstrates how small farms can successfully expand their activities through high-value-added services. It shows the creation of new income sources beyond primary agricultural production, alongside the development of gastronomic and rural tourism services and improved direct access to consumers. These activities support the promotion of local products, traditions, and cultural identity, while also contributing to the extension of the tourism season. As a result, farms benefit from increased economic resilience and sustainability, as well as the creation of temporary and seasonal employment opportunities. The model also supports the retention of young people and families in rural areas and strengthens the image of rural territories through authentic visitor experiences.

In addition, the model contributes to the preservation of intangible cultural heritage, particularly traditional cuisine and local food practices.

Lessons and recommendations

A key success factor is the authentic connection between the farm, local products, personal stories, and the overall visitor experience. Diversification is most successful when it is perceived not as a separate tourism activity, but as a natural extension of agricultural production. Visitors value authentic interaction and personal storytelling.

The main challenges relate to administrative requirements, the small farmers' limited marketing skills, seasonality, and access to funding. These can be addressed through advisory support, step-by-step development, partnerships, and clear positioning of services towards appropriate target audiences. Using a centralised platform such as Pendar.bg distributes marketing costs and administrative overhead across a wider network.

For successful replication, it is important to maintain authenticity, involve local communities, and combine agricultural production with services that generate added value and strengthen direct contact with consumers.

Funding: The initiative is financed through foundational grants and private resources. Total Budget: EUR 400 000

Timeframe: 2018 - 2026

Lead organisation: Foundation Pendar

Further information:

<https://www.facebook.com/pendara.bg>

Contact: office@pendara.bg

Copyrights: Foundation Pendar





2.8. Croatia – Young Farmers in Lika: Generational collaborative entrepreneurship

Description

This example highlights how young farmers in the Lika region of Croatia are revitalising rural areas through diversification, value addition, and entrepreneurship. It brings together the experiences of two young entrepreneurs, Ivan Vlaineić and Nikolina Perša, who have successfully transformed traditional family farming activities into innovative and market-oriented businesses.

Ivan Vlaineić returned from Zagreb to his family farm in Prvan Selo, in the Municipality of Perušić, to revive and modernise his great-grandfather's traditional plum brandy distillery. Building on a family heritage dating back almost a century, he now produces premium plum brandy alongside seven other fruit brandies and liqueurs made from fruit grown in his own orchards. To reduce climate-related risks affecting fruit production, he recently diversified further by developing an innovative beer-based liqueur.

Similarly, Nikolina Perša returned to her family farm in the village of Mušaluk after completing her studies and seasonal work in the tourism sector. Drawing on the farm's beekeeping, fruit, and grain production, she developed a range of artisanal granola and energy bars, creating value-added products based on local ingredients.

Together, these examples demonstrate how young farmers can create new economic opportunities by combining traditional agricultural production with processing, branding, tourism, and product innovation.

Rationale

Both businesses are based on adding value to primary agricultural production and developing diversified income streams. Ivan Vlaineić expanded the family farm by investing in modern processing equipment, including a 470-litre copper distillation kettle supported through CAP funding. The farm now manages more than 650 fruit trees and offers visitors accommodation and tasting experiences in a restored traditional Lika house. The production process combines modern technology with traditional methods, and incorporates circular practices through the reuse of by-products for energy generation and agricultural purposes.

Nikolina Perša diversified her family farm by transforming farm-produced honey, grains, and fruit into innovative food products aimed at health-conscious consumers. Through product development, branding, and market positioning, she successfully entered new sales channels and reached consumers beyond the local market.

The main stakeholders include the young farmers and their families, local communities, consumers, tourism operators, advisory services, processing and retail partners, and organisations supporting young farmers and rural entrepreneurship. CAP support, national competitions for young farmers, and various business support initiatives also played an important role in strengthening entrepreneurship, innovation, and visibility.

Achievements

The initiative demonstrates how young farmers can successfully diversify agricultural activities and increase farm resilience through value-added processing and direct consumer engagement. Ivan Vlaineić has established a recognised premium spirits business while also developing agritourism activities linked to tasting experiences and rural accommodation. His achievements led to national recognition and participation in European-level events promoting young farmers.

Nikolina Perša successfully created a new product line based on local farm resources and gained national recognition for her artisanal granola and energy bars, including securing placement opportunities in a major European supermarket chain.

Both examples contribute to rural development by creating additional income sources, strengthening local identity, promoting traditional products, and encouraging generational renewal in agriculture. They also demonstrate that returning to rural areas can offer attractive entrepreneurial opportunities for young people.



Lessons and recommendations

A key lesson from these examples is that diversification is most successful when it builds on existing farm resources, local traditions, and clear market opportunities. Combining agricultural production with processing, tourism, or innovative food products can significantly increase the added value generated on the farm.

Strong entrepreneurial skills, willingness to innovate, and continuous learning were essential success factors. Participation in competitions, networking activities, and advisory programmes helped increase visibility, improve business skills and create new market opportunities.

The main challenges included access to investment capital, climate-related risks affecting agricultural production, market development, and the need to balance multiple business activities. These challenges can be addressed through gradual business expansion, investment in value-added processing, cooperation with support organisations, and the use of available CAP and rural development funding.

Funding: n/a

Timeframe: n/a

Lead organisation: n/a

Further information: n/a

Contact: n/a

Copyrights: n/a





2.9. Croatia - PROcvjetaj (Cinija Cottage): Scale-resilient micro-farming and eco-labelled tourism

Description

PROcvjetaj is a small family farm located in the remote rural area of Žumberak Nature Park in Croatia. Shortly after its establishment, it became clear that agricultural production alone could not ensure long-term economic viability due to the small scale of production and structural constraints linked to depopulation and limited rural development opportunities.

To strengthen resilience, the farm diversified its activities by developing Cinija Cottage, a sustainable holiday home integrated into the agricultural holding. This tourism activity complements rather than replaces farming, creating a multifunctional rural business model based on agriculture, hospitality, and environmental values.

The farm cultivates sweet chestnut trees, ornamental flowers, and mixed fruit, using ecological principles. The accommodation promotes local products and nearby farms, contributing to wider rural value creation. Cinija Cottage has obtained EU Ecolabel certification, becoming one of the few certified holiday homes in Croatia and the first in Zagreb County.

As the first holiday home in the village, the project played a pioneering role in introducing tourism-based diversification in the area and strengthening the visibility of rural entrepreneurship in Žumberak Nature Park.

Rationale

PROcvjetaj developed its diversification strategy in response to the limited income potential of small-scale agriculture in a remote mountain area. The farm identified rural tourism as a complementary activity that could generate additional income while enhancing the value of existing natural and agricultural assets.

The model is built on the integration of ecological farming and sustainable accommodation. Agricultural production of chestnuts, flowers, and mixed fruit provides both landscape value and local food products that are shared with visitors, strengthening the link between production and consumption.

Cinija Cottage was designed as an environmentally responsible accommodation facility, using the surrounding landscape, traditions, and agricultural environment as tourism assets. It applies sustainability principles such as renewable energy use, waste separation, water management, and local sourcing, supporting both environmental performance and market positioning.

The tourism activity is closely linked to agriculture. Guests are introduced to seasonal farm activities, local food systems, biodiversity, and rural life in Žumberak Nature Park. Cooperation with neighbouring farms and producers strengthens short supply chains and expands local economic impact.

The farm also invested in EU Ecolabel certification, which improved credibility, structured environmental practices, and increased visibility among environmentally conscious visitors.

Stakeholders include the PROcvjetaj family farm; guests and visitors; neighbouring farmers and local food producers; Zagreb County tourism actors; the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Green Transition through the EU Ecolabel framework; local service providers; and the wider Žumberak Nature Park community. These actors contribute to a broader rural ecosystem supporting sustainable tourism and local development.

Achievements

PROcvjetaj successfully established an additional and more stable income stream, improving the farm's long-term viability in a structurally constrained rural area.

The diversification strategy combines agriculture and tourism into a coherent business model that increases resilience and reduces dependence on primary production alone. The farm obtained EU Ecolabel certification, becoming the first certified accommodation facility of its kind in Zagreb County, which strengthened its market positioning and environmental credibility.

The project increased the visibility of Žumberak Nature Park as a rural tourism destination and contributed to the promotion of local agricultural products. Cooperation with neighbouring producers reinforced short supply chains and generated spillover benefits for the wider local economy.

As the first holiday home in the village, Cinija Cottage played a pioneering role in introducing tourism-based diversification locally and demonstrated the potential of small-scale rural entrepreneurship in depopulated areas.

Lessons and recommendations

The case shows that early recognition of structural limitations in primary agriculture is key to developing successful diversification strategies. Rather than scaling up production, PROcvjetaj strengthened viability through tourism and sustainability-oriented services.

A key success factor is the alignment of tourism activities with existing farm resources and local identity. Authenticity and environmental responsibility were central to building trust and market differentiation, supported by EU Ecolabel certification.

Main challenges included remoteness, limited infrastructure, administrative requirements, and investment costs for tourism development. These were addressed through gradual implementation and integration of activities within a single farm system.



For replication, diversification works best when it builds directly on local landscapes, farm products, and territorial identity, while combining agriculture with sustainability and experiential tourism.

Funding: Funding sources include the Croatian Rural Development Programme (Measure 6.2.1 – support for investments in the creation and development of non-agricultural activities in rural areas), combined with private investment by the PROcvjetaj family farm.

Timeframe: 2022-ongoing

Lead organisation: PROcvjetaj obrt za proizvodnju i usluge (Cinija Cottage)

Further information

- > <https://www.naturala.hr/cinija-cottage-savrsen-bijeg-iz-urbanog-kaosa-i-uzurbane-svakodnevice>
- > <https://www.novilist.hr/tag/cinija-cottage>

Contact: jelena@procvjetaj.com

Copyrights: n/a





2.10. Czechia - AGRO SVOBODA s.r.o.

Description

Over the years, the farm has undergone a series of six diversification projects aimed at strengthening its economic resilience and reducing dependence on traditional farming income. The first initiative was the establishment of a small 150 t/year composting facility serving local municipalities, funded through the European Regional Development Fund and the Cohesion Fund. This was followed by a 0.5 MWh electrical biogas facility, which was entirely self-funded and remains the only activity directly linked to core farming operations.

They further expanded into the hospitality sector with Kap Café, a café combined with a bed-and-breakfast offering 14 beds, creating a new income stream tied to rural tourism. Recognising opportunities in infrastructure, they invested in construction services by acquiring a construction-grade telescopic handler, with support from the EU Rural Development Programme (EAFRD). Their diversification continued with significant investment in housing development, resulting in a portfolio of 60 flats dedicated to long-term rental. Most recently, they participated in an EIP-AGRI Operational Group, contributing to innovation and collaboration in the agricultural sector.

The key stakeholders involved included local municipalities, which collaborated especially on the composting initiative; the farm, as the central project developer and investor; and local construction companies, which supported infrastructure development and equipment utilisation.

Achievements

The diversification efforts have created new business activities and multiple income streams, making the farm more resilient and less dependent on traditional agriculture. This stronger financial base provides greater opportunities to reinvest in the farm, including upgrading machinery, increasing employee wages, acquiring additional land, and supporting further expansion.

Lessons and recommendations

Avoid projects that require the creation of new jobs as a funding condition. In the Czech context, employment obligations apply to the farm as a whole, not just the specific project. If an employee leaves and a replacement is not found quickly, the project can be considered non-compliant, even if it is otherwise successful. In this case, this led to the failure of a wood-processing diversification project, requiring the farm to return funding and cease operations to limit further losses.

Funding: Multiple sources

Timeframe:

- > 2013 – flats for rent
- > 2016 – Kap Café
- > 2018 – Composting facility
- > 2019 – Biogas Facility
- > 2020 – Construction contracting
- > 2026 – EIP AGRI OG

Lead organisation: AGRO SVOBODA s.r.o.

Further information:

- > www.agrosvoboda.cz
- > www.facebook.com/agrosvoboda

Contact: Svoboda.ml@agrosvoboda.cz

Copyrights: AGRO SVOBODA s.r.o © 2025





2.11. Germany – Landfrauen machen Schule: School-farm educational programme

Description

The 'School-farm educational programme' project is a long-standing educational initiative implemented across Bavaria that enables farms to diversify through structured educational and experiential learning programmes. Coordinated by the Educational Institute of the Bavarian Farmers' Association (Bayerischer Bauernverband) and supported by the Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Tourism, the initiative allows participating farms to welcome school classes and provide hands-on insights into regional food production and the role of agriculture in nutrition, the environment, and society.

Running for almost 25 years, the programme offers farms a structured entry point into diversification, helping them develop educational services that can evolve into sustainable additional income streams while strengthening their role as places of learning and community engagement.

Farms receive comprehensive support through collaboration with nutrition specialists from the Farmers' Association's educational centre, standardised teaching frameworks, training courses provided by the association, and professional qualification programmes offered by the Bavarian State Ministry through the Academy for Diversification.

For many participants, the programme serves as a first step towards broader diversification, creating new economic opportunities alongside agricultural production and establishing the farm as a recognised venue for education and community interaction.

Rationale

The project provides Bavarian farms with a structured entry point into diversification by developing educational activities and learning opportunities on the farm.

At the heart of the project is the link between classroom learning and a farm visit. Trained nutrition specialists teach pupils about topics such as milk, cereals, potatoes, fruit and vegetables, meat, eggs, regional food, sustainable nutrition, and food appreciation. Classroom lessons are complemented by practical exercises and reinforced during the farm visit. Farms receive EUR 220 for each school class hosted, covering an educational session lasting three to four school hours.

Farms are integrated into the programme through the Bavarian Farmers' Association, which provides training, teaching concepts, and ongoing technical support. This enables farms with no prior educational experience to gradually develop pedagogical skills and offer structured learning activities.

Farm visits are the central element of the diversification strategy. Farmers provide hands-on insights into food production, explain agricultural practices, and share their daily lives with pupils.

Through direct interaction with children, teachers, and parents, they help strengthen understanding of local agriculture. The educational activities are closely aligned with the competence-based curricula of primary and secondary schools.

Participation allows farms to gain experience in educational services, strengthen their communication and presentation skills, develop pedagogical expertise, and increase their visibility within society. It also creates links with schools and other regional stakeholders, providing a foundation for further educational and community activities, as well as additional diversification opportunities such as direct sales, farm gastronomy, social farming, or hosting children's events on the farm.

The programme is supported by a network of agricultural and educational institutions, including the Educational Centre of the Bavarian Farmers' Association, the Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Tourism, and the Academy for Diversification under the Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Tourism.

This institutional framework ensures quality, consistency, and accessibility across participating farms.

Achievements

Since its launch 25 years ago, the 'School-farm educational programme' project has helped open new development opportunities for farms. By welcoming school classes and offering hands-on educational activities, farms have expanded into educational services and extracurricular learning, creating additional income streams alongside traditional production, and positioning themselves as places of learning and community connection.

The programme has contributed to improved public understanding of agriculture and food systems through direct engagement between farms and school communities. Standardised teaching concepts and training programmes have improved the quality and consistency of educational delivery.

Direct engagement with children, teachers, and parents also strengthens public perceptions of agriculture and builds trust in regional food production.

Over time, structured qualification pathways have been developed. Farmers can now complete a 16-day qualification to become certified 'Experiential Farmers' (*Erlebnisbäuerin/Erlebnisbauer*), This has further professionalised farm-based learning and expanded its potential beyond school groups to broader target audiences.

Ultimately, the project supports nutrition education, deepens understanding of agriculture, and strengthens the link between farming communities and wider society. It also contributes to the sustainable development of rural areas and creates future-oriented prospects for family farms.



