Title of the Story: Logarska dolina - Solčavsko: A taste of home

Destination Name: Logarska dolina - Solčavsko

Country: Slovenia

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Nomination Category: (Please check the boxes that indicate the focus of your story)

☒ Localizing the destination supply chain
☐ Decarbonizing the destination supply chain
☐ Culture & Communities
☐ Environment & Climate
☐ Nature & Ecotourism
☐ Tourism Reset & Recovery

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DESCRIBE YOUR GOOD PRACTICE STORY

Address each aspect of your good practice story in the different sections being specific including relevant quantitative and qualitative information.

Issues faced
What was the problem/issue solved with the good practice? Click to add your text

Logarska dolina - Solčavsko destination is a local, rural, border community surrounded by the Karavanke and Kamnik Savinja Alps. It has 530 permanent residents. Agriculture in the Solčava region has always been an important economic activity in providing the local population with their required provisions. The development of tourism means agriculture has become an increasingly important activity meeting the requirements of tourists, as production on all Solčava farms is either organic or produced in a nature-friendly way. This provides the possibility that with tourism-related products of a higher quality grade greater value of basic raw materials is achieved. The supply chains are shorter and the carbon footprint is lower.

The most common basic production activity on 52 farms in the region is the grazing of their animals for meat, milk production for domestic processing, and sheep breeding. Methods of production are still largely sustainable and organic. Nowadays, complementary activities on farms such as tourism and processing of home-grown food are gaining ground. Farms focused on tourism market their own produce directly to their guests or to other tourism providers for their guests.

However, this has not always been the case. Surplus home-grown food that was excess requirements was a cheap raw material for other more distant food establishments. This resulted in the loss of valuable raw materials grown through the hard work and care of owners of Solčava farms on steep mountain meadows and pastures.

Yes, a taste of home. It is something that we internalize as a memory of the closeness and warmth of our home and those we love. It is something that may have been lost and that we are looking for, something whereby mankind is still in genuine contact with nature. That is what it is like here in Logarska dolina - Solčavsko region...

These problems were detected and have been solved through good practice:

1. **Market surpluses of milk and meat emerged as a result of the restructuring of agricultural production that took place after 1990.** Prior to that, almost all Solčava farms were connected through the organized purchase of milk. With the abolition of the so-called ‘milk route’, market surpluses of milk emerged. That led to the problem of how to consume market surpluses of milk and meat while preserving the tradition of production, rural jobs and the image of the cultural landscape.
2. **Raw materials were thus leaving the local area through various sales channels without added value, as the farms did not have registered their supplementary processing activities.** This led to decreased earnings potential of the rural population. Those involved in agricultural activities, especially country women, had the knowledge they had acquired through various professional education courses run by professional organizations, such as the Association of Peasant Women, the Association of Tourist Farms and the local Agricultural Advisory Service. This meant that there was a remarkable, and as yet untapped wealth of knowledge among these women. Due to weak economic power, there was also a lack of funds for investments in the modernization of processing and the registration of activities.

3. **Demand for domestic products exceeded the supply from the registered processing on small farms.** Solčava is an attractive tourist area that is annually visited by well over 100,000 daily visitors and 15,000 residential guests. While staying here guests also spend money on purchases of local products. The range of products, as well as the quantities available, was small. We faced the challenge of how to accelerate investment in the modernization of small processing plants and expand the range of various domestic products.

4. **In the past, the wool of the indigenous Jezersko-Solčava sheep was mostly treated as waste.** This raw material represented one of the biggest challenges and potentials for processing it into products for use by the locals as well as tourist souvenirs. The indigenous Jezersko-Solčava sheep, which in addition to meat also produces quality wool has developed over the centuries in the area. Today, sheep are reared on 15 farms and there is a total of about 400 pedigree stock. The amount of wool is not large (estimated at 800kg per year) but in the past it most often ended up as a worthless waste. We faced the challenge of how to turn ‘almost worthless’ raw material into a ‘valued’ raw material.

5. **Connecting producers and a joint approach to product marketing.** The previously fragmented offer posed a problem for consumers as the products could only be purchased at one common point of sale in the Rinka Centre. During the time of the coronavirus pandemic the Rinka Centre was no longer able to act as a common marketplace due to the implementation of preventative measures. The demand for local products by the local tourism industry and visitors also decreased during that time. However, the interest from the local population increased. The problem of how or rather where to sell these products arose. The members of the Farmwomen’s Association took it as a challenge and solved it with the help of the local community.

