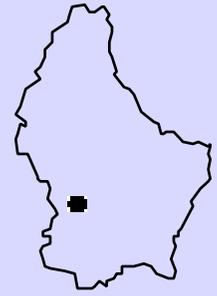


HAUTE-SÛRE (Luxembourg)

“Téi vum Séi”: a step by step education in agricultural diversification



The action

Introduction of the cultivation of aromatic and medicinal plants in an area corresponding to the Haute-Sûre Nature Reserve organised around an artificial lake. The reluctance of the authorities, farmers and the population in the face of a “small project” has gradually been overcome. The farmers, in particular, feared that an action of this type would involve a return to manual farm-work. Mechanising the harvesting and processing procedures of herbal tea plants has been the first step towards consolidating the initiative. In 1998, the “Téi vum Séi” (Herbal Tea of the Lake) label covered a range of 23 products and strengthened the image of the Haute-Sûre. The operation is already a success because in the same year, the Téi vum Séi association only managed to meet 40% of demand.

Key elements

- > Creation of a range of new quality agricultural products in an area where conventional farming is the norm.
- > Gradual approach of modifying agricultural methods to the requirements of nature conservation and promoting the image of a Nature Reserve.
- > Creation in a small village of a “Conservatory of Medicinal Plants”, with an educational mission, attracting tourists and schoolchildren alike.
- > Demonstrative effect concerning similar projects in the region: producers are starting to become aware of the possibilities open to them through niche activities and “tailor-made” products.

Context

Agricultural diversification implies a change in the long term, especially when methods of intensive farming are well-established in an area. Farmers used to anonymous markets of mass agricultural production need to accept this change and properly understand the advantages and risks of direct production and marketing. Gearing agricultural activity towards quality products is a challenge that the Haute-Sûre Nature Reserve must accept in order to strengthen its image, while taking into account the interests and requirements of farmers. Cultivating aromatic herbs appears to be an opportunity because of the emergence of new demands and quality requirements on the part of consumers.

Starting point

The idea of diversifying local production by introducing the cultivation and processing of aromatic herbs came about in 1991 when the business plan for the LEADER I Community Initiative was being drawn up. The document provided for a feasibility study to be carried out concerning this outlet. The study was to be carried out by the local action group (LAG) itself by means of a series of visits to other LEADER areas (particularly the Canary Islands and to France) and contacts with technicians and organic companies in Germany and Austria. The idea was supported by the Haute-Sûre Nature Reserve, in search of the development of quality products to assert its image.

During the period of gathering information, actions were carried out to inform the population and producers. In the beginning, it proved very difficult to convince farmers of the

importance of the project. Nevertheless, the LAG managed to convince eight farmers to provide 20 areas for an initial experiment. An association of producers was created.

Implementation

Five years were needed to convince the farmers, as well as the authorities, of the project’s viability. At present, three hectares are cultivated (including 0.5 hectares for wild plants, e.g. mulberry-leaves). In 1998, the association had 16 members.

In 1993, an abandoned farmhouse was rented out at a token rate for a five-year period. This renovated building enabled the production line (drying, packaging and storing herbal teas and spices) to be centralised and encouraged the producers, by way of the demonstrative effect of the structure, to be more productive. A system of technical assistance (on the type of seeds to use, treating crops, etc.) was organised by the association with the support of the Nature Reserve.

The problem of mechanisation existed from the start. Indeed, it was out of the question for the producers to work manually. Sophisticated machinery is thus currently used, for example for harvesting camomile petals (machinery purchased in the Czech Republic). Furthermore, 30°C drying systems were introduced to preserve the plants’ essential oils.

The activity was carried on from May to September. In 1997, a tonne of herbs was processed. In terms of value added, one hectare of herbs corresponds to 40 hectares of cereals. With seven different plants for the herbal teas and nine for

the spices, Téli vum Séi offers a range of 23 products: five types of herbal teas in sachets, eight types of herbal teas loose packed and 10 different spices.

Once the LEADER I project was consolidated, a garden of medicinal plants and condiments, the "Kraidergaart", was created by the Téli vum Séi association in partnership with the municipality of Winseler in the context of LEADER II. A new association was formed in 1996 to manage the development of the botanical aspects of the Kraidergaart. In the face of the success of Téli vum Séi, the project was supported by various public institutions (in particular the Waterways and Forestry Commission, the Ministry of Agriculture's Rural Development Service, etc.). Over an area of approximately 2 500 m², 300 different species have been planted and organised by subject: condiments, astrological, aromatic, aquatic, medicinal plants, etc. Once the project is completed, 600 species will be represented in this "Conservatory of Medicinal Plants". Open to the public from July to September, the Kraidergaart received 2 000 visitors in 1997. There is also a point of sale for visitors to purchase Téli vum Séi products.

Budget and sources of funding

The entire Téli vum Séi LEADER I project cost ECU 85 300, ECU 34 500 of which was covered by the European Union (EAGGF), ECU 21 300 by the Luxembourg Government and the rest (ECU 29 500) by private contributions.

The Conservatory of Medicinal Plants has been financed under LEADER II (total cost: ECU 33 900; European contribution: ECU 7 500; Luxembourg Government: ECU 14 900; private funds: ECU 11 500).

Innovative elements for the area

The area's image

The Téli vum Séi label symbolises nature and health.

The Kraidergaart / Conservatory of Medicinal Plants is helping to strengthen the image of an area where the natural environment is an essential resource. A handbook devoted to medicinal plants has been published: it presents 757 plants (with their organic name translated into five languages), classified by genus and function.

Interactive software on the plants has also been developed. It can be consulted by visitors to the Kraidergaart.

Small promotional cards have been printed. They are placed on tables in Luxembourg restaurants where Téli vum Séi products are available.

The Téli vum Séi range also enjoys considerable media coverage thanks to the different projects and activities of the Haute-Sûre Nature Reserve.

Activities and employment

All Téli vum Séi activities are carried out by members of the association, including distribution (each month, a different member takes it in turn to be the coordinator). One salaried position is to be created to help the members of the association, who continually see the number of hours they devote to the operation increase. The added value generated by Téli vum Séi in 1997 represented the equivalent of three average Luxembourg family incomes.

Certain members of the association have begun to develop cosmetic products and liqueurs flavoured with local plants.

Competitiveness and market access

Half of the marketing is carried out by the middleman for a supermarket chain and the other half in small shops, shops selling organic products, restaurants, as well as in two hospitals and several pharmacies. In 1998, the association only managed to meet 40% of demand.

THE HAUTE-SÛRE

A large part of the Redange-Wiltz LEADER area (335 km²; 13 406 inhabitants) corresponds to the Haute-Sûre Nature Reserve (199 km²), organised around the Esch-sur-Sûre dam built at the end of the 1950s. Providing drinking water to more than two-thirds of the population of Luxembourg, the artificial lake created by the dam is the great attraction of the area, but runs a certain risk of pollution due to the sometimes over-intensive farming practices and the pressures of summer tourism. In this mountainous area in the north of Luxembourg, where 11% of the working population is dependent on agriculture, the main challenge for development is to reconcile the exploitation of local agricultural resources, tourism and protecting the quality of the natural environment and landscape.

Contact

Fons Jacques
Bureau LEADER Eschdorf,
23, an der Gaass
L-9150 Eschdorf
Tel: +352 89 95 68 (69)
Fax: +352 89 95 67
E-mail: leader2e@education.lu