Lessons and recommendations

For agricultural enterprises looking to diversify, the project demonstrates that educational services can provide a low-threshold, low-risk entry point into an additional business branch. A key success factor is the support provided by an established network, which in this case includes the Educational Centre of the Bavarian Farmers' Association, local branch offices near the farms, and trained nutrition specialists.

Standardised teaching frameworks, professional training, expert guidance, and best-practice examples, including training sessions hosted directly on active educational farms, make it easier to get started, even without prior pedagogical experience.

To ensure that farms are recognised as credible extracurricular educational partners, it is vital to closely align the farm-based lesson content with school curricula. This integration allows students to explore topics such as food appreciation, nutrient cycles and Education for Sustainable Development in a practical setting.

A major challenge lies in integrating educational activities into daily farming operations. This requires time, organisational planning, and a willingness to develop new skills in communication and knowledge transfer. This can be eased through targeted training, exchange with experienced farms, and the use of existing educational materials.

Long-term success depends above all on strong partnerships with the educational sector, such as ministries of education, local schools, and school boards, as well as reliable funding through state subsidies and advisory services.

Funding: National funds: EUR 190 000, other funding (non-CAP): EUR 48 000

Timeframe: 2022– ongoing. In 2026, the project is currently in its 24th cycle.

Lead organisation: Bayerischer Bauernverband, Bildungswerk (The Educational Centre of the Bavarian Farmers' Association)

Further information

- > <https://www.landfrauen-machen-schule.de>
- > <https://www.stmelf.bayern.de/landwirtschaft/erwerbskombination/programm-erlebnis-bauernhof/index.html>
- > <https://www.ima-agrar.de>

Contact: brigitte.klamt@bayerischerbauernverband.de

Copyrights: BBV





2.12. Germany - Blauer Gockel - Farm and rural holidays network

Description

The network Blauer Gockel is a state-wide umbrella organisation in Bavaria supporting around 1 400 family-run farms in diversifying their agricultural activities through tourism. The participating businesses are predominantly small and medium-sized farms in rural regions.

The farms have expanded their income through offers such as holiday apartments, farm stays, camping facilities, wellness services, family and children's activities, and interactive learning experiences about farming, alongside the direct marketing of regional products. This has created alternative and more stable income sources alongside traditional agriculture.

Blauer Gockel provides a comprehensive quality, advisory, and marketing system, including quality standards and classifications, training and further education, digital visibility, online booking and marketing support, and tailored advice for host families. Through the shared brand, small businesses in particular benefit from wider reach, professional marketing, and a strong knowledge-sharing network.

This diversification model strengthens the competitiveness, resilience and long-term viability of family farms. Tourism income helps to buffer agricultural market fluctuations and secure farm continuity. At the same time, it supports the preservation of rural culture, regional traditions, and the cultural landscape, making them accessible to visitors.

Rationale

Blauer Gockel functions as a central tourism brand that coordinates the marketing and visibility of participating farms. It provides a shared platform for promotion, including online booking systems, marketing campaigns, trade fair participation, and digital communication tools.

A key feature of the model is the combination of professional marketing support with continuous knowledge exchange among farm families. Regular meetings, training sessions, and working groups enable farms to share experience, develop new ideas and innovative offerings, and improve service quality.

To bridge the gap between agricultural operations and the tourism market, the Bavarian Offices for Food, Agriculture, and Forestry, supported by regional provider associations, provide

vital expert consultation, guiding farms through service design, professionalisation, and compliance with regulatory requirements and quality standards. On a broader scale, regional tourism organisations and destinations, alongside local partners such as hospitality businesses, leisure facilities, direct marketers, and artisanal craftsmen, further integrate these offers into the local economy, maximising regional value creation.

Ultimately, this entire framework is driven by guests and holidaymakers, whose demand for authentic rural experiences forms the economic foundation for the farms' diversification. Ensuring long-term continuity, the Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry and Tourism establishes the overarching policy frameworks, funding schemes, and advisory measures.

The close interaction between agricultural advisory services, tourist marketing, and knowledge exchange within the network ensures both high-quality standards and sustainable economic resilience across the region.

Achievements

Blauer Gockel has contributed to the long-term economic stabilisation and future viability of many family farms, particularly small and medium-sized holdings, by enabling them to develop reliable tourism income alongside traditional agriculture. This has strengthened resilience in the face of structural change, crises, and price volatility in the agricultural sector.

A large network of around 1 300 quality-certified farms has been established, improving visibility and market access, particularly for smaller holdings. The use of recognised national classification systems enhances transparency and trust for visitors, supports continuous service development, and improves competitiveness in the tourism market.

The model has generated additional employment and regional value creation through cooperation with local businesses and services, including gastronomy, leisure providers, crafts, and direct marketing. It has also strengthened the public image and understanding of agriculture by providing authentic visitor experiences centred on farm life, sustainability, and food production.

In addition, the initiative contributes to preserving rural agricultural landscapes, traditions, and cultural identity by integrating them into tourism experiences, keeping rural areas attractive and accessible to future generations.



Lessons and recommendations

Key success factors include close cooperation between advisory services, tourism organisations, and farming families. Individual guidance from regional agricultural offices has helped farms professionalise their tourism offers and better align them with visitor expectations. The Blauer Gockel umbrella brand has been crucial in increasing trust, visibility, and market access, particularly for small farms.

Consistent quality standards and certification systems are also essential, as they strengthen competitiveness and provide clear guidance for visitors.

Main challenges include investment costs, administrative requirements, and limited skills in tourism and digital marketing. These have been addressed through targeted training, advisory support, funding programmes, and peer learning within the network.

Successful replication requires long-term policy support, a strong umbrella organisation, regional networks, and accessible advisory and funding mechanisms. It is particularly important to ensure tailored support for small farms and to maintain a strong focus on regional identity and authentic visitor experiences.

Funding: Information not available

Timeframe: Since 2010

Lead organisation: Blauer Gockel – Bauernhof – und Landurlaub e. V.

Further information: www.blauergockel.de

Contact: wibbeke@blauergockel.de

Copyrights: Blauer Gockel, Schleipfnerhof





2.13. Germany - Projekt 'Auszeithöfe': integrating social farming care and respite network

Description

The project 'Auszeithöfe', developed by Verein Soziale Landwirtschaft Bayern e.V., supports farms in Bavaria in diversifying their activities through social farming services. The initiative enables participating farms to offer structured, short experiential visits for older people or people living with dementia and their carers. These visits combine sensory engagement with farm animals and rural environments, followed by opportunities for social interaction over coffee, cake, or a light meal. The project currently involves 62 farms and is expanding.

Rationale

The project provides a structured model for integrating care-related and social services into farm-based diversification. The initiative is designed for small and medium-sized farms seeking additional income sources while contributing to social well-being in rural areas.

The 'Auszeithöfe' model offers two-hour farm visits, including a 30-minute guided experiential activity focusing on sensory stimulation, movement, and social interaction. Contact with farm animals plays a central emotional and therapeutic role. The visits are followed by informal gatherings over food and drinks, creating space for exchange between visitors, carers, and relatives.

Groups such as outpatient care services or dementia support groups register directly with participating farms and organise their own transport. Participation is free for visitors, while farms receive compensation of EUR 160, plus EUR 20 for additional support costs, financed primarily through the Bavarian Dementia Fund.

Farmers involved in the programme are required to meet certain qualifications, including training in social farming, experience farming certification, or equivalent care-related training. Farms must also ensure appropriate facilities, including indoor spaces, sanitary conditions, insurance coverage, and food safety compliance.

The development of the project is supported by multiple institutional actors. The Bavarian Farmers' Association plays a key role in promoting social farming and supporting farm participation. Public institutions such as the Bavarian State Ministry of Food, Agriculture, Forestry, and Tourism, the Bavarian State Ministry of Health, Care, and Prevention, and the Bavarian State Research Centre for Agriculture provide regulatory, financial, and strategic support. The Bavarian Dementia Fund and media partners such as ANTENNE Bayern contribute to financing and visibility.

Achievements

The project 'Auszeithöfe', has rapidly expanded since its launch in 2023 and now includes 62 participating farms, with further expansion planned. It has successfully established a structured framework for integrating social care activities into farm diversification strategies.

A key achievement is the creation of a coordinated support system, including the establishment of a Coordination Office for 'Auszeithöfe' at Kempten University of Applied Sciences in 2025. This office strengthens professional support, quality assurance, training development, and network coordination for participating farms.

The initiative contributes both to rural diversification and social welfare by offering respite and emotional support for carers and families of people living with dementia. It also strengthens the visibility of social farming as a recognised rural development strategy.



Lessons and recommendations

The project demonstrates that social farming can provide a meaningful diversification pathway for small farms, particularly in ageing rural societies. A key success factor is the combination of public funding, institutional partnerships, and community-based support networks.

A main challenge concerns the long-term financial sustainability of farm compensation, as current funding mechanisms (including the Bavarian Dementia Fund) are time-limited. While donations and media partnerships help bridge funding gaps, stable long-term financing structures remain necessary.

The model shows strong societal relevance, particularly given that most people living with dementia are cared for at home. Continued institutional support and integration into health and social care systems are therefore essential for scaling and long-term viability.

Funding: The funding and support sources include the Bavarian Dementia Fund, national co-financing schemes, private donations, and media partnerships (e.g. ANTENNE Bayern support initiatives).

Timeframe: 2023 - ongoing

Lead organisation: Verein Soziale Landwirtschaft Bayern e.V.

Further information

- > <https://soziale-landwirtschaft-bayern.org/auszeithoeft>
- > <https://www.hs-kempten.de/fakultaet-soziales-und-gesundheit/labore/institut-fuer-gesundheit-und-generationen/koordinierungsstelle-auszeithoeft>
- > <https://www.bayerischerbauernverband.de/soziale-landwirtschaft>

Contact:

- > sozialelandwirtschaft@outlook.com
- > juliane.Singer@BayerischerBauernverband.de

Copyrights: Alexander Rath / Fotolia.com

Auszeithöfe





2.14. Germany - Bohnet Farm: reinventing an iconic dairy farm in the black forest

Description

Biodirekt C & C Bohnet GbR is a family-run organic farm located in the Black Forest region of Baden-Württemberg at around 700 metres altitude. The farm was converted to organic production in 1989 and joined the Bioland association, making it one of the early adopters of organic farming in the region. Since 2013, sisters Charlotte and Claudia Bohnet have jointly managed the holding.

Of its 45 hectares, two-thirds are permanent grassland, while the remaining area is used to grow cereals and potatoes. Forestry also plays an important role in the business. Today, the farm produces beef, eggs, potatoes, bread, and other goods. Animal welfare, particularly for suckler cows, and sustainable land and forest management are central principles of Bohnet Farm.

Rationale

Bohnet Farm provides an example of long-term diversification driven by structural constraints and market adaptation.

The introduction of milk quotas triggered the search for alternatives, as the farm was too small to remain competitive as a dairy farm. It thus shifted away from conventional dairy farming and began developing direct marketing channels. Over time, the farm diversified further through on-farm processing, bakery production, direct sales, a delivery service, a self-service farm shop, egg production, and digital marketing, creating multiple complementary income streams.

After taking over the farm, Charlotte and Claudia continued this diversification strategy by replacing dairy production with suckler cow farming. Today, one animal is slaughtered each month, processed, and marketed directly to private households.

Supported by the 'Innovative Measures for Women in Rural Areas' funding programme, the farm developed an on-site bakery producing bread and baked goods from grain grown on the farm. The bread is sold through multiple channels, including three [EDEKA supermarkets](#), an organic food shop, direct sales, and a weekly delivery service, enabling customers to purchase farm products throughout the week.

The farm also established a self-service farm shop (open 7 days a week), with support through LEADER.

To broaden its product range further, the farm also invested in a mobile hen house to sell eggs.

Marketing has been professionalised through digital tools, branding, and a farm website, reducing reliance on informal word-of-mouth.

The farm's development was supported by a range of stakeholders, including the regional government office (Regierungspräsidium), the LEADER local action group, and the Arbeitskreis Bäuerliche Landwirtschaft (ALB).

Achievements

In the region, it is difficult to acquire additional land for farming. In addition, working the land is challenging due to the location of the farm, and cannot always be fully mechanised. Diversification enabled the farm to remain viable and continue developing without expanding its land base. New business areas were created, and a loyal customer base was established. Thanks to hard work, resilience, and a dedication to innovation, the farm has successfully secured a sustainable, long-term future.



Lessons and recommendations

Successful diversification requires strong entrepreneurial commitment, regulatory compliance, and long-term perseverance. Family cohesion across generations is a key success factor.

Diversification is most effective when aligned with market demand and supported by strong internal cooperation and consistent investment in new value-added activities.

Funding: LEADER Programme – Innovative Measures for Women in Rural Areas

Timeframe: Since 1989

Lead organisation: Biodirekt C & C Bohnet GbR

Further information

- > <https://www.bohnet-hof.de>
- > <https://mlr.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/unsere-themen/laendlicher-raum/foerderung/innovative-massnahmen-frauen>
- > <https://mlr.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/unsere-themen/laendlicher-raum/foerderung/leader>

Contact: mail@bohnet-hof.de

Copyrights: Claudia und Charlotte Bohnet





2.15. Germany - Andrea Göhring: Social farming and animal-assisted therapy

Description

Andrea Göhring's farm in Rulfingen, Baden-Württemberg, is a diversified agricultural holding combining organic arable farming, forestry services, and social farming activities. The farm produces cereals, potatoes, lentils, lupins, and hemp, and operates a self-service farm shop offering products from the farm and regional partners.

A key diversification area is animal-assisted intervention, where farm animals are trained to support children, young people, and adults with disabilities. The farm also provides training for professionals in this field.

In addition, the farm offers forestry services, including tree and woodland care, specialist tree felling, and chainsaw training courses.

Rationale

Andrea Göhring's farm is an example of gradual diversification following structural transition. In 2004, the Göhring couple took over Andrea Göhring's parents' traditional pig breeding farm. The young couple initiated the conversion to organic arable farming (Bioland), while maintaining pig breeding temporarily to manage financial obligations.

Alongside arable farming, Hubert Göhring, a trained forester, developed forestry services as an additional business line.

While raising their family, Andrea Göhring focused her efforts on 'Educational Farming'. This branch of the business performed exceptionally well and saw high demand. During these educational visits, it became clear that children instinctively associate a farm visit with animals, and that animals are essential for a circular farming approach. Consequently, from 2007 onwards, livestock gradually returned to the farm, supported by the construction of a training facility through the funding programme 'Innovative Measures for Women in Rural Areas.' By 2009, the farm was hosting around 150 visits a year. However, the financial viability of these school visits became increasingly difficult, as compensation was capped by the Rural Youth Association (Landjugend) and schools were reluctant to spend money on farm excursions.

Alongside regular school classes, educational institutions for children with disabilities frequently visited the farm. It became clear that these children responded remarkably well to the animals, and that the visits as a whole had a profoundly positive impact. This inspired Andrea to train as a specialist in animal-assisted intervention. Through this training, she acquired the skills and key qualifications needed to train her own animals to act as 'co-therapists.'

The farm now offers tailored programmes for children and adults with disabilities, focusing on life skills development. A professional training programme for farmers has also been established on-site, alongside advisory services.

This new farm offering was highly sought after and well-received by special education institutions. Development goals for each individual are tailor-made within a team setting, with a particular focus on developing daily life skills.

While the content of her specialist training was invaluable to Andrea, it had not been specifically designed for farm animals. To bridge this gap, and to give other farmers the opportunity to acquire knowledge in animal training and animal-assisted intervention, the farm now offers a part-time professional development course. In addition, Andrea provides freelance consultancy services.

In 2023, a dedicated 'interaction barn' (Begegnungsstall) was built with the help of diversification funding, providing even more space for visitors to experience hands-on interaction with the farm animals. This branch of the business holds further potential for growth, such as expanding programmes to work with dementia patients.

