

FRANCE

Agri-food chain integration and quality

Location

Causses du Quercy

Programming period

2014 - 2020

Priority

P3 – Food chain and risk management

Measure

M4 – Investments in physical assets

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 54 318
EAFRD 11 515
National/regional 10 212
Private 32 591

Project duration

2016 – 2017

Project promoter

GAEC Esparcetou

Contact

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Website

n/a

A young female farmer used RDP support to set up a traditional backing oven and start selling organic bread in the local area.

Summary

RDP support was used by a young female entrepreneur to build a traditional bakery house on her farm. The new bakery sells organic bread to the local community, offering them a quality product and an opportunity for social interaction at the bakery premises.



Results

The production of the bakery has now reached a weekly volume of 140 kg, of which 30 kg goes to nearby school canteens.

Every Friday, the bakery house is open for direct selling, serving on average 30 customers.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ When realising an investment it is vital to have a sufficient cash flow while waiting for the grant, as it comes in the form of reimbursement of expenditure. The managing authority in charge of checking the accuracy of expenses took more than six months in this instance to send the clearance form to the paying agency.
- ❑ Quality control of organic wheat production can be challenging, especially without support and advice.

Context

The regional RDP of Midi-Pyrénées, acknowledges the structural characteristics of the agricultural sector of the region, which is distinct for its great diversity and quality. In addition, national guidelines encourage farmers to rethink their practices, as do new consumer expectations. It is therefore necessary to invest in new tools and methods, and to support investments for better economic, ecological and social performance.

The Esparcetou farm is located in the 'Causse du Quercy' Regional Nature Park, Occitanie region of southwest France. The farm is a mixed crop and stock farming holding, with 280 sheep and 257 ha of fields, moors and forest. It also grows wheat for its own consumption.

In 2013, the farmer's daughter followed a vocational training course to learn how to make organic bread and started to develop her business idea in order to set up as a young farmer. Between 2014 and 2016, she created her customers' network, selling directly around 70 kg of organic bread per week, while using a friend's bake house.

Objectives

The long-term idea was to create the conditions for the smooth succession of the agricultural holding while creating added value on the farm. The specific objectives were to:

- Increase the added value of farm products and develop a new market; and
- Improve the quality of products and working conditions.

Activities

The EAFRD grant served to pay for the services of a craftsman who specialises in building traditional bread ovens. The baking chamber of such ovens are constructed without masonry, using only terracotta and clay bricks. The work was quite challenging because of the large size of the oven (5 m² of baking surface, requiring 16 m³ of sand to mould the oven's shape). In addition, small equipment such as storing shelves and food processing machinery were required.

The rest of the building, located next to the beneficiary's house, was mainly built by the farmer with ecological material (straw plastered with clay), except for the electricity and plumbing works that required professional certification.

The baker house is a vast square room containing all the necessary baking equipment. The entrance allows for storage space and direct selling. The wood storage is at the back of the baker house, and has direct access to the oven. In the summer time, the terrace provides a comfortable space to host customers.

Farmers cooperating with the beneficiary were already cultivating wheat and selling wood. Now the wheat is also used for Justine's baking needs, and some of the timber logged on the farm property is used to heat the oven.

In addition, the beneficiary signed a five-year contract scheme for organic farming.



Main results

The baker house was finished in October 2017.

Justine Rossi, the baker, has now reached a weekly volume of 140 kg, of which 30 kg goes to nearby school canteens.

She works 30 hours/week, including two baking sessions that start at 5 am. She delivers the bread herself by car to various selling points: a community café in Caniac, an employees' group in Labastide-Murat, and a school kitchen in Figeac. She also delivers some pre-ordered bread to nearby farms and during the summer time, she has a stand at the local marketplace of Livernon.

Every Friday, the baker house is open for direct selling from 4 pm to 7 pm, hosting on average of 30 customers, thus creating an opportunity for the local community to meet. In this isolated rural area where houses are relatively far from each other, people are eager to 'go to bread' (*aller au pain*). At the Caniac community café, it has become a regular weekly occasion for meeting up. The Friday delivery has become more than a shopping trip; it is a moment of solidarity and exchange where social bonds are strengthened.

Key lessons

- The main challenge was to keep sufficient cash flow while waiting for the grant, as it comes in the form of a reimbursement of expenditure. The managing authority in charge of checking the accuracy of expenses, took more than six months in this instance to send the clearance form to the paying agency.
- On the operational side, a positive surprise is the obvious direct impact of the beneficiary's well being:
 - she is less tired because the bakery is next door to the farm, and she only has to walk a few steps early in the morning. This proximity reduces fatigue and creates less pollution as she does not need to take the car anymore.
- Setting up as a young baker can eventually create some rivalry with the nearby traditional artisan bakers.
- Quality control of organic wheat production can be challenging, especially without support and advice.