

SAGITER project: A CASE STUDY

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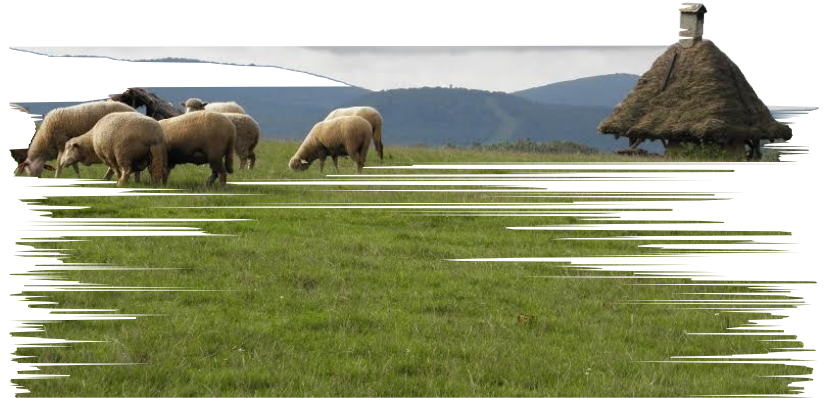
KACÁR FARM

Owner: Mr. István Lénárd, private farmer

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ABSTRACT

As the geographical features favour sustainable agriculture and modern trends in food production the number of self-sufficient farms and enterprises are growing steadily in the Eastern and Central European countries.

This tendency that has the aim to revive the traditional ways of food processing and bring back the methods of old times can help to preserve conventions and customs of a certain area or region and at the same time it can also represent the basis for the diverse food production in the future. However, sustainability has its own open questions and gives way for a lot of discussion, including topics like energy use, climate change, reasonable management of ecology, and the safety of food supply. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) promoted by the EU - together with the suggested reforms and the process of greening - serve exactly the above mentioned aims and objectives.

Knowledge and experience of traditional farming represent an essential part of agricultural sciences. It is crucial that students of Green Education and Training along with the young farmers of today gain a useful knowledge about it. In order to help the development of particular regions and do some further marketing for rural tourism, a lot of agricultural entrepreneurs run their business as educational farms by applying and promoting the traditional production of that certain area.

These farms today have become more and more attractive not only for students but also for the inhabitants of the neighbouring settlements and regions. Nowadays it is also a trend that city dwellers have become interested in ecology

and the environment and they want to learn more about the traditional and sustainable ways of food production.

BACKGROUND



Among the slopes and hills of the volcanic mountain range, Börzsöny and a few kilometres towards northwest from the small rural settlement Szokolya, the curious little farm of Mr. István Lénárd stretches out on approximately 20 hectares. The owner is devoted to sustainable agriculture and calls his activity „natural farming”. His motto is: „Let’s get back to nature!”

The Lénárds bought this land eighteen years ago. It has become the base and the foundation of the farm that they are running today. It is now the permanent habitation and dwelling place of the four-member family. Far from the noise of the nearby towns and villages, this territory covers a 6 km long fertile valley. The family mainly deals with husbandry making a good use of the pastures and grasslands in the area. The nearby forests play an important part in hunting, bee keeping, honey production and mushroom collection.

In this area and particularly in the little village of Szokolya traditional food production has always been practised. Modernisation and social changes of the past century were such that this way of life almost completely disappeared. However, traces of old-fashioned lifestyle still survived and Mr Lénárd, the owner of the Kacár Farm, took up the challenge to collect and revive them. On the basis of his research and findings he adapted the traditions and has set up his own well-organised and viable enterprise.

The farm deals with husbandry and growing crops based on traditional technologies. Old crafts such as weaving, basketwork, carving, planking, furnace building, pottery, grinding in windmills, traditional building construction, etc. are also there to be found on this self-sufficient farm of Mr. Lénárd and so they link the modern 21st century life to the one of the old generations.

Mr. Lénárd's knowledge is mainly based upon his own experiences. He himself has developed several of the methods and technologies he uses today on his farm. He has also obtained skills and expertise by learning from craftsmen and experts of older generations. He has planned and constructed all the buildings of his farm and he built them himself without any help using exclusively natural materials (mud, hay, wood, straw and loam). The farm includes stables and sheds for his animals, a forge and a number of other outhouses.

TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE CHALLENGE

Eighteen years ago the farm of Mr. Lénárd was founded entirely and exclusively for food production. The family did not have the slightest idea that apart from self-sufficiency they would be able to deal with tourism or anything else for that matter. They say that the only thing that they really wanted was to get away from the busy life of the city and run away from people. They aspired to run a self-sufficient and sustainable farm and get close to nature as much as it was possible. Therefore they constructed buildings on the land and bought animals. Soon after that the business started to boom.



The Lénárds did not take into consideration that city people have become interested in tradition, heritage, nature and sustainability. At the same time schools have started putting emphases on environmental protection and ecology in recent years. The education of young generation in this field has been turned into a process that aims at showing students how it is possible to live in harmony

with nature and to experience the environmentally friendly methods of production and the sustainable way of farming. It is important to make youngsters understand the renewable character of nature with all its respects and correlations towards people and towards the future of humanity. Simply by opening its doors and sharing the experiences, Kacár Farm has become a major factor of this educational process in the region of Northern Hungary.

First locals from the nearby villages got interested and they wanted to know more about the everyday life of the Kacár Farm. As time went by the popularity of the ranch grew bigger, the farm got a reputation and a name to itself and more and more visitors got attracted. Nowadays this little business has grown into a self-sustainable smallholding, a pedagogical farm and also a major touristic sight in the region. People coming to the farm have been constantly asking questions and making suggestions and that is how the touristic part of the business developed and the number of services offered by the owners grew steadily with time.

Very many secondary school pupils and also university students come to visit the farm. They would arrive in organised groups and they are interested in gaining knowledge on site. Visitors appreciate real experiences during the workshops and different activities, and they claim that it is *the* key of success of the Kacár Farm. Getting involved in traditional practices, building stables or just watching the old machines at work are truly great encounters for the 21st century city dwellers.

The real aim of knowledge transfer is to raise interest and initiate new thoughts and ideas. The interactive workshops make it possible for visitors to take the products of the farm into their own hands, feel the scents and flavours of the freshly baked bread, start up and use old machinery and equipment, see the way mud stables are erected. Guests get the chance to follow the whole process of food production and learn about the breeding of authentic animal species. On the basis of the obtained knowledge motivation will arise and in this way Kacár Farm has grown into an important source of know-hows and understanding of agricultural production and food processing.

TRANSFER OF KNOWLEDGE RESPONSE

Opening the farm to the public was not only a good idea from the transfer of knowledge point of view but it proved to have been a good decision for the development of the business as well. Actually, the owner himself admits that the soil is not of a very good quality so it is not possible to produce a significant amount of extra goods, fruit or crops. The family did not take up selling their products on the open market places of the region because it would have been way too tough and laborious and not very profitable. Instead of that they have set up an agro-touristic dimension for their enterprise, and made it possible for individual visitors and groups alike to stay on the farm, get involved and spend their free time there. In this way all family members have become engaged in

promoting the farm and selling its products and services with an added value to them.



Kacár Farm is very popular in the region and neighbouring settlements. Every day more and more people are getting acquainted with it. It has also come into the scope of national experts and even of European and international project leaders. Nowadays, if you want to get inside the ranch it is absolutely necessary to make an appointment for the visit.

Kacár Farm offers a lot of different programmes, services and workshops including traditional gastronomy, old arts and crafts, folk art and old-style way of food production. The owner believes that education at school is not effective enough. He claims that one should acquire knowledge and know-hows with the method of “learning-by-doing” because the only way to pick up the right skills is to work alongside elderly specialists and experts for a substantial period of time. Thus through experiencing the conception of environmental awareness and sustainability really comes to life and becomes a common feature of agriculture and food production in the future to come.

These days they have a very busy schedule. At weekends they regularly host groups. During the holidays they organise summer camps for school children. All year long they have lots of programmes to carry out: harvest festivals, family and business celebrations, school reunions, barn-parties, events of folk arts, traditional music and dancing, wine tastings, picnics, etc. All these events and services are very important for the family budget.