Diversification was supported by funding authorities, permitting bodies, and social partners involved in regulatory and implementation processes.



Achievements

Diversification and the development of these different business sectors, integrating production, education, and care-oriented services, have strengthened the farm's financial viability while creating inclusive social value. Today, everyone working on the farm is able to use and develop their unique strengths and skills. This has had a profound impact not only on the well-being of the people involved but also on the long-term sustainability of the entire enterprise.

Lessons and recommendations

The family identifies their determination and the courage to take unconventional or difficult paths as key success factors for the enterprise. Furthermore, their services are strongly aligned with local demand, with a sharp focus on the financial viability of each individual branch of the business.

In the early years, the main challenges were managing the generational transition and handling the heavy debt service inherited with the takeover. Turning their own ideas into reality and developing them required a tremendous amount of energy.

Funding: 'Innovative Measures for Women in Rural Areas' and diversification grants.

Timeframe: Since 2004

Lead organisation: Andrea Goehring

Further information

- > <https://andrea-goehring.de>
- > <https://mlr.baden-wuerttemberg.de/de/unsere-themen/laendlicher-raum/foerderung/innovative-massnahmen-frauen>
- > <https://foerderung.landwirtschaft-bw.de>
- > [Lde/Startseite/Foerderwegweiser/Foerderung+von+Investitionen+zur+Diversifizierung](#)

Contact: info@andrea-goehring.de

Copyrights: Andrea Göhring





2.16. Greece - Tofillo Mountain Herb Farm - Experiential agritourism

Description

Tofillo is a family-based organic herb business in Crete that has diversified its farming activity by opening the farm to visitors and offering an agritourism experience centred on mountain herbs, Cretan biodiversity, and herbal products. The farm is in the wider area of the White Mountains and specialises in aromatic and medicinal plants cultivated in high-altitude conditions.

Through guided visits, guests learn about the cultivation of Cretan Mountain botanicals, the unique characteristics of the local ecosystem, and the traditional knowledge associated with these plants. The experience is complemented by tastings of herbal teas, infusions, and other farm products, creating a direct link between primary production, processing, storytelling, and rural tourism.

This example illustrates how a small herb farm can generate value beyond raw agricultural production. By combining tastings with visitor experiences, the farm strengthens its brand, reaches new customers, promotes Cretan biodiversity, and creates additional sources of income while increasing the visibility of both the farm and its products.

Rationale

Tofillo combines organic herb cultivation, on-farm processing, product branding, and visitor experiences into an integrated business model. The farm cultivates aromatic and medicinal plants in the mountain areas of Crete, benefiting from the natural advantages of altitude, biodiversity, and local climatic conditions. These herbs are processed and packaged into value-added products such as teas, infusions, and aromatic extracts, all marketed under a strong brand identity closely linked to Cretan nature, mountain farming, and traditional botanical knowledge.

An important element of the diversification strategy is the organisation of guided farm visits, during which visitors can explore the cultivation areas and learn about production methods and the characteristics of local herbs. Tasting sessions allow guests to experience the products directly and better understand their quality, origin, and uses. The farm also benefits from links with tourism and gastronomy networks, enabling it to attract visitors seeking authentic rural and food experiences. Direct sales and retail opportunities further increase the value captured from production, while strengthening relationships with consumers.

This approach enables diversification because the farm is no longer dependent solely on the sale of raw or processed agricultural products. It also generates value through knowledge sharing, visitor experiences, hospitality, and storytelling, making the farm visit both an educational activity and an additional source of income.

The main stakeholders include the farm owners and staff, visitors, local tourism and gastronomy operators, organic certification bodies, local communities in Crete, retailers, and distribution partners, as well as networks promoting experiential tourism. Public

and private advisory services may also have supported business development, branding, certification, and tourism promotion.

Achievements

Tofillo has successfully moved beyond primary production by developing a diversified business model based on organic herb cultivation, value-added products, and agritourism experiences. The initiative has strengthened the market identity of Cretan Mountain herbs and created a direct connection between consumers, producers, and the place of origin.

Guided visits and tasting activities add value to the farm's products, facilitate direct communication with consumers, and increase the visibility of mountain farming in Crete. The initiative also contributes to local development by enriching the rural tourism offer, encouraging visitors to explore agricultural landscapes and promoting local biodiversity and traditional knowledge. Overall, diversification has improved the farm's resilience by combining product sales with service-based income and by reinforcing the brand through authentic visitor experiences.

Lessons and recommendations

A key success factor is the authenticity of the visitor experience. Guests are interested not only in tasting products, but also in understanding their origin, cultivation methods, and their connection to the local landscape and culture.

For successful replication, farmers should invest in product quality, visitor-friendly infrastructure, clear storytelling, well-designed tasting experiences, branding, and cooperation with tourism and gastronomy partners. Experiences should remain simple, safe, and closely linked to the everyday reality of the farm.

Potential barriers include seasonality, limited time available for hosting visitors, administrative requirements, marketing costs, and the need for strong communication skills. These challenges can be addressed by starting with small-scale activities, using advance booking systems, cooperating with local networks, and gradually expanding the offer over time.

Funding: The business was launched and scaled using private equity and operational revenue, bypassing public subsidies.

Timeframe: 2014 - Present

Lead organisation: Tofillo

Further information:

[Tofillo Mountain Herbs Official Platform](#)

Contact: np@tofilllo.com

Copyrights: © Tofillo 2024



tofilllo





2.17. Greece - Honey Farm - Apitourism and interactive beekeeping experiences

Description

Kokkiadis Honey Farm is a beekeeping and farm-based business located in Heraklion, Crete, which has diversified its agricultural activity by offering visitor experiences, tastings, and hands-on learning activities. The farm produces honey and other local products, while inviting visitors to discover the world of bees, honey production, and Cretan food culture.

The diversification model combines primary production, processing, direct sales, education, and agritourism. Visitors can take part in guided beekeeping tours, learn about honey production, taste Cretan honey and other farm products, and visit the farm shop. The farm also offers complementary experiences related to cooking, regenerative farming, and bee-based products.

This example is relevant for small farm diversification because it demonstrates how a beekeeping enterprise can create additional income streams and strengthen its market position by transforming production knowledge into an experience. Farm visits increase the perceived value of products, build trust with consumers, and create stronger links between agriculture, tourism, and gastronomy.

Rationale

Kokkiadis Honey Farm integrates beekeeping, product development, visitor services, and direct consumer engagement into a diversified business model. The farm produces honey and bee-related products closely connected to the local environment of Crete and markets them under its own brand alongside other local food products.

A central element of the diversification strategy is the organisation of guided beekeeping tours, during which visitors learn about bees, hives, honey production, and the role of the beekeeper. Honey tastings and tastings of other farm products allow visitors to better understand product quality, flavour, and origin. The farm shop and direct sales activities enable visitors to purchase products immediately after the experience, thereby increasing added value and strengthening customer relationships.

The farm has further diversified its offer through complementary services, including cooking courses, regenerative farming activities, and bee balm workshops. Online communication and booking channels are used to reach tourists, food enthusiasts, and visitors interested in authentic rural experiences.

This approach enables diversification because the farm is not limited to selling honey as a product. It also offers knowledge, experiences, hospitality, and direct interaction with producers. The visitor experience therefore becomes both an additional source of income and a powerful marketing tool.

The main stakeholders include the beekeeper and farm team, visitors and customers, local tourism and gastronomy partners, suppliers, retailers, and online sales channels, as well as the local community. Other stakeholders include experience-booking platforms, local food networks, and organisations supporting agri-food entrepreneurship.

The New Agriculture New Generation organisation is also connected to the initiative through its wider network supporting innovative agri-food and rural entrepreneurship practices, contributing to the visibility and promotion of farm diversification.

Achievements

Kokkiadis Honey Farm has developed a diversified business model combining beekeeping, product sales, farm visits, tastings, and educational experiences. This has enabled the business to reach new audiences, including tourists, families, food enthusiasts, and visitors interested in nature and sustainable production.

The visitor experience increases the value of the farm's honey and other products by allowing consumers to understand how they are produced and meet the people behind them. It also strengthens direct sales and creates opportunities for repeat purchases.

The initiative enriches the rural tourism offer in the Heraklion area while promoting Cretan honey, local products, and beekeeping knowledge. It demonstrates how a small agricultural enterprise can improve its resilience by combining agricultural production with services and experience-based income.

Lessons and recommendations

A key success factor is the ability to transform existing farm knowledge into a structured, safe, and attractive visitor experience. Beekeeping is naturally appealing to the public, but experiences must be carefully designed, accessible, and clearly communicated.

For successful replication, farms should invest in visitor safety, storytelling, tasting design, booking systems, multilingual communication, and cooperation with local tourism partners. The experience should complement rather than disrupt normal farm operations, and group sizes should remain manageable.

Potential barriers include seasonality, limited time available to farmers, safety requirements associated with beekeeping, and the need for hospitality and communication skills. These challenges can be addressed by starting with small groups, using advance booking systems, establishing clear visitor flows, and cooperating with tourism and gastronomy networks.

Funding: The infrastructure, brand development, and farm adaptations were entirely privately funded by the owners.

Timeframe: Operated for over 14 years – Present

Lead organisation: Kokkiadis Honey Farm

Further information:

[Kokkiadis Honey Farm Official Portal](#)

Contact: farmakokkiadi@gmail.com

Copyrights: ©2026 KokkiadisHoneyFarm





2.18. Greece – Agricultural Detention Facility of Agia – Social farming and vocational reintegration

Description

The Agricultural Detention Facility of Agia, located in Chania on the island of Crete, Greece, is an institutional model of multifunctional and social agriculture. Operating since 2002, this specialised public corrective institution uses its vast agricultural land and farm infrastructure as therapeutic, educational, and productive assets. Rather than treating rehabilitation as purely punitive or sedentary, the facility integrates organic crop cultivation and processing directly into its institutional framework to foster vocational skills, accountability, and real-world social reintegration.

Rationale

Social farming, or care farming, repurposes agricultural routines to generate explicit psycho-social and educational benefits for vulnerable or institutionalised populations. In Chania, incarcerated individuals voluntarily participate in structured, supervisor-led agricultural work cycles. The programme introduces them to modern regenerative practices, soil preparation, weed management, delicate harvesting techniques, and post-harvest drying and packaging workflows.

A prominent operational output of this systemic approach is the commercial development of high-quality culinary herbs, notably their organic oregano packaged under the custom retail brand 'Omadi' (meaning *together* or *as a team* in Greek). The project functions as a tangible economic and social bridge, showing the public that agricultural work can transform raw human potential while feeding high-value goods back into regional consumer markets. Stakeholders include the Agricultural Detention Facility of Agia, supplying the secured land base, farm buildings, and structural oversight; the incarcerated participants, namely individuals completing corrective sentences who gain practical, transferable agronomic skills; New Agriculture New Generation (*Nea Georgia Nea Genia*), a specialised rural entrepreneurship network that provides technical advisory backing and regional promotion; and regulatory and certification bodies.

Achievements

The facility has created an institutional care farming benchmark. It has successfully shifted the penal framework from idle confinement to active, therapeutic, and skilled vocational production.

By successfully launching the 'Omadi' organic oregano brand, it has demonstrated that public institutional farms can deliver market-grade processed goods, and that agricultural activity can lead to market-facing outputs with a clear identity and social value.

The facility has also equipped hundreds of participants with documented competencies in organic agriculture, post-harvest logistics, and food safety standards, to reduce recidivism rates.

Finally, it has redefined agricultural value and expanded the regional definition of farm diversification by proving that public institutions can co-generate economic, educational, and social value simultaneously.

Lessons and recommendations

Social farming examples should be communicated with dignity and respect. When marketing social farming products, centre all public communication, branding, and storytelling on the exceptional quality of the crop and the vocational skills developed, rather than exploiting the corrective backdrop.

Operating a commercial-grade farm within a public institution requires continuous collaboration between correctional administration, professional agronomists, organic certifiers, and commercial distribution partners.

Social farming products must compete directly with conventional businesses on retail shelves. To win consumer trust, it is important to enforce rigid quality control, professional labelling, and strict organic certifications.

Institutional workflows often conflict with the immediate, flexible demands of seasonal farming. To overcome these structural bottlenecks, one needs to embed highly clear operational guidelines, security-cleared supervisor training, and dedicated workspace flows early in the planning process.

Funding: The initiative is sustained via institutional budgets, self-generated product sales, and non-profit advisory networks, operating independently of standard agricultural subsidies.

Timeframe: 2002 – Present

Lead organisation: Agricultural Detention Facility of Agia in Chania (Public Correctional Institution)

Further information: <https://newagri.org/nea/social-farming-360-i-anagennitiki-georgia-eiserchetai-sta-sofronistika-katastimata-tis-choras-proagontas-ti-gnosi-ti-viosimotita-kai-tin-koinoniki-entaxi>

Contact: argyrobitsaki@gmail.com

Copyrights: n/a





2.19. Italy – Rurinnova: guiding farmers towards sustainable diversification decisions

Description

Rurinnova S.r.l. Società Benefit is a spin-off of the Sant'Anna School of Advanced Studies in Italy. It provides specialist advisory (technical, legal, and financial) services to agricultural enterprises to support strategic decision-making for farm diversification. The idea is to help farms, particularly in rural and marginal areas, assess whether new activities are feasible, sustainable, and aligned with available resources.

The organisation helps farmers move from an initial concept – such as agritourism, educational farming, or social farming – to a structured business plan.

It reduces financial uncertainty for farmers and improves long-term decision quality by making diversification choices transparent, measurable, and explicitly aligned with economic, environmental, and social sustainability objectives.

Rationale

Rurinnova's advisory process follows a six-step approach. It begins with a comprehensive diagnosis of the farm, assessing its objectives, resources, economic performance, organisational capacity, territorial context, and development needs. Based on this analysis, suitable diversification opportunities are identified, such as agritourism, social farming, direct sales, on-farm processing, ecosystem services, or other rural activities. These options are then evaluated through technical, economic, and sustainability assessments, using data and scenario analysis to compare benefits, costs, risks, and implementation requirements. The process also supports compliance with relevant regulations and policy frameworks. Practical outputs, including reports, technical recommendations, monitoring tools, and performance indicators, are provided to support implementation. Finally, follow-up activities such as field visits, training, and periodic reviews ensure that the diversification strategy remains adaptive and responsive to changing circumstances.

The service is delivered through collaboration between Rurinnova advisors, technical experts, and agricultural enterprises. It strengthens farmers' access to specialised knowledge, particularly in areas where advisory capacity is limited and supports more robust diversification decisions.

Achievements

Rurinnova has developed an advisory model that structures farm diversification as an evidence-based and sustainability-oriented decision-making process. It improves farmers' ability to compare options, understand trade-offs, and evaluate long-term implications before investing.

The approach reduces the risk of poorly planned diversification by making costs, benefits, and risks explicit. It also enhances access to specialised knowledge in rural and marginal areas, supporting more balanced and realistic business development.

Lessons and recommendations

Farm diversification benefits significantly from early-stage advisory support rather than post-decision assistance. Integrating sustainability, regulatory awareness, and economic analysis from the outset improves outcomes.

Replication requires combining agronomic, economic, legal, and environmental expertise, and translating complex analysis into practical tools. CAP advisory measures can play an important role in scaling such services and improving diversification quality across regions.

