

SWEDEN

Diversify the rural economy

Location

Stockholm Region

Programming period

2007-2013

Axis / Priority

Axis 3 - Quality of life in rural areas and diversification of the rural economy

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 94 000
EAFRD 42 000
National 42 000
Private 10 000

Project duration

2012 – 2015

Project promoter

LRF Mälardalen (Farmers' Association)

Contact

Helena Isakson
Helena.Isakson@lrf.se
tel. +46 171 41 76 45

Website

www.lrf.se/mitt-lrf/regioner/malardalen

'Business Development for Women' provided a business training programme to 60 women, giving them the knowledge and skills necessary to create a business plan for developing their rural business.

Summary

The full potential of female entrepreneurship in rural areas can be hampered by insufficient business knowledge, skills and confidence.

This project provided a business training programme over six sessions to a total of 60 women. Theoretical courses were mixed with practical exercises based on real cases.

In addition to course materials and training activities, a Facebook group was created to facilitate networking and peer support amongst the female entrepreneurs.



Results

- Increased business knowledge, skills and confidence of 60 rural women.
- 50 participants completed business plans, approved by external consultants.
- Participants gave the training consistently high ratings and many of the participants recommended the programme to friends and acquaintances.
- Many of the women continue to network and offer each other peer support.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ More business education and training is needed for women in rural areas.
- ❑ Focusing on making a business plan is one of the best tools available – both for developing skills and thinking, and preparing to meet e.g. banks or authorities.
- ❑ Coaching and facilitation is more important than traditional classroom 'teaching'.
- ❑ As well as business development skills, there is a need for more training in leadership and accountancy.
- ❑ Rural businesswomen could also benefit from more networking opportunities.

Context

The Swedish agricultural sector is still traditional when it comes to gender issues. The male norm and dominance is stronger than in most other industries.

LRF (the federation of farmers) has the stated goal of working for gender equality in the sector. This is about principles, but also the opportunities to benefit from the innovation ability and professional experience that many women possess from other sectors, such as healthcare, education, IT and public relations.

The LRF had already started to have contact during 2010 and 2011 with many women who had a desire to develop their existing rural business.

“Women can often contribute with other experiences than men because they have working experience off the farm. Generally, I think that the green industry needs to involve more women in order to develop.”

Helena Isakson,
Project Manager, LRF Mälardalen

Objectives

The main goal was to enable more rural women to make a better living by developing an existing business.

More specifically it aimed to improve the business skills of female entrepreneurs, for example around how to develop effective business plans and marketing strategies.

A longer-term objective was to change attitudes and challenge stereotypes towards women as entrepreneurs in rural areas.

Activities

The basic feature of the project was a business training programme developed by project coordinator Helena Isaksson and spread out over six training sessions. In total 60 women participated in the different sessions.

Theory briefings were mixed with practical exercises related to real cases. At each workshop, participants were given new tools and models to increase profitability and develop their companies to a new level.

The training included team coaching activities. These group activities aimed to help the participants to find the momentum to evolve an existing company, provide them with energy and reduce stress.

All participants received good quality course material, including a binder with facts and tips on for instance business strategy, market analysis and budget.

Where any of the participants had specific questions or challenges, the project coordinator was able to put them in contact with other people from her own network of advisors and practitioners with the relevant knowledge or experience to guide or advise them.

A Facebook group was initiated and is still operating to encourage and enable further networking exchange and peer support between female rural entrepreneurs

Main Results

- 50 of the 60 participants completed their own business plans which were all approved by external consultants.
- The creation of the business plans provided the participants with new insights and an increased awareness of the challenges and opportunities in developing their own business.
- The training gave hands-on knowledge, practical tips, useful tools and increased confidence.
- The training received consistently high ratings and many of the participants recommended the programme to friends and acquaintances.
- Many of the women offered each other peer support through ongoing networking including through a continuing Facebook group
- Growing demand for similar courses led LRF to acquire further funding for a follow-up programme on leadership and another targeting young people.

“I had just started my business, but realised that my skills were not sufficient. I learned a lot during those days. Maybe I would have learned them sooner or later anyway, but I am quite sure that everything would have taken much longer.”

Anna Kalvebrand
Participant and now successful cheese manufacturer

Key lessons

- It is still necessary to provide specific education and training opportunities for women in rural areas.
- Focusing on making a business plan is one of the best tools available.
- If possible try to add a coaching part, which should be hands-on and inspirational.
- Be sure to engage a facilitator and not someone who is doing traditional teaching.
- As well as business development skills, there is a need for more training in leadership and economics/accountancy.
- It would have been very positive to plan in more time for group work and networking opportunities.
- Several participants would have benefitted from more individual coaching.



“I was proud that there were so many women who wanted to take part in the education and gained so much knowledge.”

Helena Isakson,
Project Manager, LRF Mälardalsförf