The wide range of different activities at the Kacár Farm represents a good opportunity for knowledge transfer as well as keeping the old traditions alive. The Lénárds are devoted to this issue; they want to preserve the heritage of the old generations by passing it to the children and to the young generations of the 21st

century. Their effort and aspiration has certainly paid off as the response from the society was clearly and utterly positive.

OUTCOMES AND CONCLUSIONS

The Kacár Farm was set up as a self-sufficient family business and has become a promoter of traditional farming and cultural heritage of the region and also of Hungary. The great choice of different programmes and activities – which would take you back in time to the roots and traditions of our nation – attracts a great number of visitors and boosts the business of the Lénard family.

The key to such a success is perhaps purely going back to the old traditions and also the wish of city people to get away and get back to the nature whenever it is possible. The farm is a good example of the diversification of rural activities and also a model for the sustainable and conscious way of using the ecological facilities of a particular territory or region. Its success story proves that it is possible to put the theory of agro ecological farming into practice.

The visit to the Kacár Farm was organised by trainers of an agricultural vocational college based in the neighbouring town of Vác. The event had to be arranged weeks before as the farm has a busy timetable. The group took a round trip through the farm. It was a guided tour lead by the owner himself, who was interviewed during and after the trip and records were made on tape, videos and photos. It was a special activity, a field trip within the topic of sustainability for the senior students who are currently attending the 5th and final year of our farming course (EQF level: 4).



Students were prepared and trained prior to the visit. They had to fill in a questionnaire on sustainability and agro ecology in order to make it possible for the trainer to see clearly what knowledge they had gained already, what were

their views and opinions about green economy, and what kind of experiences they had with authentic animal husbandry and application of traditional agricultural methods. On the basis of the results of this survey the practical tasks of the field trip were discussed and consigned as well as the possible questions of the interview were defined and formulated.

One of the main objectives of the visit was framed as raising awareness among the students (future farmers) for professional dedication and skills, and especially for the issues of self-sufficiency and sustainable farming. Among a number of other arts and crafts, students were shown the process of building a traditional furnace. The experience and the communication skills of the owner, Mr Lénárd, his stories and anecdotes helped to maintain the interest of the students and contributed considerably to the success of knowledge transfer.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The experiences of the visit and also the interview made our students re-think and consider all what they had seen, heard and learnt, and they got motivated to talk about their own ideas, share and discuss them with their peers and teachers. Some of the following questions came out:

What are the chances and the prospects of small family-sized agro-touristic companies in this region in the upcoming years? Will these farms be able to survive and under what conditions? Will the back-to-the-nature approach prove to be the right direction in rural development and food production of the future?

How can a business like this stay competitive on the touristic market and create a base of returning customers or attract a large number of one-time visitors? How can they use the different modern communication channels to promote and advertise their business and services?

Would a steady cooperation with agricultural VET institutions (practical training, regular visits, common events, exhibitions and agro-shows, etc.) contribute to further success of the business and at the same time how could a collaboration like that help the quality of education and increase the practicality of the training?

What kind of other measures should be applied to make a back-to-nature farm to flourish even more? Would it be a good idea to strengthen the cooperation and

communication between similar farms of a region or area? E.g. cooperation of pedagogical farms? How bigger scale applications could be taken advantage of in order to develop the community and the region, and also help to establish a new ecological approach to the manufacturing of local food products or confirm the development of sustainable food production?

NOTES FOR TUTORS

It is of a vital importance from the knowledge transfer point of view that the farmer has good communication skills and is professionally well-prepared. The other key element in this process is maintaining the level of motivation, empathy and interest of the students.

Prior to the visit it is advisable to carry out some research work, collect data and do analysis either individually or in groups. It could be very useful to urge our students to talk to their grandparents, elderly relatives or acquaintances and look at old photos. This way they would get information about family traditions and stories on food production provided they come from a rural environment. Questionnaires can also help the gathering of agro ecological knowledge before actually stepping out and visit such a farm.

These trips have to be organised in a way to give students the opportunity of real practical activities and interactive work (e.g. buildings of mud and clay, grinding with a windmill). A personal experience would take them closer to the process and give them a deeper understanding of all that they have learnt.