Funding: CAP funding: RDP measure 2.1 Farm advisory services

Timeframe: 2024–2025

Lead organisation: Rurinnova S.r.l. Società Benefit

Further information:

- > <https://www.rurinnova.com>
- > <https://www.pianetapsr.it/flex/cm/pages/ServeBLOB.php/L/IT/IDPagina/3320>

Contact:

- > andrea.saba@santannapisa.it
- > federica.mura@rurinnova.com

Copyrights: Rurinnova





2.20. Italy – Agriturismo Bergi – Le Delizie di Bergi: Sustainable and regenerative farming practices

Description

Agriturismo Bergi is a family-run organic farm near Castelbuono, in Sicily's Madonie Park, within an archaeological area dating to the Greco-Roman period. Originally a 2-hectare vegetable garden, the holding has expanded to approximately 110 hectares of vegetable gardens, orchards, and olive groves. The farm produces honey, extra virgin olive oil, manna, and traditional preserves, all certified organic, and operates as an accredited educational farm recognised by the Palermo Regional Department of Agriculture and Forestry.

Rationale

Agriturismo Bergi began in the 1950s as a small sharecropped plot and expanded across three generations: Pasquale introduced chemical-free fruit and vegetable production and direct sales in the 1970s–80s, and his wife Anna launched the agritourism business in 1996, becoming one of Sicily's first female agritourism entrepreneurs. Today the enterprise is run by their four daughters, each with a distinct operational role: an agronomist, the head of agritourism, a food technologist managing the Le Delizie di Bergi product line, and a biologist and farm chef.

The farm balances heritage values with innovative digital and ecological solutions to achieve long-term sustainability. It operates as a certified agro-ecological holding that prioritises landscape protection, water conservation, renewable energy, and closed-loop waste recycling. In 2012, the business joined the Sicilian Social Farms Network to promote responsible agriculture and community-oriented services.

To counter inbreeding risks and safeguard the native Sicilian black bee, the farm actively participates in a regional conservation project alongside Slow Food and local universities. This includes managing an isolated queen-bee mating station on Lampedusa Island. The breed exhibits natural climate resilience and strong disease resistance, resulting in zero colony losses on the farm.

In 2025, the farm launched its 'Wellness Apiary' (*Apiario del Benessere*), in partnership with the Italian Apiterapia Association. This experiential space allows visitors to benefit from specialised acoustic and aromatic bee treatments such as Api-aroma and Api-sound. Furthermore, the farm preserves traditional ash tree tapping to harvest Madonie Manna, and maintains rigorous PGI Sicilia conformity certification for its extra virgin olive oil.

Agriturismo Bergi diversifies on several levels simultaneously. Production spans honey, olive oil, manna, and preserves, each adhering to Slow Food Presidia standards (Sicilian Black Bee, Ancient Olive Trees, Madonie Manna) that link the farm to conservation efforts for endangered local varieties, in particular a reintroduction project for the Sicilian black bee subspecies, coordinated with national research bodies and universities, for which the farm also manages a mating station on Lampedusa. The farm's olive oil production is certified under the Sicily PGI scheme.

Agriturismo Bergi delivers educational activities through its accreditation as a Biofattoria Didattica, and in 2025 the farm opened L'Apiario del Benessere – a dedicated apitherapy space offering bee-related sensory and educational experiences under a registered national trademark.

Achievements

Situated 3 kilometres from the tourist hub of Castelbuono, the farm leverages a strategic, high-nature location to maximise direct-to-consumer sales. Using zero-kilometre supply chains eliminates commercial intermediaries, allowing the business to capture significantly higher profit margins than conventional agricultural wholesale channels.

The farm has successfully established an identity built entirely on natural, traditional Sicilian peasant cuisine free from artificial additives or chemical flavour enhancers. By integrating its agricultural and hospitality offers into regional food and wine itineraries, the enterprise drives local territorial marketing and works in close synergy with neighbouring rural businesses.

Agriturismo Bergi has converted territorial identity into commercial value: products sold through short supply chains generate higher margins than sales through intermediaries, supported by inclusion in regional food and wine tourism routes. The farm's participation in the Sicilian black bee conservation project has produced observable results, including a marked reduction in colony losses, linked to the subspecies' resilience to heat and disease. Its four-daughter management structure has sustained continuous innovation while preserving traditional production methods, and the 2025 launch of the Wellness Apiary represents a new, branded diversification stream built on the farm's existing apicultural expertise.



Lessons and recommendations

Agriturismo Bergi demonstrates that diversification can be deepened by giving all the farm's products a verified, traceable identity that strengthens both price positioning and credibility. The farm's family succession planning, with clearly divided roles, each grounded in formal expertise (agronomy, food technology, biology), has allowed the business to scale from 2 to 110 hectares without losing coherence. The lesson for replication is that multifunctionality benefits from formal accreditation frameworks (PGI, Slow Food Presidia, regional educational farm registers), which provide external validation that individual farms cannot generate alone.

Funding: The business has funded its phased infrastructure expansion across four decades by combining private equity with sequential Rural Development Programme (RDP) support:

- **1980s-1990s:** Initiated via a CAP Young Farmer Installation grant. It secured regional agritourism license No. 4, making it one of the first female-led tourism holdings in Sicily, and introduced its first managed beehives.
- **2000-2006 RDP:** Funded the guest swimming pool, a wastewater purification plant, and the primary photovoltaic solar installation under Measure 4.15.
- **2007-2013 RDP:** Measure 121 funded laboratory expansions and food processing equipment for honey, fruits, and vegetables. Measure 311 financed agritourism hospitality upgrades, and Measure 214/2B supported sustainable land management alongside a dedicated biodiversity preservation field.
- **2014-2020 RDP:** Measure 11 supported organic farming maintenance. Measure 4.1 funded land improvements for new ash tree manna plots, nut orchards, medicinal plants, a tasting room, an on-farm retail shop, and secondary solar arrays. Measure 6.4a funded accommodation efficiency upgrades, and Measure 8.5 targeted forest ecosystem resilience.
- **EIP-AGRI Operational Groups:** Funded under Measure 16.1 to run the 'PLEURON' project for protected speciality mushroom cultivation and the 'ProNERA' project for acaricide-free medicinal honey production.

Timeframe: 1980 – 2026 (farm origins from the 1950s; agritourism activity launched 1996).

Lead organisation: Sottile Anna

Further information:

- www.agriturismobergi.com
- www.ledeliziedibergi.com

Contact:

- aziendaagrituristicaibergi@gmail.com
- danydigarbo@gmail.com

Copyrights: Agriturismo Bergi





2.21. Italy - Casale di Martignano - Peri-urban agritourism

Description

Casale di Martignano, operated by Eredi Ferrazza, is a family-run farm in Lazio that has evolved from a traditional agricultural holding into a multifunctional rural enterprise. Since its origins in 1953, the farm has progressively diversified its activities in response to economic pressures, market instability, and territorial constraints. Today, it operates a diversified model combining organic primary production, food processing, agritourism, education, social farming, recreational services, and environmental management linked to the surrounding lake and rural landscape.

Since 1999, the farm has adopted organic farming practices and diversified its production system, which now includes cereals, horticulture, and pig farming. Alongside primary agriculture, it has developed on-site processing facilities for dairy and cured meat products, an agritourism restaurant, guest accommodation, educational farm activities, and social farming programmes. Additional services include wildlife management and nature-based recreation linked to the lake area. This multifaceted diversification has directly enabled the farm's long-term economic sustainability.

The farm also represents an example of multi-entrepreneurship and diversified rural governance, where collaborations with non-agricultural actors contribute to the management of rural assets. Under regional legislation and through a formal connection contract with the farm, external 'connected entrepreneurs' and social cooperatives are authorised to carry out complementary activities within the farm's infrastructure. This framework has introduced new tourism and leisure services, including glamping and an adventure park, and short supply chains reaching local markets. This integrated approach allows the farm to create employment opportunities, consolidate local networks, and generate social and environmental value, while maintaining its central agricultural identity.

Rationale

Casale di Martignano developed its diversification strategy in response to economic pressures, rising production costs, and increasing market instability affecting small and medium-sized farms in peri-urban areas of Lazio.

In the late 1990s, the farm began shifting from reliance on primary production towards value-added activities. Agritourism was introduced through a farm restaurant, and guest accommodation directly linked to farm production. This marked the beginning of a broader multifunctional strategy based on short supply chains and on-farm value creation.

Casale di Martignano integrated livestock production with processing activities to strengthen economic resilience. A small dairy facility produces sheep's cheese and yoghurt in collaboration with the Barikamà cooperative, while a meat-processing facility

supports pig production and cured meat products. These activities increased value retention within the farm system.

The farm also developed structured social farming and educational activities in partnership with the KAIROS and OASI cooperatives, providing six-month training pathways for disadvantaged young people. These programmes combine agricultural work experience with social inclusion objectives.

A key feature of the model is the collaboration with the Barikamà social cooperative through a network contract. Eredi Ferrazza leases agricultural land for organic horticulture, while Barikamà supplies part of its production to the agritourism business, creating a reciprocal economic relationship based on shared value creation.

Following the outbreak of African swine fever, Casale di Martignano adapted by discontinuing pig farming and introducing wildlife management activities in cooperation with public health authorities, ensuring continuity of its cured meat production.

More recently, the farm has expanded into recreational services, including glamping, lake-based tourism, and partnerships with private operators developing an adventure park in forested areas of the holding. These developments reflect an ongoing strategy of adaptation and diversification.

Key stakeholders include the Barikamà social cooperative, KAIROS and OASI cooperatives, local health authorities, schools, tourism networks, consumers, visitors, and local communities. Institutional actors include the Lazio Regional Agricultural Directorate, environmental and landscape authorities, Natura 2000 governance bodies, and labour platforms. Agricultural organisations such as Confagricoltura have also provided advocacy support.

Achievements

Casale di Martignano has evolved into a multifunctional rural system integrating agricultural production, food processing, hospitality, education, social inclusion, and environmental management.

A key achievement is the farm's transformation into a territorial hub that connects multiple economic and social functions while maintaining its agricultural identity. The integration of short supply chains and on-farm processing has increased value creation and strengthened local economic linkages.

The farm has also contributed to social inclusion through structured programmes with cooperatives, providing training and work opportunities for vulnerable groups. Its capacity to adapt to external shocks, including animal disease outbreaks, demonstrates strong resilience and adaptive capacity.

Overall, the farm represents a model of multifunctional agriculture aligned with agroecological principles such as diversity, synergies, resilience, circularity, and territorial governance.



Lessons and recommendations

Casale di Martignano shows that farm diversification can evolve into a systemic restructuring of the business model, extending beyond additional income streams towards integrated territorial functions.

A key success factor is the strong integration between production, processing, hospitality, social services, and environmental management, supported by contractual innovation such as network agreements with cooperatives and 'connected entrepreneurs'.

The case highlights the importance of regulatory flexibility to enable multifunctional agriculture, particularly in peri-urban areas where environmental, landscape, and planning restrictions can limit development. Continuous dialogue with public authorities and farmers' organisations has been essential to navigating these constraints.

The experience demonstrates that diversification requires long-term adaptability, institutional cooperation, and openness to hybrid governance models combining private, cooperative, and public actors.

Funding: The funding and support sources include RDP 2007–2013 (Reg. EC No 1698/2005), Young Farmers Package measures (112, 114, 121), and private co-financing by the farm.

- > Total budget: EUR 165 772.81
- > CAP funds: EUR 85 000
- > Private / Own funds: EUR 80 772.81

Timeframe: 1953 – ongoing (diversification accelerated from late 1990s; key developments since 1999)

Lead organisation: Eredi Ferrazza sas – Casale di Martignano

Further information:

> <https://www.casaledimartignano.it>

Contact:

> aurelio@martignano.com

> roberta@centonze.org

Copyrights: © 2025 CASALE DI MARTIGNANO





2.22. Italy – Le Pianore: Wellness, organic farming and experiential eco-tourism

Description

Le Pianore is a rural initiative located in Monticello Amiata, in the Province of Grosseto, Tuscany, that demonstrates how organic farming can be successfully combined with retreat tourism, wellbeing activities, and sustainable rural hospitality.

Developed from a traditional rural property amid an agricultural setting, Le Pianore has evolved into a multifunctional rural enterprise offering accommodation and retreat spaces for groups interested in yoga, dance, theatre, meditation, visual arts, and nature-based experiences. The hospitality offer is closely linked to the surrounding agricultural and natural environment, and includes distinctive facilities such as a villa, a yurt, a straw-and-wood eco-building known as 'La Pagliatella', and a natural swimming pool.

The initiative remains firmly rooted in agriculture. As a certified organic farm, Le Pianore manages vineyards, olive groves, and vegetable gardens, integrating food production with environmental stewardship and hospitality services.

Rationale

Le Pianore's diversification model is based on the integration of organic farming, retreat hosting, experiential tourism, and environmental stewardship.

The initiative builds on its agricultural and landscape assets, which include approximately 50 hectares of vineyards, olive groves, woodlands, and other natural features. Agriculture remains at the heart of the business model, ensuring that diversification is closely connected to the land, the landscape, and the seasonal rhythms of the territory.

A key element of diversification has been the development of rural hospitality and retreat tourism. The farm hosts teachers, facilitators, and groups from different countries who organise retreats, seminars, and workshops focused on wellbeing, creativity, learning, and reconnection with nature. This specialised market positioning differentiates Le Pianore from conventional rural tourism offers.

The accommodation facilities themselves reinforce the sustainability identity of the initiative. The villa, yurts, and 'La Pagliatella' provide different forms of rural accommodation, while the bio-construction approach used in some facilities becomes part of the educational and environmental experience offered to visitors.

Organic farming and farm products also contribute to diversification through wine tastings, cooking classes, vegetable garden experiences, and nature-based activities such as forest bathing. These activities transform the rural environment into a source of experiential, educational, and economic value.

The main stakeholders include retreat teachers and facilitators, visitors and organised groups, local food and tourism networks, suppliers, certifying bodies, and the wider rural communities of Monticello Amiata, Monte Amiata, and the Maremma area. The initiative also interacts with territorial actors involved in sustainable tourism and rural development.

Achievements

Le Pianore has successfully transformed a rural property into a multifunctional enterprise combining agriculture, hospitality, wellbeing, and environmental education.

The initiative has created a wide range of new rural services, including accommodation, retreat hosting, seminar and workshop spaces, wine tastings, cooking classes, and nature-based experiences. These activities have diversified income sources while strengthening the economic viability of the farm.

The project has also attracted visitors, facilitators, and organised groups from different countries, increasing the visibility and attractiveness of an inland area of Tuscany. By linking hospitality with organic farming and sustainability, Le Pianore has contributed to promoting environmentally responsible tourism and reinforcing the territorial identity of the Monte Amiata region.

Overall, the initiative demonstrates how rural hospitality and specialised tourism can generate additional value while maintaining agriculture as the core activity of the enterprise.

Lessons and recommendations

A key lesson from Le Pianore is that diversification is most effective when it is built around a clear and distinctive identity. In this case, the initiative is strongly rooted in organic farming, wellbeing, nature, sustainability, and care for the land.

Another important success factor is the close integration between agricultural production and service provision. Rather than offering generic tourism services, Le Pianore has developed a specialised niche focused on retreats, seminars, and group experiences, allowing it to attract specific target audiences and create a distinctive market position.

Farmers wishing to replicate this model should invest in developing a coherent vision, high-quality visitor facilities, and strong links between agricultural activities and experiential services. Cooperation with tourism networks, facilitators, and local stakeholders can further strengthen market access and visibility.



Potential challenges include the need for significant investment in hospitality infrastructure, the management of diverse activities, and the development of the communication and organisational skills required to host specialised groups. These challenges can be addressed through gradual expansion, partnerships, and continuous learning.

Funding: The initiative is sustained via institutional budgets, self-generated product sales, and non-profit advisory networks, operating independently of standard agricultural subsidies.

