

SLOVENIA

Entry for skilled/younger farmers

Location

Šmarje pri Jelšah

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P2 – Competitiveness

Measure

M6 – Farm & business
development

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 161 000

EAFRD 33 750

National/Regional 11 250

Private 116 000

Project duration

2016 – 2018

Project promoter

Matic Vizjak, Vizjak Farm

Contact

info@kmetija-vizjak.si

Website

<http://kmetija-vizjak.si>

An ambitious entrepreneur used business start-up aid for young farmers in order to modernise his farm and create a series of innovative products.

Summary

Matic Vizjak is a young farmer who took over the family farm in 2016. Prior to this he travelled and worked in other countries. Support from the Slovenian Rural Development Programme (RDP) was used to acquire a honeycomb dispenser, increase the number of hives, purchase a machine for the processing of cream honey, set up the farm's website, install a mulcher, construct a greenhouse and set up an irrigation system.



RDP support has also been used to set up a new apiary with the ability to perform apitherapy.

Results

The farm started with 16 beehives and increased this number to 65. The honey produced was used to create a series of innovative cream honey-based products.

The brand recognition and sales of the farm's chilli based products have been rising from year to year. The products are available in over 60 retail chains, restaurants and independent retailers around Slovenia.

The farm also developed the first spicy wine in the world (both rosé and white). Today, the price of this wine is EUR 49/litre. In 2017 - 4 000 bottles of white and 1 000 of rosé were sold – a total of 3 000 litres. In 2018, the farm produced 4 500 litres. Sales are expected to double in 2019.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ No matter what their size, all farms can be innovative, if given the right support.

Context

Matic Vizjak is a young farmer who took over his farm in 2016. Prior to this he travelled and worked in other countries. He had always loved being outdoors, and as his father Silvo kept bees and produced wholemeal flour, he joined him to help in the family business. That year the yield of chillies was very good and the family could not eat all them. They decided to use the excess crop to create their first sauces, and this proved a great success.

They also tried new ideas to add value to the honey. They developed cream honey, and added goji berries, ginger, cinnamon and chocolate. The response from consumers was phenomenal. For this reason, Matic made the bold decision to stop looking for a job abroad as he had planned and take over the farm.

Since the farm is very small, they hoped to add value to their basic agricultural products. Matic's aim when developing a new product is to do something no one has ever done before and to create the highest possible margin.

Objectives

To develop innovative products and develop the farm's brand.

To make a living off a mere two hectare farm.

Activities

Support from the Slovenian Rural Development Programme was used to acquire a honeycomb dispenser, increase the number of hives, purchase a machine for the processing of cream honey, set up the farm's website, install a mulcher, construct a greenhouse and set up an irrigation system. RDP support has also been used to set up a new apiary with the ability to perform apitherapy.

The farm's activities now include beekeeping (innovative honey products, apitourism); the cultivation and processing of chillies (chilli sauce, salsas, brandies and jams); milling products (gluten-free wholemeal flour); wine (the first official spicy wine in the world); organising the largest spicy food festival in Slovenia. In 2017 Matic was recognised as the most innovative young farmer in Slovenia by the Slovenian Rural Youth Association.

Main results

The farm increased its number of beehives from 16 to 65. The honey produced was used to create a series of innovative cream honey based products with a modern

design and add value to them thanks to additives that are beneficial for the immune system (which they named 'Melissé'). The products include cream honey with cinnamon and pollen; real cocoa; bourbon vanilla; chilli peppers; ginger; goji berries; mint and lemon balm; spruce tips. Cream honey is a natural honey made with a special stirring process. The result is a finely crystallised honey that can easily be spread.

Ten chilli pepper products (sauces) have been created under the increasingly recognised brand 'Čili Frik'. Most of the ingredients are home-grown. Chilli peppers are combined with fruit, smoked pepper (which is prepared on the farm) and various spices. The chillies are cultivated in a greenhouse which has 800–1 000 plants and over 20 assorted varieties from around the world. The recognisability and sales of the brand have been rising from year to year. Now they are sold and served in over 60 retail chains, restaurants and independent retailers around Slovenia. Their target is to sell at 100 locations and become the largest manufacturer of chilli sauces in Slovenia. They have recently renovated and modernised their production line, which means that they can manufacture many more products within a shorter period.



© Matic Vizjak

The farm developed the first spicy wine in the world in two types – rosé and white. Chilli wine is a unique combination of top vine varieties and cellaring following old methods with a touch of fresh spicy chilli. The wine's flavour is complex, slightly spicy and mature. The recipe is protected by intellectual property rights. The chilli wine was first presented in May 2016 at the Wine and Chocolate Festival in Podčetrtek, where it immediately drew media attention. Approximately 450 bottles were sold in the first (2016). Expectations for 2017 were higher; 4 000 bottles of white and 1 000 of rosé were prepared – a total of 3 000 litres; in 2018, the farm produced 4 500 litres. The wine is actively promoted abroad, and the target for 2019 is to double its sales.

The farm also grows cereals, i.e. spelt, buckwheat, white corn, wheat and soya. Organic certification has been obtained for their production. Organic flours are produced both with gluten and gluten-free.

Matic and his father successfully raised the market value of basic products by between three and ten times in three years.

Matic Vizjak is also the founder and president of Društvo ljubiteljev čilija Slovenije, and the organiser of the largest spicy food festival in Slovenia, which was visited by around 17 000 people in four years. The festival hosts 36 stalls with spicy food. The purpose of the festival is to raise awareness and make spicy food popular in the country.

Finally, the project created two new jobs on the farm (for Matic and his father).

The farm's awards include:

- Gold and silver medals for spicy wine in the USA (Great American International Wine competition 2017)
- Silver medal for spicy wine in the USA (Fingerlakes International Wine competition 2017)

(International Wine competition 2017)

Since winning the Innovative Young Farmer 2017 award, Matic Vizjak has become one of the loudest promoters of agriculture in Slovenia. He regularly gives lectures at primary and secondary schools, encouraging young people to become farmers. He also gives lectures at associations, events and business conferences as a best practice example and a motivator, stating that many innovations may be created from scratch with the right approach and a positive mindset, leading to success.

Key lessons

According to Matic: *“If we continue to speak only about our farms, we will not change people's mindset. We need to dig deeper and stimulate young people so that they can succeed even on small farms measuring a mere two hectares. I know that this is a weird number in the European context but this is the reality in Slovenia. Such farmers must be given hope and shown that they can succeed if their aims are ambitious enough and if they believe in them.”*



Additional sources of information

www.chilli-wine.com/en/

<https://chillino.eu/>