

GARFAGNANA (Tuscan y, Italy)

Promoting the area through regional products



The action

The promotion of three local specific products (einkorn (wheat), honey and chestnuts) has led to the promotion at national and international level of this relatively isolated Tuscan area, with a considerable impact on tourism. Financed mostly by LEADER I and II programmes, the initiative has enabled local entrepreneurs to form a group. The production of einkorn, honey and chestnuts is currently being organised through robust networks, bringing together farmers and traders. The quality dimension is another essential component of the initiative, as demonstrated by the indication of origin label obtained by Garfagnana's einkorn and the quality labels for meat and milk produce.

The key elements

- > Creation of networks bringing together local economic players – farmers and traders, notably – who did not have a tradition of co-operation.
- > The lever role of local agri-food products in the area's economic and tourist promotion.
- > A means through which emigrants from the region can promote their home area.
- > A long-term quality initiative "spreading" to other products.

The context

Although Garfagnana's mountainous relief has for a long time isolated this micro-region from the rest of Italy, it has also protected it from deforestation. Garfagnana (Greater Forest) deserves its name because 75% of the area's total surface is still covered by forest, i.e. 86 624 ha, of which 4 544 ha is made up of chestnut groves. The small amount of land (6 500 ha) devoted to farming and the high level of cultivated land fragmentation make full-time agricultural activity difficult. Multi-activity is the rule, and increasing the revenue derived from agriculture requires a qualitative and non-orthodox approach to markets.

As for chestnuts, which quantitatively constitute the main local production covering a surface area of 4 544 ha, the LAG and the producers concerned concentrated their efforts on the dried product (nearly half of the total production), as chestnut flour offers good opportunities as a gastronomic and baking ingredient.

The three products required the same type of intervention in three dimensions: preservation through the promotion of an ancient form of production in need of updating, giving the products a "regional image", and teaching people to buy and use the products.

Starting point

Created in 1991 under LEADER I, the Garfagnana Ambiente e Sviluppo (Garfagnana Environment and Development) LAG identified three local products with good promotional prospects, i.e. einkorn (wheat), honey and chestnuts.

Attention was firstly concentrated on einkorn. This ancient cereal, which typically grows in mountainous areas, bears all the hallmarks of a product that needs to be protected and marketed. Until then produced only in Garfagnana, einkorn was marketed individually by the producers who only produced it in small quantities and had, therefore, very little impact on the negotiations with distributors.

With regard to honey, studies indicate that the consumer had a tendency to choose the product on visual and taste criteria. It also became evident that the product needed to be given a strong regional character.

Implementation

This intervention was firstly based on the revival of a local association, the "Consorzio Garfagnana Produce", which initially exclusively brought together processors and traders. However, organising the production of the three products through networks also required integrating farmers in the initiative, something that the traders were not initially enthusiastic about. Intensive facilitation work by the LAG and organisation of various promotional activities finally overcame the traders' initial reluctance and opened the Consorzio to farmers.

LEADER funds covered the costs of the equipment to be used in processing einkorn and chestnut flour. There was firstly an experimental action, which quickly convinced the Comunità Montana (a technico-administrative grouping of several mountain districts), responsible for the implementation of an Objective 5b programme, to join the project.

In 1994, Comunità Montana applied for an indication of origin for Garfagnana's einkorn crop, and received it from the European Commission in July 1996.

At the end of the LEADER I programme in 1995, Garfagnana's products started gaining visibility. They still had to be promoted on international markets. In this regard, the LAG's idea was to conduct activities permitting the promotion of the products under one umbrella label during trade fairs and exhibitions, notably in European regions where the population of Garfagnana emigrants is high. The LAG approached the Italian Institute of External Commerce, which accepted to supply a stand free of charge at fairs and exhibitions. The first concrete experience took place in Düsseldorf, Germany, in the framework of an exhibition devoted to regional products targeting wholesalers and tour operators.

Six national shows, three international shows and a local show were held in 1995 and 1996. One of the objectives was to reinforce the Consorzio's local visibility. Also, several actions were conducted with a view to attracting a larger number of visitors to Garfagnana and to prolonging the tourist season. Three local shows were held in 1998. In 1999, six local and two international events were held. Six local and two international events have been planned for 2000.

Following the revival and expansion of the Consorzio Garfagnana Produce, two sectoral consortia were created in 1998: the Consorzio del Farro della Garfagnana, which brings together Garfagnana's einkorn producers, and the Consorzio Castanicoltori, which brings together chestnut producers. Each association has around thirty members.

The budget and financing sources

Financed essentially within the LEADER framework, the total investment for the action amounts to EUR 723 000, 50% (EUR 361 500) of which comes from private sources.

LEADER I covered the promotional aspect in 1994-1996 (EUR 118 800) as well as the equipment for the processing centre (EUR 77 500); LEADER II covered promotion in 1997-2000, in accordance with the following breakdown: promotion of the area (EUR 206 500), contacts with restaurant owners (EUR 134 300) and participation in fairs and exhibitions (EUR 185 900). Local contributions by the Mountain Communities and districts supplemented the investment.

Elements of innovation for the area

Involvement of the local population and social cohesion

By mobilising all the local public and private players, the action has had a considerable effect on structural cohesion. It has raised the local authorities' awareness with regard to the promotion of the area, and the awareness private entrepreneurs with regard to the benefits of collective work.

Image of the area

The local population has become aware of the potential of its own area, and Garfagnana has achieved recognition in the outside world. Foreign tourists make up 80% of the visitors to the area. The action has made it possible to attract part of Tuscany's tourist flows to Garfagnana.

Activities and employment

Significant development of rural tourism has been achieved, with the number of enterprises in the sector increasing from 12 in 1995 to 40 in 1999. The initiative has had a considerable impact and encouraged other players to invest in rural tourism and in the promotion of local products.

Competitiveness and access to markets

Acquisition of an indication of origin certificate for Garfagnana's einkorn, a request for an indication of origin certificate for chestnut flour and a quality label for milk and meat all point to the spreading of quality activity among local entrepreneurs. Now einkorn, honey and chestnut products such as flour, desserts and liquors, are sold on national and European markets, whereas other products such as canned foods, meat, cheese, etc. are sold on the regional markets. The level of quality production, now between 1 000 and 1 200 quintals a year for einkorn and more than 4 000 quintals a year for chestnut flour - obtained through the use of semi-traditional techniques - highlight the economic and competitive dimension of the products concerned.

GARFAGNANA

Garfagnana (Greater Forest) is part of the province of Lucca and forms a valley with a surface area of 534 km² situated between the Tosco-Emiliano Apennines and the Apuana Alps. The rugged terrain explains the centuries-old isolation of this area, in spite of its proximity to the highly developed basins of the coastal plain that stretch from Livorno to Spezia. 63% of the area is situated at an altitude of more than 600 m, with summits reaching nearly 2 000 m. The 32 000 (58 inhabitants/km²) Garfagnana population is spread over 25 districts.

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