Timeframe: From the 1990s – Present

Lead organisation: Le Pianore Societa' Semplice Societa' Agricola

Further information: <https://www.lepianore.it>

Contact:

> andrea.saba@santannapisa.it

> lepianore@gmail.com

Copyrights: Le Pianore





2.23. Italy - Le Tore Organic Farm. Closed loop gastronomy and organic farm hospitality

Description

Le Tore is a small-to-medium family-run organic farm located in Massa Lubrense, on Italy's high-tourism Sorrento Peninsula. The diversification strategy combines agricultural production with hospitality, environmental education, direct sales, and rural tourism. The farm produces PDO 'Penisola Sorrentina' extra virgin olive oil, wine, fruit jams and juices, tomato purée, and fresh garden produce.

In addition to production activities, it offers eco-accommodation in a restored nineteenth-century farmhouse, along with cooking classes, guided tastings, educational farm activities, nature excursions, and collaborations with local cultural and environmental organisations.

This diversification strategy has strengthened the farm's resilience and competitiveness by reducing dependence on a single agricultural activity. Agritourism generates additional income streams while promoting local biodiversity, traditional farming practices, and sustainable tourism. Organic waste is reused on-site through composting, complemented by pruning residues and livestock integration. Educational activities also help reconnect consumers and younger generations with rural heritage and organic agriculture.

Rationale

Le Tore developed a progressively diversified and highly interconnected business model in response to changing agricultural markets, growing rural tourism demand and the need to strengthen long-term economic sustainability. The farm converted to organic production in 1994, becoming one of the first certified organic farms in Campania under the ICEA system, and built a portfolio of high-quality products rooted in territorial identity, including PDO extra virgin olive oil, PDO wines (sottozona Red and White), vegetables, walnuts, and seasonal fruit.

Over time, diversification expanded into agritourism through the restoration of a nineteenth-century farmhouse offering accommodation and hospitality experiences closely linked to farm life and local gastronomy. Direct sales channels and supply relationships with local restaurants were also established, strengthening local value chains. In parallel, the farm developed educational activities for schools, students, and visitors, covering olive growing, biodiversity, organic farming, food production, and environmental awareness.

These activities were supported through collaboration with public and research institutions, including the Campania Regional Agricultural Department, which hosted an experimental field for organic olive cultivation on the estate for several years. Environmental organisations such as FAI (Fondo per l'Ambiente Italiano) and the management authority of the Baia di Ieranto protected area also contributed through guided excursions and nature-based experiences, while schools, students, local restaurants, tourism operators, and eco-conscious consumers form an important part of the wider local ecosystem. The Brancaccio family leads and manages the farm's strategic and operational development.

The model functions as a closed loop: agricultural production supplies the agritourism restaurant and tasting experiences, while kitchen scraps, pruning residues and surplus food are recycled into compost or used to feed livestock. Educational and tourism activities reinforce the farm's reputation and strengthen community engagement, while environmental sustainability enhances its attractiveness within a high-tourism destination area such as the Sorrento Peninsula.

Achievements

Le Tore successfully transformed a traditional farm into a diversified rural enterprise combining agriculture, hospitality, education, and environmental tourism. Its main achievements include the creation of multiple income sources through agritourism, direct sales, educational activities, and food experiences, as well as increased economic resilience by reducing dependence on volatile agricultural commodity markets. The farm has developed and promoted high-quality local products such as PDO olive oil and PDO wine, which have also received recognition and awards in national competitions.

The diversification process has contributed to rural employment and local economic development, while supporting the preservation of traditional agricultural landscapes and biodiversity in the Sorrento Peninsula. It has also increased awareness among visitors and students of organic farming, sustainable agriculture, and Mediterranean food culture, strengthening the connection between tourism and local agricultural production. Overall, the farm has contributed to enhancing the image of sustainable rural tourism in the Campania region and demonstrates the long-term viability of integrated farm diversification strategies.



Lessons and recommendations

One of the main success factors was the integration of different but complementary activities around a strong territorial identity. Organic farming, local gastronomy, hospitality, and environmental education were combined into a coherent visitor experience.

Another important factor was the early adoption of organic certification and a strong focus on quality products linked to geographical indications (PDO and PGI), which strengthened market positioning and consumer trust.

The main challenges included the high initial investments required for farm restoration, hospitality infrastructure, and compliance with tourism and food regulations. Seasonal tourism fluctuations and administrative complexity also represented barriers.

The experience suggests that diversification is more effective when: agricultural production remains central to the business model; cooperation with local institutions and organisations is developed; farms invest in communication, storytelling, and experiential tourism; environmental sustainability is integrated into all activities; and local cultural and natural heritage is actively promoted.

Policy support for rural tourism, organic farming, educational farms, and small-scale processing can significantly help similar farms replicate this model.

Funding: The project was financed through a mix of historical Italian national funds, CAP regional development programmes and substantial private reinvestment.

- **National Funds:** 20 million Italian Lire (~EUR 10 300) from 1985–1987.
- **CAP / Regional Development Funds (RDP & POP):** 150 million Italian Lire (~EUR 77 500) under POP 94/96 Measure 4.2.1 A for farmhouse renovation, plus EUR 50 000 via later RDP frameworks for restructuring and pruning olive groves.
- **Private / Own Funds:** Accumulation of approximately EUR 1 000 000 in corporate profits reinvested directly back into the business between 1994 and 2026.

Timeframe: 1985 – Ongoing (Organic certification established in 1994)

Lead organisation: Azienda Agricola Le Tore Srl

Further information:

- [Le Tore Agriturismo Official Site](#)
- [Campania Region Educational Farm Registry – Le Tore Profile](#)

Contact: info@letore.com

Copyrights: Vittoria Brancaccio





2.24. Italy – Sa Mandra: Agritourism and cultural farm diversification in Sardinia

Description

Sa Mandra is a family-run agricultural and agritourism enterprise located near Alghero in north-western Sardinia. It represents a mature diversification model combining agricultural production, hospitality, education, cultural heritage, and experiential tourism within a single farm-based system.

The farm has evolved from a pastoral and agricultural base into a multifunctional enterprise offering restaurant services, rural accommodation, educational farm activities, cultural experiences, horse-riding activities, event spaces, and direct product sales through 'Sa Buteca', including online distribution.

Agriculture and rural identity remain central, with diversification built around family traditions, local food culture, and the Sardinian pastoral landscape.

Rationale

Sa Mandra integrates multiple complementary activities anchored in its agricultural core. Farm production underpins a restaurant offering based on traditional Sardinian and Barbagia cuisine, where local ingredients and family recipes are transformed into high-value gastronomic experiences.

Hospitality services, including rural accommodation and nearby guest facilities, extend the visitor experience and connect tourism directly with the agricultural environment.

Educational and experiential activities are a central component of the diversification model. These include cheese-making experiences, pasta workshops, horse-riding excursions, and farm-based learning pathways for schools and families. Agricultural knowledge is transformed into interactive cultural and educational services.

The farm also functions as a cultural space, presenting rural life, tools, traditions, and pastoral practices as part of an open heritage experience. This storytelling approach reinforces territorial identity and strengthens the link between agriculture and culture.

Direct sales through 'Sa Buteca' connect visitors to short supply chains, offering cheeses, cured meats, honey, bread, oils, and preserves. These products extend the farm experience beyond the visit.

The model also engages tourism and quality networks and includes small sustainability-oriented elements such as electric vehicle charging, reinforcing its alignment with contemporary tourism expectations.

Achievements

Sa Mandra has successfully built a coherent territorial experience where agriculture, food, culture, and hospitality reinforce each other. The farm has diversified into multiple business lines while maintaining a strong agricultural identity.

It has strengthened market access through direct sales and online channels and expanded its reach to tourists, families, schools, and cultural visitors. The farm contributes to the valorisation of Sardinian rural heritage and supports local identity and economic activity.

Lessons and recommendations

Sa Mandra demonstrates that successful diversification depends on authenticity, coherence, and long-term family commitment. Agricultural heritage can be transformed into multiple services without losing productive identity when development is gradual and rooted in local assets.

Place-based diversification that builds on family knowledge, cultural memory, and local food traditions is particularly effective.

Funding: n/a

Timeframe: The family history of the initiative dates back to the 1980s. The diversified activities developed progressively.

Lead organisation: Società Agricola Sa Mandra di Murrocu Mario e C. SS

Further information: <https://www.samandra.it>

Contact:

> andrea.saba@santannapisa.it

> info@samandra.it

Copyrights: Società Agricola Sa Mandra di Murrocu Mario e C. SS





2.25. Italy - ASCA Cooperative / La Porta dei Parchi - Mountain revitalisation through social shepherding

Description

ASCA Agricultural and Social Cooperative, based in Anversa degli Abruzzi, in the mountainous inland areas of central Italy, is an example of farm diversification and multifunctional rural development.

Founded almost 50 years ago in a depopulated and economically marginal territory, ASCA transformed traditional extensive sheep and goat farming into a diversified rural economy. Building on pastoral systems, the cooperative expanded into organic production, agritourism, educational and social farming, experiential tourism, environmental stewardship, cultural promotion, and community-supported agriculture.

A key innovation is the 'Adopt a Sheep, Defend Nature' initiative launched in 2000, which connects citizens directly with pastoral farming through symbolic animal adoption, combined with the delivery of local products. This approach anticipated what is now known as participatory certification and community-supported agriculture.

ASCA manages around 1 320 hectares of agro-silvo-pastoral land, with 87% located in protected natural areas. The cooperative contributes to biodiversity conservation, rural employment, and the safeguarding of pastoral culture. In a village of approximately 200 people, the cooperative created around 20 local jobs, showing how diversification can support local economies and help rural mountain communities remain viable.

Rationale

ASCA Cooperative was established as a response to long-term demographic decline and economic fragility in mountain areas of the Apennines. From the beginning, it was clear that livestock farming alone would not sustain the local economy, making diversification a necessity rather than a choice.

The model is built around integrated and mutually reinforcing activities. Extensive organic sheep and goat farming remains the core agricultural base, supporting product development such as cheese, ricotta, honey, and olive oil. These products feed directly into the cooperative's agritourism services through Bioagriturismo La Porta dei Parchi.

Agritourism is combined with experiential and educational activities, including farm visits, shepherding experiences, participation in transhumance, rural workshops, and environmental learning programmes for schools and visitors.

Social farming initiatives further extend the farm's role into inclusion-oriented services, working with vulnerable groups and strengthening the farm's social function within the territory.

A key innovation has been the cooperative's focus on communication and direct engagement with consumers. In 2000, it launched the pioneering 'Adopt a Sheep' initiative, creating a direct link between urban consumers and pastoral farming while strengthening both economic stability and awareness of rural heritage.

The model succeeds because it brings together environmental conservation, tourism, food production, social innovation, and cultural identity. ASCA has also played an active role in promoting pastoralism and transhumance, contributing to the process that led to UNESCO recognition of Transhumance as Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

Over the years, the cooperative has built strong partnerships with institutions, universities, local authorities, environmental networks, and Slow Food initiatives. This wider support network has helped create long-term resilience and local development.

Through diversification, ASCA transformed a vulnerable mountain farm into a multifunctional rural innovation hub capable of combining environmental sustainability, economic resilience, cultural preservation, and social inclusion.

Over the years, the cooperative has built strong partnerships with institutions, universities, local authorities, environmental networks, and Slow Food initiatives. This wider support network has helped create long-term resilience and local development.

The diversification process has involved a wide range of stakeholders, including local shepherds and farmers, residents, schools, researchers, environmental organisations, restaurants, chefs, tourists, and participants in the 'Adopt a Sheep' programme. By directly involving consumers in supporting extensive organic farming, the cooperative has created a strong connection between producers, communities, and visitors.

Achievements

ASCA Cooperative has generated significant environmental, social, and economic impacts in a highly fragile rural context.

Key achievements include the creation of around 20 jobs in a village of approximately 200 inhabitants, contributing directly to local demographic stability. The cooperative manages 1 320 hectares of agro-silvo-pastoral land, most of which lies within protected areas, supporting biodiversity conservation and sustainable land use.

The diversification strategy preserved extensive pastoral farming while transforming it into a multifunctional rural economy integrating production, tourism, education, and social services. The 'Adopt a Sheep' initiative became internationally recognised and contributed to innovative forms of consumer participation in agriculture.



The farm strengthened experiential tourism, educational programmes, and cultural activities linked to pastoral heritage and transhumance, including UNESCO-recognised intangible cultural heritage.

ASCA also improved the visibility of rural mountain territories internationally, with coverage in major media outlets such as The New York Times, Wall Street Journal, National Geographic, and Le Figaro.

Overall, the cooperative demonstrates how diversification can reinforce resilience, strengthen rural economies, and preserve cultural landscapes in marginal regions.

Lessons and recommendations

ASCA shows that successful diversification in marginal rural areas must be rooted in territorial identity and long-term commitment. Diversification worked because it was not treated as a set of separate activities, but as an integrated rural system combining agriculture, tourism, education, culture, and environmental management.

Key success factors include strong community identity, long-term vision, innovation combined with tradition, direct producer-consumer relationships, strategic communication and storytelling, multifunctionality, the creation of networks and partnerships, and the integration of environmental conservation with economic activity.

A major challenge was structural economic fragility and the perception that pastoral farming was no longer viable. This was addressed through innovation, experiential tourism, direct marketing, and participatory models such as 'Adopt a Sheep'. Geographic isolation was mitigated through digital communication and strong external networks.

For replication, it is essential to build strong territorial narratives; diversify progressively; integrate agriculture with tourism and education; invest in communication; create collaborative networks; and maintain authenticity and environmental coherence.

Funding: Funding sources include CAP support, national and regional rural development funds, and significant private investment combined with income from agritourism, direct sales, and participatory initiatives such as 'Adopt a Sheep'.

Timeframe: 1997-ongoing

Lead organisation: ASCA Agricultural and Social Cooperative (Bioagriturismo La Porta dei Parchi)

Further information

- > <https://laportadeiparchi.com/adotta-una-pecora>
- > <https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLnA47-icslC13l4KtYMXm87QTl08Puplg>
- > <https://laportadeiparchi.com/newyorktimesinternational-adopt-a-sheep>
- > <https://eccellenzerurali.crea.gov.it/?p=3245>

Contact: infolaportadeiparchi@gmail.com

Copyrights: © 2025 La Porta dei Parchi





2.26. Italy - Agriturismo Biologico La Buona Terra: Plant-based agritourism

Description

La Buona Terra is a family-run organic farm located within the Regional Park of the Euganean Hills, between Padua and Venice. Covering over 10 000 m², the holding combines agricultural production with a fully integrated agritourism offer that has operated for over twenty years. The farm includes a vegetable garden, a wildlife pond, more than 2 000 native trees and plants, a seasonal swimming pool, and a range of accommodation and catering facilities. The business is built around organic farming, plant-based cuisine, biodiversity protection, and environmental responsibility.

Rationale

The model integrates four complementary activities around the farm's organic production. The on-site restaurant offers a seasonal, fully plant-based menu drawn primarily from the farm's own crops, with the menu changing monthly according to availability and culinary creativity; gluten-free options are included. Accommodation is offered in three forms: independent holiday apartments, simple guest rooms built from natural materials, and an agri-camping area with 25 pitches across 40 000 m², equipped for tents and campervans, with electric hook-ups, hot showers, a baby park, and pool access. The farm closes in January and February.

Education is a long-standing pillar of the business. La Buona Terra is registered in the Veneto Region's Official Register of Educational Farms and has hosted school groups for more than two decades. A regular programme of themed dinners, nature workshops, seasonal events, and farm breakfasts rounds out the offer, creating recurring engagement beyond overnight stays.

The model's coherence is its defining feature – the restaurant menu follows farm production directly, meaning catering, agriculture, and sustainability messaging reinforce one another rather than operating as separate business lines. Family management with over twenty years of continuity has allowed this integration to deepen over time, supported by an active online presence and direct booking system that reduces dependence on intermediaries.

