

FRANCE – GERS

Ferme du Mounet, Eauze

The case study describes a typical example of an activity which can potentially affect in a positive way the existence of higher linkages between primary agricultural production and the wider rural economy in the study area of Gers (France). More specifically, the utilization of this particular investment project can potentially result in the more effective use of agricultural resources, the increase of local value-added, the diversification of the local economic-base and the generation of rural jobs.

1. Project details

Nature of the project

Purpose: Located in Gascony's Armagnac country, the Ferme de Mounet is an excellent model of integrated agricultural production combined with agro-tourism that is prevalent in the Gers department. Monique and Bernard Molas have been keeping the best of the old traditions alive for over 30 years in their beautiful manor house, preserving both the architecture and ancestral traditions of Gers. Tourists can savour their farm-produced foie gras and the cuisine of Southwest France, while staying in the self-catering cottage with its swimming pool or in one of four *chambre d'hôte* (bed & breakfast) guest rooms.

Content: The farm has 60 hectares devoted to maize, cereals and, most importantly, ducks and geese. Until 1980, the Molas family produced cereals only. They then decided to diversify their agricultural production, buying ducks and geese. Nowadays, their flock includes about 3000 palmipeds (90% ducks). Poultry are grown and slaughtered traditionally on the farm, while meeting sanitary EU regulations. Products are processed in full accordance with the requirements of the "Protected Geographical Indication Gers," the guarantee of the Gersoix origin. The owners cook their own traditional farm products. The farm offers whole foie gras, confits, cassoulets, magrets, pâtés and rillettes. All of these food products are labelled "production fermière" ensuring that only ducks originating from the farm have been used in the process.

Inspiration: Facing the bad economic results in the cereals market at the end of the 80's, the owners decided to expand into other sectors, following the department's trend of duck production and agri-tourism diversification activities.

Policy coherence: The project is coherent with the major strategic aims of regional (Region of Midi-Pyrénées) and local (Gers Department) rural development policy, especially with the focus on creating certified quality products and generating agri-tourism activity.

Links between agriculture and the rest of the economy

Main agricultural sub-sectors involved: Duck breeding, and local food product processing are the main agricultural sub-sectors involved. To begin their flock each year, the farmers buy ducklings from "Palmy Pro Sud-Ouest", under a quality label PGI (this company also provides technical assistance, mostly regarding sanitation issues). The other local sector involved is tourism.

Description of these links: Backward links relate to the aforementioned purchase of ducklings. The project has no forward links with the local food industry as the farm sells all their artisanal food

products directly on-site. With more than 4,000,000 ducks and 130,000 geese produced per year, Gers is one of the main foie gras producers. In this department, co-operatives, commodity groups, farming enterprises and farmers coexist harmoniously and all of them want to offer consumers quality products, relying on their savoir-faire, the terroir, and their product chain organisation.

Scale of the project

Size: Medium-size

Time scale: 30 years

Coverage: Regional

Beneficiaries and supporters

Beneficiary: The owners

Supporters: The Chamber of Agriculture has supported the farm by explaining and convincing the owners to apply for EU grants in order to co-finance new ideas (see Funding section). Also, the *Association Foie Gras* (a Gersois NGO) has helped the farm with technical advice and training. As a producers association, the primary mission of this NGO is the qualitative and quantitative promotion of foie gras from Gers. The 400 farmer-members of the Association have a common goal: to demonstrate their savoir-faire in foie gras production, to guarantee that the processing method is authentic and healthy, and, finally, welcome the consumer in a friendly manner. A Consumer Quality Charter has been established, so that each producer meets his commitments.

Finance

Funding: The farm owners started their *chambres d'hôtes* in 1989 without any subsidies. However, the Molas family has received several Regional and EU Funding grants in the past few years:

- In 2003, they renovated an old house on their property and transformed it into a *gîte*. The Conseil Général gave them a 10,000 EUR grant (total amount of the renovation: 140,000 EUR). The objective 2 Fund also financed the swimming pool (6,596 EUR).
- In 2005, the Molas family received an EU grant to modernise and renovate the "*salle de gavage*". The global amount was roughly 33,000 EUR including a 10,000 EUR grant ERDF (European fund for regional development, objective 2 "modernisation/diversification" measure).
- In 2006, they received grant money from the Conseil Régional through the "*Chambres de caractère*" label. The budget given this project was about 70,000 EUR, including a 32,000 EUR co-financing from the region.

