

GERMANY

Resilient futures

Location

Jossgrund

Programming period

2014 – 2020

Priority

P6 – Social inclusion & local development

Measure

M19 – LEADER/CLLD

Funding (EUR)

Total budget 137 000

RDP contr. 10 812

Private/own funds 26 632

Other 99 556

Project duration

2016 – 2020

Project promoter

LAG SPESSARTregional e.V.

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www.spessartregional.de/re-gio-dorf-laden/

The aim of the project was to secure a supply of quality regional products in shops in small villages in the SPESSART LEADER area, and by so doing to develop shops' regional products offer and enhance their long-term sustainability.

Summary

Village shops help to serve the needs of less mobile populations, such as senior citizens, and act as a meeting place for village communities. Selling agricultural products in the region in which they are produced saves CO₂ on transport and boosts acceptance and appreciation for domestic agriculture. However, many village shops in the SPESSART LEADER region are threatened by a lack of succession planning and decreasing demand for their existing product offer.



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The aim of the project was to secure a supply of quality regional products in shops in small villages in the SPESSART LEADER area, and by so doing to develop shops into quality retailers for regional products, thus increasing the local shops' appeal. Working with local marketing and trade experts, the LAG established a network for village shops and regional producers. Shopkeepers were introduced at meetings to regional producers and received professional advice on assortment selection, regional products, shelf design and how to arrange products. A joint order catalogue was created, and delivery routes were coordinated to save CO₂.

This project has strengthened participating village shops, thus enhanced their economic efficiency and sustainability. It has also successfully brought together groups that previously worked independently and less efficiently than they do now. The approach can be applied to other European regions, making rural areas resilient to current and future challenges through well organised local supply of regional agricultural products.

Results

Ten village shops and around 20 producers, butchers and bakeries are now part of the network. Shopkeepers have enhanced their regional product range and learned in-store promotion and product placement.

Village shop employees are now fully informed about each product and can advise customers accordingly.

A survey of customers, carried out in cooperation with Fulda University of Applied Sciences, showed that customers' trust in regional agriculture and locally processed products has grown as a result of the project.

The project demonstrated that a regional products range plays a key role in increasing sales in village shops and therefore strengthens their economic viability. As a result, around 23 full-time jobs in the village shops in the SPESSART region have been preserved.

Business succession for three (soon four) shops has been secured.

The shops and producers network got media coverage, for example in the Spessart tourism magazine, at the Taste Festival or at a "Village Shop Day", a new promotional event in the Spessart LEADER region.

Context

The SPESSART LEADER area includes more than 100 villages, some of which are very small, and is characterised by the Spessart forest, one of the largest contiguous forests in Germany. Although in recent decades shopping for daily provisions in the villages has declined, the SPESSART region still has about 15 village shops. However, many of these shops are at risk from demographic change and a corresponding decline in purchasing power. In addition, many people in the region commute to larger cities for work and do their shopping there. An attractive range of regional products did not previously exist across the village shops, which poorly networked with each other and with regional producers. Each shop communicated with producers independently and there was no common voice.

Objectives

For the village shops in the region to survive, it was necessary to make local shopping attractive and to increase local demand in a targeted manner. Therefore, a unique selling point was developed for local shops focused on offering an attractive range of regional products, combined with professional customer-oriented consultation. To achieve this, a network for village shops and local producers was established. The aim was to promote exchange between shopkeepers of advice and support. In addition, shopping locally would reduce CO₂ emissions and open up new business opportunities for local producers.

Activities

With the aim of expanding cooperation between the village shops and producers, the project of "Regio.Dorf.Laden – Dorfladen-Erzeuger-Netzwerk" was launched in 2016 and was renewed in 2018 until 2020.

As part of the project, Regio.Marketing GmbH, a Hessian network of marketing experts, and the LAG SPESSART together established a network between producers, processors and village shops.

After an initial information event, the project team, of the LAG and Regio.Marketing GmbH, together with a village shop consultant, visited each of the 15 village shops in the region and provided them with some initial advice, while six shops were selected as pilots. The Hanau-Gelnhausen-Schlüchtern Chamber of Commerce and Industry was a cooperation partner in this process.



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Based on an analysis of the shops and possible options, a working group of pilot shops and interested producers was established and it developed ideas for communication and the development of their product range.

The six pilot shops decided which regional products could best expand their offer, from fresh dairy and sausage products, oils, lentils or flaxseeds to bakery produced from local grains. In partnership with producers an order catalogue of regional products was created, from which the village shops can now order.

The shopkeepers also received advice in displaying goods on their premises. Through targeted advertising and labelling, customers know at first glance that they are buying a product from the region. In addition, the shopkeepers were trained in marketing, customer contact and shelf design. For example, they learned how to improve their range of bread rolls for early rising customers and how to price them correctly. Training on the sale of cheeses took place at the request of shopkeepers.

The network has developed a joint 'product of the month' which is collectively purchased by local shops, as producers made it clear that the supply of small quantities is not economically viable for them.

The network has also developed a simple digital tool for micro-logistics to plan transport routes for reducing CO₂ emissions and which will be implemented from 2021.

Main Results

Ten village shops and around 20 producers, butchers and bakeries are now part of the network.

Shopkeepers have enhanced their regional products range and learned in-store promotion and product placement, while village shop employees are now fully informed about each product and can advise customers accordingly.

A survey of customers, carried out in cooperation with Fulda University of Applied Sciences, showed that customers' trust in regional agriculture and locally processed products has grown.

The project demonstrated that a regional product range plays a key role in increasing sales in village shops and therefore strengthens their economic viability. As a result, around 23 full-time jobs in the village shops in the SPESART region have been preserved.

Business succession for three (soon four) shops has been secured.

The shop and producer network received media coverage, for example in the Spessart tourism magazine, at the Taste Festival or at a "Village Shop Day", a new promotional event in the LEADER region.

Key lessons

The project has shown that a regional products range plays a key role in increasing sales in village shops and therefore strengthens their economic viability, with the associated social and environmental benefits.

Networking has been a key success factor. Shops, processors and farmers, the LAG, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the municipalities and the Office for Rural Affairs and Tourism have joined their efforts to redevelop the local market in the area. Monthly meetings are organised with all partners where the LAG SPESART regional discusses current issues and collects ideas on how to develop the local supply chain.

There has been interest from other EU member states, and in November 2019, a 30-member delegation from Belgium, organised by the Flemish Farmers' Association, visited the region to learn about the project.

'We need the fantastic products of local producers to survive. Here in the store, customers get advice on every single product, they are allowed to sample, and they trust us that the goods are produced properly. Especially at a time when there is a great deal of uncertainty, we notice that customers are consciously coming to us. We live and breathe regionality and know our producers – you can tell that' - Simone Bienessek, shopkeeper from Wächtersbach



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Additional sources of information

n/a

* This project has been categorised under 'Resilient futures' by the nominating National Rural Network