Achievements

The diversification strategy has generated multiple income streams: restaurant, accommodation, camping, education, and events, while maintaining consistency with the farm's core values of animal welfare, biodiversity, seasonal production, and dietary inclusivity. Registration as an official educational farm has embedded the business within regional educational networks, extending its reach to schools across the Veneto region. The farm's location inside a protected natural park has provided both a distinctive setting that supports tourism appeal and a clear responsibility toward landscape protection, which latter the business has incorporated into its operating principles rather than treating as an external constraint.

Lessons and recommendations

The clearest transferable lesson is that diversification works best when activities are not bolted on separately but built around a single coherent identity. In this case, organic and plant-based values are expressed consistently across catering, accommodation, and education. Linking the restaurant menu directly to farm production removes the need for a separate supply chain and strengthens the authenticity of the customer experience.

Long-term family management has been essential to sustaining this coherence over two decades; new entrants attempting a similar model should expect that full integration of activities takes years rather than a single investment cycle. The protected park location is a double-edged enabling condition: it provides tourism appeal but should be treated as something the farm protects, not merely benefits from.

Funding: n/a

Timeframe: 2000 – ongoing (agritourism activity operating for over 20 years prior to this date).

Lead organisation: Agriturismo Biologico La Buona Terra (Farmer/Farmers organisation).

Further information: <https://www.buonaterrabio.it>

Contact info@buonaterrabio.it

Copyrights: © 2026 Agriturismo Biologico La Buona Terra





2.27. Italy – Campidarte: From a disused poultry infrastructure to a cultural rural hub

Description

Campidarte is a rural and cultural initiative developed within agricultural company C.I.O. in Sardinia, a poultry company, in the countryside between Ussana and Monastir. Established in 2012, it combines traditional agriculture with agritourism, cultural production, artistic residencies, nature restoration, and the creative reuse of agricultural spaces.

The diversification process centres on transforming disused infrastructure into a multifunctional hub. Former farm buildings have been converted into an agritourism facility and an educational farm, hosting cultural events, workshops, open-air installations, and design activities focused on the reuse of materials. The spaces are also rented out for public and private events.

This initiative illustrates how agricultural assets can be adapted to foster new relationships with visitors, artists, schools, and local communities, representing a highly relevant model for rural regeneration in a peripheral island context, where long-term viability is linked not only to tourism, but also to cultural innovation, environmental sustainability and community engagement.

Rationale

The project is based on the reuse and adaptation of existing farm buildings and land. Disused agricultural structures have been renovated and repurposed into spaces for agritourism, cultural events, artistic residencies, exhibitions, workshops, and an outdoor cultural park featuring murals, sculptures, and installations. This physical transformation of the farm is central to its diversification strategy.

Campidarte, operated within the C.I.O. agricultural context, integrates agritourism services and educational farm components. The hospitality offer is linked to the company's own seasonal farm products, wild territorial resources, and local suppliers, reinforcing the connection between agriculture, guided educational visits, and visitor experience.

The initiative also develops a strong cultural and creative dimension. Campidarte hosts artistic residencies, exhibitions, workshops, performances, debates, music, theatre, craft-related events, and community events involving artists, designers, and cultural practitioners. These activities contribute to the creation of both permanent and temporary installations within the rural landscape, strengthening the role of the farm as a cultural production space.

Environmental enhancement and eco-sustainability are key components. In addition to the creative reuse of materials, the site includes planted olive trees, fruit trees, Mediterranean vegetation, flowers, walking paths, resting areas, and biodiversity-friendly interventions such as the introduction of bees. These elements reinforce the ecological dimension of diversification.

Campidarte also generates income through the rental of spaces for private and public events, including weddings, meetings, photo shoots, performances, and cultural gatherings. This expands the economic base of the farm beyond traditional agriculture and agritourism, attracting diverse audiences to the rural area.

The initiative interacts with a wide range of stakeholders, including artists, cultural organisations, schools, visitors, food producers, event organisers, and the wider rural community. These collaborations help integrate the farm into broader cultural and territorial networks.

Achievements

Campidarte has successfully transformed a traditional agricultural site into a multifunctional rural and cultural hub. A key achievement is the reuse of disused farm infrastructure, which has been converted into spaces for cultural production, hospitality, and community engagement.

The initiative has created a diversified portfolio of activities, including agritourism, educational visits, workshops, cultural events, artistic residencies, and event hosting services. These activities have expanded the farm's audience and strengthened its economic resilience.

Campidarte has also contributed to rural regeneration by linking agricultural identity with cultural innovation and environmental restoration. It demonstrates how farms can evolve into multifunctional spaces without losing their connection to agriculture and local territory.

Lessons and recommendations

Campidarte shows that successful diversification depends on coherence with local identity and the gradual transformation of existing assets. A key lesson is that rural cultural initiatives are most effective when they remain anchored in agricultural production, local products, and the landscape context. This agricultural base preserves the enterprise's concrete productive identity.



Another important lesson is that diversification benefits from combining multiple complementary functions, such as agriculture, tourism, culture, education, design, environmental care, and events, within a single coherent system. This strengthens both economic viability and territorial relevance, allowing the initiative to move from initial experimentation into a stable, sustainable business model.

The case also highlights the importance of partnerships with cultural actors, local communities, advisory services, and public support in sustaining long-term development. Such collaboration is particularly vital for navigating the investment costs, administrative requirements, and skills gaps that small family farms often face during the diversification process.

Funding: The funding and support sources include private investment, cultural partnerships and self-generated revenues from agritourism and event activities.

Timeframe: 2012 - ongoing

Lead organisation: C.I.O. Agricultural Company / Campidarte initiative

Further information: <https://www.campidarte.org>

Contact:

> andrea.saba@santannapisa.it

> info@campidarte.com

Copyrights: @ 2020 - CAMPIDARTE C.I.O. srl



2.28. Malta - Green Thumb Farm: micro-green agriculture

Description

Green Thumb Farm is a Maltese example of farm diversification driven by innovation, entrepreneurship, and the entry of a new generation into agriculture. Mr Claude Falzon, a registered farmer under the age of 40, does not come from a traditional farming family, unlike many farmers in Malta. With a background in the catering sector and an entrepreneurial mindset, he identified a gap in the local market for fresh microgreens, edible flowers, and specialised produce demanded by high-end restaurants.

Without access to his own agricultural land, Claude began experimenting on a small plot belonging to his grandfather, gradually developing his skills and expertise in niche production. As demand increased, he later rented additional land and invested in a greenhouse to expand the activity.

Today, Green Thumb Farm demonstrates how diversification can create new opportunities within agriculture through specialised crops, direct links with the gastronomy sector, and stronger connections between producers and end users. The initiative highlights how new entrants can bring innovation into farming, while also underscoring the importance of access to land, entrepreneurship, and value addition for the future resilience of the sector.



Rationale

Green Thumb Farm is an example of diversification that emerged from identifying an unmet market need and adapting agricultural activity accordingly. Through his experience in the catering sector, Claude Falzon recognised that many restaurants, particularly those operating at a higher level, required fresh, locally produced microgreens, edible flowers, and speciality crops that were not easily available.

The initiative started on a very small scale, allowing for experimentation before any major investment. Lacking a traditional farming family background and access to his own agricultural land, Claude began by testing production on a small plot belonging to his grandfather. This gradual approach reduced risk and enabled him to better understand production techniques, market demand, and client requirements before scaling up. After validating the concept, he later rented agricultural land, and invested in a greenhouse to expand production.

The main stakeholders behind the initiative are young farmer and entrepreneur Claude Falzon, who develops and manages Green Thumb Farm, and a network of chefs, restaurants, and catering businesses whose direct communication and recurring demand have actively shaped production planning and product development.

This model is particularly relevant in the Maltese context, where limited access to affordable agricultural land represents a major barrier for young farmers. Land prices are among the highest in Europe, making opportunity costs particularly significant for new entrants. Claude's focus on specialised, high-value crops therefore allows for high productivity and economic return from a limited area, demonstrating how innovation can help overcome structural constraints.

The operational model is relatively simple but highly effective. Close communication with chefs allows the farm to anticipate demand and adjust production accordingly, with peak activity during spring and summer. Orders are placed weekly, and products are harvested and delivered directly to clients, ensuring maximum freshness and reliability. Although the model does not rely on advanced technology, it requires strong technical knowledge due to the delicate nature of microgreens and edible flowers. Harvesting is carried out by hand, making the process labour-intensive and quality-sensitive.

Green Thumb Farm also addressed distribution challenges by investing in its own delivery vehicle and managing logistics internally, thereby shortening the supply chain and strengthening direct relationships with customers.

The case demonstrates that diversification is not limited to tourism or non-agricultural activities. It can also occur within primary production through the development of niche products, access to new markets, and stronger integration with related sectors such as gastronomy.

Achievements

Green Thumb Farm has successfully established a new niche in northern Malta by introducing consistent local production of microgreens, edible flowers, and speciality crops.

The initiative enabled a young farmer from outside a traditional farming background to enter the sector and develop a viable agricultural enterprise, despite major barriers such as limited land availability and high land prices. The micro-enterprise employs fewer than five people, which is significant in a context where most local farms operate with very small workforces.

The project demonstrates that even small areas of agricultural land can generate economic value when combined with innovation, specialised knowledge, and a strong understanding of market demand. Green Thumb Farm serves as an example for other young farmers, showing that opportunities still exist within agriculture through creativity, diversification, and adaptation to emerging consumer needs.



Lessons and recommendations

The experience of Green Thumb Farm highlights that small-scale agricultural diversification can create opportunities, but also presents significant challenges, particularly for new entrants. Starting a farming enterprise from scratch requires not only an innovative idea but also technical knowledge, resilience, and the ability to manage all aspects of the business.

One of the main lessons is that small farms often lack access to specialised advisory services, particularly when developing new or niche forms of production. Finding reliable workers with the necessary agricultural skills is another challenge, especially for delicate crops such as microgreens and edible flowers, where quality and attention to detail are essential.

Access to land and finance remain the most significant barriers for young farmers in Malta. Without inherited resources, new entrants face high initial costs before their ideas can be properly tested and developed. Greater support is therefore needed to improve access to land, investment, technical advice, and training.

Green Thumb Farm demonstrates that successful diversification requires a combination of agricultural knowledge, entrepreneurship, market awareness, and direct relationships with customers. Supporting such initiatives can encourage more young people to enter agriculture and develop innovative, sustainable farming models.

Funding: The enterprise was established via private equity, family land-sharing, and reinvested revenue channels, bypassing traditional public subsidies.

Timeframe: 2018 – Present

Lead organisation: Green Thumb Farm

Further information:

> [Green Thumb Farm Official Website](#)

> [Facebook](#)

Contact: [Green Thumb Farm Portal](#)

Copyrights: MaYA Foundation





2.29. Portugal - Bananika. Upcycling fruit surpluses in the Azores

Description

Bananika is a circular-economy agricultural startup located on Terceira Island in the Azores, Portugal. Set up by a farmer and an entrepreneur, Bananika addresses a regional challenge: the loss of over 100 tonnes of bananas annually due to local market overproduction or strict market standards. To mitigate this environmental and economic drain, the project transforms bananas that would be otherwise wasted into a fermented alcoholic beverage (banana cider) with an alcohol content of 5--6%. This approach converts a low-value agricultural waste stream into a premium, marketable product with a longer shelf life. In addition, banana peels and residual pulp are reused as organic fertiliser, reinforcing circular economy principles.

The initiative also helps other farmers dealing with their surplus production through partnerships with local producers, particularly members of the FRUTERCOOP cooperative.

The project demonstrates how innovation, value addition, and food waste reduction can strengthen farm competitiveness, resilience, and growth by creating a unique product category in Portugal and reaching new consumer segments seeking sustainable and lower-alcohol beverages.

Rationale

The project began with the development of a banana-based fermented alcoholic beverage (banana cider), which was later expanded through product innovation into a broader range, including a pineapple variant and banana chips. This gradual diversification allowed the producers to build on existing know-how while increasing product variety and market appeal. Market positioning has focused on younger consumers seeking innovative, refreshing, and lower-alcohol alternatives to traditional beer, wine, and cider. Integration into the Azores Brand further strengthened market visibility by aligning the products with the regional identity and values of quality and sustainability associated with the Azores.

The main stakeholders are the project promoters, Tibério Barbeito and Leon Biermann, as well as FRUTERCOOP Cooperative and its 41 associated banana producers, who form the core supply base. Around this core, a wider ecosystem of actors has supported the initiative, including the Regional Directorate for Rural Development of the Azores, the Municipality of Angra do Heroísmo, Startup Angra, Beta-i, the Portuguese Catholic University, Territórios Criativos, BET – Bring Entrepreneurs Together, Quinta dos Cedros Grocery Store, Biermann Technologies GmbH, and the Azores Brand initiative. These stakeholders have contributed through funding, business development, networking, training, marketing, and improved access to markets.

The project stems from an explicit partnership with the regional FRUTERCOOP agricultural cooperative. Instead of allowing non-standard fruit to rot, the founders purchase the surplus directly from cooperative farmers, ensuring an alternative baseline revenue stream for local growers.

Developing a stable fermentation profile for high-sugar, dense banana pulp required two years of continuous laboratory experimentation and product testing. Bananika strategically positions its final product toward health-conscious urban consumers and younger demographics seeking refreshing, lower-alcohol alternatives to traditional beers, wines, and standard apple ciders. To maximise its market footprint and command premium pricing, the product was officially certified under the protected 'Azores Brand' (*Marca Açores*).

Achievements

Bananika has successfully transformed banana 'waste' into a commercially viable and award-winning product, creating a new business activity within the agricultural sector. In 2022 alone, approximately 1.5 tonnes of bananas that would otherwise have been discarded were used in cider production. The initiative introduced Portugal's first banana cider, establishing a distinctive regional product linked to the Azores and attracting consumers seeking innovative, sustainable, and lower-alcohol beverages.

The project created a new market opportunity for banana producers by providing an alternative outlet for surplus fruit, and strengthened the economic resilience of the business through the creation of a value-added processing activity. The current facility has the capacity to bottle up to 18 000 bottles per month and produces around 14 000 bottles annually. Beyond economic benefits, Bananika also contributes to environmental sustainability by reducing food waste and associated greenhouse gas emissions.



Lessons and recommendations

The success of the initiative was driven by a clear response to an existing agricultural problem, strong entrepreneurial vision, continuous product testing and development, effective networking, and access to diverse funding sources. One of the main challenges was developing a stable fermentation process and ensuring consistent product quality, which was achieved through extensive experimentation over a two-year period.

In terms of lessons and replication potential, the model could be adapted in other banana-producing regions where surplus fruit and waste are also significant issues, such as the Canary Islands. Communication and visibility through public events, social media, and media coverage have played an important role in positioning the project as a credible and inspiring example of circular economy innovation.

Funding: Co-financed by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development via LEADER grants under the regional Rural Development Programme (Measure 19).

Timeframe: 2020 – Ongoing

Lead organisation: Bananika

Further information:

> [Bananika Official E-Commerce Platform](#)

> [Facebook](#)

> [Instagram](#)

Contact:

> mrsantos@dgadr.pt

> rederruralnacional@dgadr.pt

Copyrights: Bananika





2.30. Portugal - Utopia Space: Tech-driven organic farming and co-working

Description

Utopia Space is a rural development initiative located in Póvoa de Lanhoso, Portugal, combining organic agriculture, a certified organic nursery producing aromatic and medicinal plants, education, and co-working activities within a single farm-based business. The project was developed by technology company Plako, which relocated part of its activities to a rural area and transformed its land into a multifunctional space.

