

ESTONIA

Technical assistance

Location

Tallinn

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Measure

M20 – Technical assistance

Funding (EUR)

RDP contr. 56 200

Project duration

2015 – 2018

Project promoter

Ministry of Rural Affairs

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Estonian farms open their doors to guests, who can experience daily life on a farm or a rural business, buy local products and learn about living and working in rural areas.

Summary

Open Farm Day is a major event that allows city dwellers to visit and learn about how food is produced and how it is to live in a rural area. After consultation with farmers, the Estonian Ministry of Rural Affairs decided to support the organisation of an Open Farm Day in Estonia on an annual basis.



Every year, farms and other rural businesses open themselves up for visitors; technical assistance funding is used to support the event. The funding is used for the preparation and distribution of promotional material, dissemination and communication activities, the organisation of feedback seminars, etc. Other actors are also involved. For example, LAGs act as local coordinators and agricultural associations organise transportation for visitors to and from the farms.

Results

The average number of visitors per farm is 400 people.

The number of participants has been increasing over the years:

- 2015: 148 farms participated and hosted more than 45 000 visitors.
- 2016: 234 farms participated and hosted more than 83 000 visitors.
- 2017: 280 farms participated and hosted more than 121 000 visitors.
- 2018: 296 farms participated and hosted more than 163 000 visitors.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ Open Farm Day enables many small producers to find new clients. There is so much acceptance of this event that many Estonian producers say that Open Farm Day is the best rural initiative and rural image campaign supported by the State.

Context

Open Farms Days are organised all over the world to bring city people to the countryside and to show them how food is produced. For example, Open Days have been organised in Australia, Finland, Great Britain, Canada, Portugal and the USA. In autumn 2013, the Estonian Ministry of Rural Affairs held a consultation with different agricultural producers about how they could better promote their contribution to society. The farmers proposed to open their doors and welcome city people onto their farms for a first-hand experience. Hence, the idea of organising an annual Open Farm Day in Estonia started through cooperation between the Ministry of Rural Affairs, the Rural Economy Research Centre (Rural Network) and farmers in Järva county.

It should be noted that the original idea arose from a study tour to Åland in 2012, which inspired two Estonian LAGs to organise such an event in their respective regions. Thus, an initial Open Farm Day was held back in 2012 in Järva county.

Objectives

The objective of this initiative is to raise awareness of people living in urban centres as to what rural life is really about. Such an event is aimed at helping to improve people's understanding of how their food is produced and appreciation for healthy local food, agriculture and living in rural areas.

Activities

During Open Farm Day each year, big and small farms welcome visitors to taste and buy products, see and touch farm animals, drive and watch demonstrations of agricultural machinery, participate in workshops, hear stories or simply enjoy the weather and a beautiful day in the countryside. In addition to farming activities, visitors can also see a circus, watch theatre, come close to exotic birds and animals or join in handicraft activities. Open Day is not limited to agricultural farms but also involves hobby farms, craft beer and cider producers, as well as artists and handicraft makers based in rural areas.

A big media campaign is carried out every year that includes broadcasting promotional videos about participating farms on television and social media, radio commercials, a social media campaign, paper cards and posters, webpage announcements, and general content marketing. Technical assistance finances these communication and preparation activities, as well as the provision of materials and information to farm staff before, during and after Open Farm Day. After the event, feedback seminars are organised where everybody can express their opinion and feelings about what worked well and what could be done better next time.

The Ministry of Rural Affairs is responsible for communication and dissemination activities (e.g. television and radio promotion, a social media campaign, press articles etc.). The Rural Network acts as the contact for farms, covers registration and the distribution of informational material. Many LEADER LAGs act as coordinators in their areas, communicating with local farms and organising common marketing actions. Agricultural umbrella organisations organise the transportation for visitors by booking coaches with guides that transport visitors from Tallinn to the farms.

Main results

The average number of visitors per farm is 400 people. Most of the farms have support teams to assist on the day, as needed.

The number of participants, both farms and visitors, has been steadily increasing every year:

- 2015: 148 farms and over 45 000 visitors.
- 2016: 234 farms and over 83 000 visitors.
- 2017: 280 farms and over 121 000 visitors.
- 2018: 296 farms and over 163 000 visitors.

Key lessons

Open Farm Day is a great opportunity for many small producers to find new clients. There is so much enthusiasm for this event that many Estonian producers say that Open Farm Day is the best rural initiative and rural image campaign supported by the State.

Additional sources of information

www.facebook.com/avatudtalud/