The local LAG Pays d'Armagnac was not involved in the project.

Budget: From the sale of local products, the farm's annual turnover is about 250,000 EUR. The turnover from the gîte holiday rental is about 20,000 EUR per year and the turnover from the *chambres d'hôtes* is about 40,000 EUR.

Results

Direct results: The direct sale of artisanal farm products is the most important source of revenue. But grant funding has resulted in important diversification: adding value to their property through agri-tourism. The Molas family has added income to their annual turnover, by renovating their farm and welcoming tourists. Above all, the Ferme de Mounet as a case study demonstrates that it takes time and investment to develop a quality agricultural project that's self-sustaining and economically viable.

Main target: tourists

Wider benefits: The Ferme du Mounet is one of the many farms that are part of the "Bienvenue à la Ferme" ("Welcome to the Farm") network. This tourism initiative encourages tourists to visit the department, stopping at farms which welcome tourists with an "open door" policy. Tourists can taste local products, learn about life on the farm, enjoy home-cooked meals by reserving a "Table d'hôte" for lunch/dinner, or spend the night in gîtes or bed & breakfast-style accommodations. All together, these farms are an important part of the Gers rural economy.

2. Relevance of case study experiences for others

Problems: The Ferme du Mounet has not faced major problems. However, the owners think that the process for EU funding should be simpler and the grants easier to obtain. Publicity should be developed around the EU funding programme to ensure a wider use of it.

Transferability and mainstreaming potential: The project can be replicated successfully elsewhere depending on the local frameworks in place to support them (i.e. labels/trademarks certifying quality of local products, tourism networks). This diversification has been pursued by many Gersois farmers. In fact, there are more than 1,800 independent producers in the Gers department; more than 1,500 producers sell foie gras and duck/geese meat directly to consumers from their farms or at street markets. Some of these farms have diversified into the tourism sector as well.

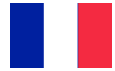
Innovation: This project is not innovative (many other projects exist locally) but it is a great example of integrated development, when farmers decide to control the whole production chain and marketing. These farmers are the best ambassadors of their products and their quality.

Institutional aspects: The maintenance of the region's economic activity requires a change in the agricultural sector. The Regional Policy Council takes into account the evolution of the Common Agricultural Policy. For the period 2007-2013, one target of the regional Council is to sustain the production and transformation of quality products: within this framework of modernisation the work tools for farm management will be continued as well as in agribusiness.

In 2007-2013, the Pays d'Armagnac will also benefit from Leader. Its new strategy is called ECOTERRA: "Environment and territorial competitiveness". Two of its priorities are to structure sustainable tourism through concerted action and the development of local resources and to "valoriser le terroir" by boosting the quality of agricultural products. However, facing too much demand and too many projects to finance, the LAG has decided to "close" the measure 311 from its strategy. Beneficiaries will deposit their application directly to the Regional Directorate of Agriculture. The owners of the Ferme du Mounet are not even familiar with the LAG (and have received no funding from Leader).

Social aspects: The Molas family employs four seasonal workers from September to April to work on the transformation process.

Environmental aspects: The Molas family takes care of the environment, bearing in mind their ecological footprint. But they cannot transform their production into an organic farm; the gavage (feeding of ducks to create foie gras) is not considered a biological process and therefore farms involved in foie gras production cannot have organic certification.



Sustainability: This project was already self-sufficient before EU and/or regional funding. However, the grants the farm received have definitely had a positive impact on its economic development. After 20 years, the competitiveness of this farm is exceptional, thanks to the EU funding.

Lessons to pass on: The farm's success is due to a lot of work, the trust gained from the banks and the Institution providing European grants. The Molas family's goals have been: retaining the ownership of their activities and keeping their independence from other economic stakeholders (like the cooperatives or banks).