The project began with setting up a greenhouse for growing aromatic and medicinal plants. Building on the company's technical expertise, an online store was launched later.

A key diversification step was the creation of Utopia Space, a multifunctional facility built using recycled materials such as tyres, cork stoppers, and aluminium cans. The space combines agricultural production with co-working facilities, educational activities, events, and other experiences. This enabled the farm to generate revenue from non-agricultural services while attracting visitors and professionals interested in sustainability and rural lifestyles.

Rationale

Plako established an online store (AMU.bio) for the direct marketing and sales of its organic plants. To diversify revenue beyond traditional agriculture, the Utopia Space eco-facility was constructed. This multi-purpose hub features meeting rooms, a show-cooking kitchen, and outdoor workshop spaces.

The initiative generated alternative revenue streams by hosting educational study visits for national and international students, social solidarity institutions, and corporate events.

Its success has been supported by strong partnerships with a wide range of stakeholders, including local farmers, consumers, schools, and scout groups, as well as the Municipality of Póvoa de Lanhoso, the University of Minho, and the University of Coimbra. Collaboration with NGOs and private-sector partners, such as Quercus, ASSIS Norte Association, Braval, Sonae, Corticeira Amorim, and Valadares, has further strengthened knowledge exchange, resource mobilisation, and the adoption of circular economy practices.

Achievements

The investment created five full-time jobs, including employment opportunities for a refugee and a person with disabilities.

This initiative attracted over 1 200 visitors and became a recognised demonstration site for sustainable agriculture and rural innovation.

The project also established new market opportunities through direct sales, educational services, and tourism-related activities.

In addition, Utopia Space strengthened local development, supported biodiversity conservation, promoted social inclusion, and received several national awards for innovation and sustainability, demonstrating the economic, environmental, and social benefits of farm diversification.



Lessons and recommendations

A key success factor was the integration of multiple complementary activities around a clear sustainability vision. Combining agriculture, technology, and co-working services enabled the business to generate diverse income streams and reduce economic risk.

Strong partnerships with local authorities, schools, universities, and social organisations also played a crucial role in fostering innovation and community engagement.

Investment in skills development was another important factor. The promoter undertook training in organic farming and related fields, acquiring the expertise needed to successfully manage the diversified activities.

Funding: Funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) and LEADER (Measures M04 and M19).

- Total Budget: EUR 262 074.03
- National Funds: EUR 16 090.89
- CAP Funds: EUR 84 867.19
- Private/Own Funds: EUR 156 145.95
- Other Sources: EUR 5 000 (Minho Tourism Innovation Awards)

Timeframe: 2014 - Ongoing

Lead organisation: Moisés Campos / Plako

Further information: [AMU Biologic Website](#); [Facebook](#); [Instagram](#)

Contact: mrsantos@dgadr.pt; rederuralnacional@dgadr.pt

Copyrights: Utopia Space





2.31. Portugal – Olijan: from olive orchards to climate-resilient pistachio

Description

Olijan is an innovative farm project in the Serpa area (Alentejo, Portugal), led by young farmer Bernardo Janeiro. Around 2014–2015, the project began with a small experimental pistachio planting proposed by a Spanish group interested in expanding pistachio cultivation in Portugal. Although Bernardo had no prior experience with this crop, he recognised its potential for marginal, water-scarce soils.

To diversify traditional, low-margin olive production, the farm introduced pistachio cultivation (now covering around 11 hectares) as a novel, high-value crop in the region. Pistachios are well-suited to marginal soils, require less water than olives, tolerate extreme temperatures, need higher chilling hours, and align with growing demand for healthy, plant-based products.

The farm combines olive groves with pistachio orchards, and has developed new market opportunities, with smaller nuts sold as snacks and larger ones used in cosmetics and ice cream production. Overall, the project demonstrates a climate-resilient diversification model for semi-arid regions facing water scarcity and declining productivity in traditional crops.

Rationale

Olijan diversified from conventional olive production into a mixed olive–pistachio system adapted to local environmental constraints in the Serpa area (Alentejo, Portugal). Bernardo Janeiro took over family land and introduced pistachios after a Spanish agricultural partner proposed the crop as part of efforts to expand pistachio

production into Portugal. The project began as a small pilot to test feasibility under local conditions, with technical input and plant material support from Spanish partners.

The pilot was implemented on land with a borehole of limited capacity, where water scarcity made traditional full olive irrigation increasingly unviable. Pistachios, with their low water requirements, were therefore selected as a climate-resilient alternative. Key technical steps included the use of drought- and heat-resistant rootstocks such as ZB-1, capable of withstanding summer temperatures up to 52°C, and a carefully designed dioecious planting system, with one male tree for every 8–16 female trees, to optimise wind pollination in a context of limited pollinator activity.

As the system developed and scaled to around 11 hectares, technical and institutional support from DRAP Alentejo and the Rede Rural Nacional helped provide advisory services and visibility, while the PDR 2020 Managing Authority enabled investment in planting, infrastructure, and equipment.

Operationally, the project progressively developed harvesting, drying, and initial processing capacity, with plans for an on-farm processing station for drying, roasting, and packaging. Market segmentation was introduced, with smaller nuts sold as premium healthy snacks and larger-calibre nuts directed to cosmetics and industrial ice cream production.

Overall, this business model shifted the farm from low-margin traditional olive production towards high-value nut cultivation, strengthening resilience to drought and heat, reducing reliance on imports, and offering a replicable example of climate-adapted diversification in the Alentejo region.



Achievements

Olijan successfully introduced and scaled pistachio production in a region where it was previously uncommon, establishing around 11 hectares and demonstrating its viability under Alentejo conditions. It created a new high-value crop alongside olives, diversifying income streams, and reducing water dependency.

Achievements include access to premium markets (dried fruit, cosmetics, and food industries), the promotion of more sustainable practices (low inputs and climate resilience), and contributions to generational renewal as a young farmer-led project. The initiative also gained visibility through the PDR 2020 podcast and other media.

The project strengthens the local economy by offering a national alternative to imports and positioning Portugal within the growing pistachio sector. Environmental benefits include better adaptation to marginal soils and reduced reliance on chemical inputs. The full economic impact is expected to increase as the trees reach full maturity.

Lessons and recommendations

Success factors: Entrepreneurial openness to innovation, particularly the willingness to test an unfamiliar crop, was key to the project's success. This was combined with strong adaptation to local constraints, especially water scarcity, and a long-term vision suited to perennial tree crops. Early-stage partnerships enabled technical knowledge transfer and public support through CAP/RDP funding (PDR 2020), providing essential backing for investment and development.

Challenges: The project faced a long maturation period, with pistachios requiring 9–10 years to reach full production. Additional challenges included limited initial technical expertise, pollination and establishment requirements, and the need to develop new markets. These were addressed through pilot testing, the selection of suitable varieties and rootstocks, and gradual scaling of the production system.

Recommendations for replication: Feasibility studies should be carried out in advance, particularly regarding climate suitability, water availability, and variety selection. Access to technical advice and high-quality planting material is essential. Integrating pistachios with existing crops can help ensure interim income during the establishment phase. On-farm processing should be planned early to capture added value, alongside securing CAP/RDP support for investment costs. Legal and regulatory aspects (including planting authorisations and food safety requirements for processing) must also be considered. Strong marketing, particularly positioning 'Portuguese pistachios' as a premium product, can enhance competitiveness. Overall, patience and diversified financing are critical, as returns are delayed but potentially significant in a low-input, climate-resilient crop system.

Funding: Supported by investment grants from PDR 2020 (Portuguese Rural Development Programme / CAP funds).

Timeframe: 2014 – Ongoing (Initial experimentation in 2015; scaled promotion around 2020)

Lead organisation: Olijan – Agricultura Unipessoal Lda

Further information:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sdw3wbcFY1E>

Contact: Bernardo Janeiro

Copyrights: INDUGLOBAL – <https://www.agriterra.pt/Artigos/318390-Olijan-o-projeto-de-olival-e-pistacio-em-Serpa.html>





2.32. Portugal – Joseph's dream: Nut orchard in Central Portugal's abandoned land

Description

Joseph's Dream is a farm diversification and rural regeneration model in Central Portugal. It addresses a major structural challenge: extensive areas of land are abandoned, highly fragmented into very small plots, and often lack clear ownership records or precise cadastral boundaries.

The project aggregates land through purchase, rental, and long-term management agreements and converts it into productive organic almond and walnut orchards. Diversification occurs at both farm and business level through perennial crop production, sheep grazing within orchards, professional farm management services, project development, shared machinery and labour, and future cooperative processing and marketing activities.

The model enables landowners and investors to participate in agriculture without needing their own technical teams, equipment, or administrative capacity. It also enables the recovery of abandoned land into productive use, while improving soil cover, biodiversity, fire-risk management, and rural employment

Rationale

The initiative emerged from the recognition that fragmented land ownership represents one of the main barriers to agricultural development in Central Portugal. Local estimates suggest that up to 40% of the land has no clearly identified owner, while only around 25% has fully mapped cadastral boundaries. Many parcels are 0.5 ha or smaller, making it almost impossible for small landowners to modernise on their own.

Joseph's Dream addresses this challenge by consolidating scattered parcels into economically viable land blocks through purchase, leasing, and management agreements.

Once a viable land block has been assembled, the company designs the orchard, prepares PEPAC/PDR investment applications, secures financing, plants the trees, installs irrigation where feasible, obtains organic certification, and provides long-term technical and operational management.

Diversification takes place at several levels. At farm level, abandoned land is transformed into high-value perennial crops such as almonds

and walnuts. At system level, sheep are integrated into the orchards to provide grazing, control vegetation, recycle nutrients, and reduce the need for mechanical intervention. At business level, Joseph's Dream offers services that individual small farms could not easily provide on their own, including project development, shared machinery and labour, irrigation management, agronomic advice, reporting, banking coordination, and, in the future, cooperative processing and marketing.

The model relies on collaboration between a wide range of stakeholders, including Joseph's Dream as the lead organisation, local landowners, Portuguese and foreign investors, farm clients, banks, PEPAC/PDR and agricultural authorities, organic certification bodies, local municipalities, technical consultants, nurseries, contractors, local employees, sheep managers, and future cooperative, processing, and marketing partners.

Where land ownership is unclear, Joseph's Dream is exploring broader public-private solutions to bring abandoned land back into productive use in a legally secure way.

Achievements

Joseph's Dream began with a 12-hectare plantation in 2019 and has grown to approximately 700 hectares under management.

The model has brought abandoned land back into productive use, attracted foreign and local investment into Central Portugal, created rural employment, and built a professional management structure around organic almond and walnut production. It has also diversified the farm system through sheep integration, shared machinery, agronomic services, project development, and future cooperative processing ambitions.

The model improves the economic viability of fragmented land by creating scale where individual owners could not. It also contributes to soil cover, fire-risk reduction, biodiversity, and rural revitalisation. The work has received external recognition, including a European Landowners' Organization award for land restoration and soil-management work.

The model demonstrates how diversification can strengthen the economic viability of fragmented agricultural landscapes while delivering environmental and social benefits.



Lessons and recommendations

The main lesson is that diversification in highly fragmented rural areas often requires land aggregation as a first step. Without sufficient scale, many diversification opportunities remain economically unviable.

Key barriers include unclear ownership, small parcel size, limited cadastral information, administrative complexity, restricted access to finance, and shortages of specialised technical expertise.

Joseph's Dream has addressed these challenges through professional management, long-term investment, strong local relationships, and clear communication with both investors and landowners.

CAP and PEPAC support have played an important role, but success also depends on organisations capable of preparing projects, coordinating finance, implementing investments, and providing long-term management. In areas with unresolved ownership issues, public-private partnerships and adapted policy frameworks may be necessary to enable replication.

Funding: The model combines CAP support, national co-financing, private investment and commercial finance. Approximately EUR

10 million has been invested across multiple farms and projects managed by Joseph's Dream. Funding sources include:

- CAP/PEPAC support for eligible investments and annual CAP payments;
- Portuguese national co-financing linked to approved CAP interventions;
- Private capital from landowners, Portuguese and international investors, and Joseph's Dream;
- Bank financing where required;
- Future cooperative investment in processing and marketing infrastructure.

Timeframe: 2017 – ongoing (first plantation established in 2019; approximately 700 hectares under management by 2026)

Lead organisation: Joseph's Dream

Further information: <https://www.josephsdream.eu>

Contact: info@josephsdream.eu

Copyrights: Joseph's Dream





2.33. Portugal - Project Egitânia: Regenerative landscapes, olivotourism and heritage

Description

The Egitânia Project is based on a 180-hectare property dedicated primarily to olive oil production from traditional rainfed olive groves. It is located in Idanha-a-Velha, in Portugal's Castelo Branco district, within a Mediterranean climate influenced by continental conditions. Its main focus is the valorisation of endemic olive varieties, producing a premium and distinctive olive oil closely linked to its territory.

The agricultural approach is rooted in regenerative farming principles and integrates the grazing of native-breed sheep within the olive grove ecosystem.

Producing high-quality olive oil requires additional communication efforts to convey its added value, both nutritional and organoleptic, to consumers and markets, making consumer awareness and education essential.

Against this background, the project gradually opened the estate to the public, not only to showcase the olive oil, but also to present the production system behind it that is embedded in the preservation of environmental, cultural, and landscape heritage. This process evolved into an olive tourism initiative, offering educational and training activities related to agricultural practices and archaeological heritage on the site.

It also developed a broader interpretation of the surrounding landscape, based on the idea that 'people only protect what they understand and value'. Egitânia is currently developing an Agricultural Landscape Interpretation Centre on the property.

Rationale

All of these dynamics have strengthened the brand's positioning, associating it not only with the quality of its olive oil but also with a model of ethical and responsible production. This has increased its economic value and positioned it within a higher-end market segment.

At the same time, the project has developed a diversified tourism offering based on olive tourism, generating an additional revenue stream. This integrates gastronomy, local culture, history, archaeology, and environmental awareness within a broader agroecological interpretation of the territory.

In this way, the project has become an expression of its surrounding landscape, communicating a cultural identity rooted in the past while oriented towards a forward-looking vision.

Due to its proximity to the Spanish border, the initiative has naturally developed a cross-border dimension and established partnerships beyond national boundaries. It is now recognised as an award-winning project, valued both for preserving traditional olive culture and for its international outreach.

The initiative is entirely privately driven, led by the vision, dynamism, and investment of its owners, Tiago Lourenço and Ricardo Araújo. Over time, it has built a strong network of partnerships and inter-institutional cooperation, including Naturtejo Geopark, the Municipality of Idanha-a-Nova, Aldeias Históricas de Portugal, the Intermunicipal Community of Beira Baixa, Food4Sustainability, the University of Coimbra, and NOVA University Lisbon, as well as active engagement with local communities and regional development organisations.

Achievements

The overall dynamic generated by the project has created significant intangible value for the estate. It has strengthened the brand's positioning in higher-value markets and built a loyal customer base aligned with its ethical principles, reducing exposure to price volatility.

While olive tourism currently represents a limited share of total annual revenue, it has been growing steadily and is becoming an increasingly relevant complementary income stream linked to the olive grove.

Beyond its economic dimensions, the project's most important contribution lies in the sense of purpose it has created for the owners, the local community, the territory, and its visitors. This sense of identity and mission is built through long-term commitment, and cannot be expressed solely in economic terms.

The project has therefore evolved from a purely agricultural initiative into a reference for more integrated and sustainable rural development, generating environmental and cultural value closely rooted in local identity.



Lessons and recommendations

The lesson from the project is to adopt a systemic and holistic way of thinking. A farm or project is not an isolated entity, but a reflection of a broader territory and landscape, making it essential to operate and plan at this scale. It is equally important to recognise that the most meaningful and lasting solutions require time to build; there are no quick fixes, only continuity and long-term commitment. In agriculture, particularly at landscape level, outcomes are measured not in days or years, but in decades and generations, with tree planting being a clear expression of this long-term perspective.

The project also shows the importance of operating within both markets and communities according to the logic of natural systems, fostering symbiotic relationships that strengthen the whole rather than extracting short-term value from finite resources. At the same time, it highlights the value of being a source of motivation and creativity, not only within the enterprise itself but also in the wider community, by inspiring others to engage with a shared vision.

Finally, it emphasises the importance of building connections with actors who share similar values, cultivating a strong sense of purpose and territorial belonging, and acting with integrity: being fair, reliable, consistent and committed to turning a credible vision into reality.

Funding: The project is entirely privately financed through the personal capital and direct reinvestments of its two owners.

Timeframe: 2016 – 2026 (Ongoing development)

Lead organisation: Real Idanha, Lda. (Private Business)

Further information: [Project Egitânia Official Social Portal](#)

Contact: tiago.lourenco@realidanha.pt

Copyrights: Real Idanha, Lda.





2.34. Portugal - Quinta da Cortiça: Rural tourism, pilgrim accommodation, and direct sales

Description

Quinta da Cortiça is a family-owned farm located in Rego da Murta, in the municipality of Alvaiázere (Leiria district, Portugal). Traditionally dedicated to agricultural production, particularly olives, olive oil, pomegranates, and livestock, the farm has gradually diversified its activities to include rural tourism, pilgrim accommodation, and direct sales. Managed by the family company Sociedade Agrícola Torre D. Gayão, the initiative aimed to broaden the farm's income sources while preserving its agricultural identity. Rather than constructing new buildings, the family chose to rehabilitate existing structures, thereby maintaining the estate's historical and architectural heritage. The property, which has remained in the same family for over 300 years and includes a medieval tower, has successfully adapted its agricultural buildings to offer a range of services:

- Agrotourism experiences, allowing visitors to participate in farm activities such as olive and pomegranate harvesting, tree pruning, and horse handling.
- A pilgrim hostel (albergue) on the Caminho de Santiago, featuring two dormitories and operating since 2018.
- Guest accommodation, including three apartments and four rooms.
- A farm shop, offering the estate's own products (olive oil, preserved olives, and pomegranates), as well as regional specialities such as cheeses, dried fruits, honey, wines, and the distinctive licor de chicharo.

Rational

Main steps and components:

- 2018: Establishment of a pilgrim hostel (albergue) with two dormitories, designed to serve walkers along the Caminho de Santiago.
- Construction of a multifunctional building integrating a communal kitchen, dining area, lounge, reception, and farm shop.
- 2019: Expansion of accommodation with the opening of additional rooms and apartments for agrotourism guests, alongside a new multifunctional space for events and gatherings.
- Development of experiential tourism activities, enabling guests to engage in seasonal farm work such as harvesting, pruning, and animal care.
- Introduction of direct sales through an on-site shop, combining the farm's own products with selected regional specialities.
- Ongoing transition towards organic (biological) production methods.

This integrated model effectively links agriculture, tourism, and local commerce. Pilgrims and tourists provide a steady flow of visitors, while farm-based experiences and the on-site shop generate complementary income and promote regional products. The farm's location along the Caminho de Santiago, combined with its proximity to natural and cultural heritage sites, including remains from the Bronze Age, Roman period, and Templar era, further enhances its attractiveness.

Support from the LEADER programme, through the Local Action Group Terras de Sicó, played a key role in financing the rehabilitation and adaptation of existing buildings. This bottom-up, place-based approach enabled the project's development, while reinforcing its territorial identity. Diversification has not only reduced dependence on volatile agricultural markets but also created more stable, year-round economic activity.

The project is led by Sociedade Agrícola Torre D. Gayão, the family business that owns and manages Quinta da Cortiça. Its main partner is the Local Action Group Terras de Sicó, which provided LEADER funding and technical assistance. Additional collaborations include local authorities, regional tourism bodies, and the wider Caminho de Santiago network. The initiative also benefits from strong synergies with local producers who supply products for the farm shop.

Achievements

- Successful conversion of traditional farm buildings into tourism infrastructure, while preserving and continuing core agricultural activities.
- Creation of diversified revenue streams, including accommodation (for both pilgrims and tourists), experiential agrotourism, events, and direct sales.
- Increased visibility and valorisation of regional products through the on-site farm shop, strengthening local value chains.
- Meaningful contribution to the local economy and to the development of infrastructure along the Caminho de Santiago in the Terras de Sicó region.
- Preservation of family heritage and generational continuity, maintaining an estate that has remained in the same family for over 300 years.
- Positive environmental and cultural impact, achieved through the rehabilitation of heritage assets and the progressive adoption of organic production practices.

Overall, the project demonstrates how small family farms can achieve long-term viability by combining agriculture with tourism and short supply chains, creating both economic resilience and territorial value.



Lessons and recommendations

Success factors: Key elements underpinning the project's success include a strong family vision and deep attachment to the land, combined with the strategic reuse of existing heritage buildings. Its prime location along the Caminho de Santiago provides a continuous flow of visitors, while the effective integration of agricultural production with tourism experiences enhances its attractiveness. Access to LEADER support was instrumental in financing the necessary investments and enabling implementation.

Challenges: The main challenges involved the high initial costs associated with building rehabilitation, the need to meet tourism standards and regulatory requirements, and the ongoing task of balancing agricultural operations with guest accommodation and services.

Recommendations:

- › Leverage distinctive local assets, such as heritage, landscape, or proximity to cultural and tourism routes.
- › Prioritise the adaptive reuse of existing buildings to reduce investment costs and preserve local character.
- › Integrate accommodation with experiential activities and direct sales to maximise value creation and diversify income.
- › Seek early support from LEADER programmes or Local Action Groups, and ensure compliance with tourism, health, and food safety regulations.
- › Invest in marketing and visibility, particularly through digital channels and networks such as pilgrimage routes, while adopting a phased development approach.
- › Maintain an authentic agricultural identity as a key differentiating factor in the market.
- › Overall, this business model is particularly well suited to farms located near tourist or pilgrimage routes, or those with strong historical and cultural value.

Funding: n/a

Timeframe: Main investments 2018–2019 (ongoing operation)

Lead organisation: Sociedade Agrícola Torre D. Gayão / Quinta da Cortiça

Further information: <https://quintadacortica.pt>

Contact: turismo@quintadacortica.pt

Copyrights: Sociedade Agrícola Torre D. Gayão





2.35. Portugal - Pepe Aromas: A multi-functional, circular business model

Description

Pepe Aromas is a family-owned farm in Vale do Pereiro, Alentejo (Portugal), that successfully diversified from traditional extensive cork oak and olive production into a multi-functional, circular business model.

Two siblings (third generation) revitalised the inherited farm by planting 20 hectares of certified organic prickly pear (*Opuntia*), a climate-resilient, low-water crop well adapted to marginal soils. They expanded the business by fully processing the entire plant (fruit, pads, flowers, and seeds) into 13 high-value products, including jams, juices, liqueurs, chocolates, cosmetics, and soaps. Additionally, they developed agritourism experiences, which now represent around 30% of the farm's revenue.

Rational

Pepe Aromas diversified a traditional family farm focused mainly on cork oak and olive production into a resilient, multi-revenue and circular economy model. The two siblings took over the family farm and implemented a clear step-by-step diversification strategy.

They began by introducing 20 hectares of certified organic prickly pear, a climate-resilient and low-water crop well adapted to the marginal soils of the Alentejo region. They simultaneously converted existing olive groves to organic production and later planted a new organic lemon orchard, while continuing sustainable management of the 500-hectare cork oak forest. The farm then invested in infrastructure by renovating a disused national heritage railway station, transforming it into a modern processing unit, warehouse,

shop and visitor space. They installed irrigation systems, processing equipment and other necessary facilities. A central element was the development of value-added processing. Through partnerships with universities and research institutions, they created 13 different high-quality products using the entire prickly pear plant - including the fruit, pads, flowers and seeds. This circular approach ensures almost zero waste, with by-products reused for animal feed, compost or new products. In parallel, they developed agritourism activities such as guided tours, harvesting experiences, and educational workshops, which now account for approximately 30% of the farm's total revenue. Sustainability was also strengthened through the adoption of solar energy, water recycling systems and biodiversity-friendly practices.

CAP RDP Measure 4 (Investments in physical assets) provided essential funding for the infrastructure and equipment, making the diversification possible. These combined activities enabled the farm to move from low-value raw commodity production to multiple high-value income streams (fresh and processed products, tourism, and environmental services), significantly increasing competitiveness, economic resilience, and growth potential.

The main stakeholders are the owners of Pepe Aromas, Lda - siblings Susana and José Mendes, who lead the family farm business. Key partners include universities and research centres (for product development and innovation), local and regional authorities, and the Managing Authority of the RDP 2020. Additional collaboration came from chefs and gastronomy professionals for product testing and promotion, as well as suppliers and equipment providers. CAP advisory services and local development groups supported the project implementation.



Achievements

Pepe Aromas represents a successful transformation of a traditional family farm into a diversified and innovative agribusiness. The farm established 20 hectares of organic prickly pear cultivation, converted existing olive groves to organic production, and introduced new lemon orchards, while continuing the sustainable management of cork oak systems.

A key achievement has been the development of 13 high-value products based on the full utilisation of raw materials, effectively implementing a circular economy model. In parallel, the introduction of agritourism activities has added a significant new revenue stream, now accounting for approximately 30% of total income.

The project has facilitated generational renewal and job creation, supporting two full-time young entrepreneurs alongside seasonal workers. It has also substantially improved the farm's economic performance through income diversification and positioning in premium markets.

Further notable outcomes include the restoration of a historic railway station, classified as national heritage, into a functional production and visitor centre, strengthening both operational capacity and visitor engagement. The initiative has also contributed to the local economy through direct sales and tourism, while delivering positive environmental impacts such as enhanced biodiversity, improved soil health, and carbon sequestration.

Lessons and recommendations

The success of Pepe Aromas was driven by several key factors: a clear long-term vision from the young farmers (siblings), a strong entrepreneurial spirit, thorough feasibility studies, and continuous collaboration with universities and research institutions for product innovation. The integration of agricultural production, processing, and agritourism created complementary income streams that increased resilience. CAP funding (RDP Measure 4) was crucial in overcoming the high initial investment barrier.

The main challenges included limited technical knowledge of prickly pear cultivation and processing, significant upfront costs, and the need to develop new markets. These were addressed through persistent research, gradual implementation, and the development of strong networks with chefs, distributors, and tourism operators.

For those wishing to replicate this model, it is essential to develop a solid business plan with realistic timelines, secure diversified financing (combining CAP and private funding), and invest early in organic certification and marketing. Strong communication and direct engagement with consumers are also vital. Patience is required, as full returns from new plantations and tourism activities may take several years to materialise. Legal aspects, such as permits for heritage building renovation and compliance with food safety regulations, should be carefully addressed from the outset.

Funding: The main support came from RDP Measure M04 – Investments in physical assets

- > Total budget: EUR 377 222
- > National funds: EUR 23 767
- > EAFRD: EUR 84 268
- > Private/own: EUR 269 187

Timeframe: 2013 – ongoing (main diversification investments and activities developed between 2017 and 2023)

Lead organisation: Pepe Aromas, Lda

Further information:

- > <https://www.pepearomas.com>
- > https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/good-practice/pepe-aromas_en

Contact: pepearomas@gmail.com

Copyrights: Pepe Aromas, Lda





2.36. Portugal - Salivtae: Diversified into the production of *Salicornia europaea*

Description

Salivtae is a project led by two young farmers in Portimão, Algarve (Portugal), which successfully diversified into the production of *Salicornia europaea* (also known as sea asparagus or green salt), a highly nutritious halophyte crop. The initiative transformed 7 hectares of abandoned, saline-affected land into a productive organic unit, including 4 600 m² of greenhouses. Instead of conventional crops, the project focuses on climate-resilient halophytes adapted to saline soils, producing fresh *Salicornia* as well as value-added products such as dehydrated 'green salt'. The approach combines sustainable production with zero-waste principles, including the use of renewable energy, water recycling, and composting. It also incorporates an educational component through training sessions for students and other farmers.

Rational

Salivtae began with extensive research and testing between 2015 and 2018, focusing on germination, varieties, and cultivation techniques adapted to saline conditions. The young farmers established an intensive organic production unit in greenhouses, applying low-input, saline-tolerant practices.

The production process is based on full plant utilisation: fresh sales of *Salicornia*, dehydration for 'green salt', and the use of roots and residues for animal feed or compost. Circular economy principles were adopted, including the use of renewable energy, water reuse systems, and composting. A strong multi-actor approach underpinned the project, with collaboration involving research institutions, local authorities, and schools, to support knowledge transfer and replication.

The project transforms environmental constraints, such as saline soils and water scarcity, into economic opportunities by producing high-value, low-sodium gourmet and health-oriented products. CAP RDP Measure M06 provided critical support for young farmer business development, infrastructure, and initial operations. This enabled the transition from unproductive land to a diversified and sustainable income source, while generating a strong educational and demonstrative impact.

The leading stakeholders are the two young farmers behind Salivtae, Lda. Key partners include the Municipality of Portimão, regional agricultural services (DRAP Algarve), and universities and research centres providing technical support. Local schools are also involved through training and educational activities. The project has further collaborated with other farmers interested in replicating the model, promoting knowledge exchange and wider adoption. CAP managing authorities and advisory services have played an important role in supporting the project's implementation.

Achievements

Salivtae successfully regenerated 7 hectares of previously abandoned, saline-affected land and increased the farm's annual income by approximately 18%. The project established a certified organic production unit and developed new high-value products targeting gourmet and nutraceutical markets.

It also created training opportunities for students and young farmers and has inspired at least seven other landowners to explore similar halophyte-based projects. Environmental benefits include CO₂ capture, improved climate change adaptation, and the implementation of a zero-waste production model.

The initiative contributes to local rural development by demonstrating a viable diversification pathway for small farms in marginal areas affected by soil degradation.

Lessons and recommendations

Key success factors included thorough scientific testing before scaling up, strong partnerships with research institutions and local authorities, and the integration of production with education and knowledge transfer.

The main barriers were the technical challenges associated with cultivation in saline soils and the initial development of markets. These were addressed through continuous experimentation, organic certification, and direct marketing strategies.

For replication, potential farmers should begin with small-scale testing, secure CAP support for young farmers (Measure M06), and invest in organic certification and the development of niche markets. Effective water management, salinity control, and community involvement are essential. Patience is also required, as halophyte crops demand specific technical expertise and time to establish markets. A strong focus on sustainability can enhance both environmental and economic outcomes.



Funding: The main support came from RDP Measure M06 – Farm and business development

- › Total budget: EUR 111 244
- › National funds: EUR 13 905
- › EAFRD: EUR 41 717
- › Private/own: EUR 55 622

Timeframe: 2015 – 2021 (ongoing operations)

Lead organisation: Salivitae, Lda

Further information: https://eu-cap-network.ec.europa.eu/good-practice/salivitae-salicornia-production-unit_en

Contact: salivitae@hotmail.com

Copyrights: Salivitae, Lda



3. Other resources

- › <https://www.euroclusterruraltourism.eu>
- › [Research project: Agricultural and forestry diversification in Austria \[PDF\]](#)
- › <https://www.urlaubambauernhof.at/de>
- › <https://www.greencare-oe.at>
- › <https://www.gutesvombauernhof.at>



EU CAP Network *supported by*
CAP Implementation Contact Point
Rue de la Loi 38 (bte 4)
1040 Brussels, Belgium
+32 (0) 2 801 38 07
implementation@eucapnetwork.eu