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**Methods, steps and tools applied**
How was the good practice implemented? Click to add your text

1. **Processing of market surpluses of milk and meat**: The new situation that resulted due to the loss of regular daily sales of milk required quick adaptation and reorientation to new channels of production. With the help of the local Agricultural Advisory Service, the farms switched to grazing animals and extensive production of milk. In many cases this also meant changing the breed of cattle and switching to extensive grazing of animals of a smaller body size and lesser yield of milk and meat. The breeding of small cattle also gained in its importance.

2. **Registration of supplementary activities**: Following the adoption of relevant legislation at the state level, as well as the opportunity to apply for public tenders to obtain financial resources for investments, a period of accelerated work began towards registering supplementary activities on farms. Most farms focused on tourism, while some also focused on the processing of home-grown raw materials. Countrywomen gained specific knowledge through education which empowered them and encouraged them to undertake new activities that brought added value to the basic agricultural production. In addition to applications for public tenders at the state level, the municipality of Solčava also supported smaller investments from its annual municipal tenders.

3. **Expanding the selection of domestic products**: A strategy was developed for marketing local products. A range of home-made products that could be produced and marketed locally as useful local products or souvenirs was created. The production of products was encouraged through various incentives, including the submission of project ideas to public tenders. A good example of a successful project is the Leader-funded ‘Traditional - Natural - Creative’ project. With the help of the project’s financial resources activities were carried out on improving the quality of traditional local dairy and sheep products. Special mention should be made of the large expansion of the woolen products range. The project titled ‘New Challenges of Slovenian Small Cattle’ which involved cooperation between local action groups also contributed to these results. Many individuals and members of associations were involved in these projects and those involved in supplementary activities also expanded their range of products, especially through their own knowledge and innovations.

4. **Solving the challenge of how to increase the use and value of wool**: Through good practice it has been possible to change the mindset of sheep breeders that wool is also a useful and valued raw material. Consumers’ interest in wool, which is a natural and healthy material, has been aroused. We have proven that through various processing activities a wide variety of products can be made that are both useful for home use as well as attractive for tourists. The initiative to find a new approach and to solve the problem of waste wool originated from a group of rural women and has grown into a successful and recognizable initiative locally. This example of good practice was also transferred to other environments in Slovenia, where they faced similar problems with waste wool. We also popularized the use of wool through the traditional ‘Wool Festival’ which takes place every year in September. The festival has an international character.
5. **Connecting producers and a joint approach to marketing:** The initiative for a common marketplace was created during the time of the coronavirus pandemic by members of the Farmwomen’s Association who already have their processing activities registered. The most important steps that were necessary for the realization of the project were connecting the necessary players in the efforts to increase self-sufficiency and local consumption and the development of new products in the destination.

**Key success factors**

What helped you tackle the issues? Click to add your text

The key success factor was primarily the engagement of individuals with their ideas and initiatives. They were the first to make a step forward and set an example to others. Non-governmental organizations and associations played an extremely important role in which active members carried out the role of connecting and organizing education. The support of professional organizations in the field of promoting rural development and the local community was equally important by providing supporting infrastructure and subsidies for investment on farms.

An important success factor of our story was the specific knowledge acquired by producers during numerous professional training courses within the implementation of the programs of different associations and professional organizations in the field of agriculture. The quality of their products was checked by producers at the tests organized by professional institutions such as the Chamber of Agriculture and Forestry, Agricultural Institutions... (an example of which was the evaluation of food products in Ptuj where many producers received quality awards). All this strengthened their self-confidence and their courageous decision to register their activities.

In our story, we particularly highlight the following key players involved in solving the problems and examples of good practice that have significantly contributed to the development of local products:

- **The non-governmental organization Association of Farmwomen, Aktiv Solčava,** which has always had a connecting role, organized training sessions and connected a group of producers of local products for joint sale at the vending machine in the center of the village Solčava. The members of the association took an organized approach to creating a model for the sale of various products from a large number of producers, which proved to be an excellent means of connective practice.

- **A group of women affiliated to the Bicka Association of Solčava Felters,** who made an important contribution to the development of the processing of wool of the indigenous Jezersko-Solčava breed of sheep. Through their initiative, the members managed to change the mentality that wool is a waste product and instead develop new innovative products from it, including the ‘Solčava jacket’. This is a fine example of ‘downside up’ principal of development.
- **The example of the Ramšak Organic Tourist Farm**: their efforts and persistence were an example to other Solčava farms to persevere on this path and develop their activities. Through their membership of the Association of Farmwomen, Aktiv Solčava, they also continually contributed their ideas and encouraged networking for a joint approach to marketing and product sales.

- **The example of the Matk Organic Farm (Ark farm)**, which is focused on tourism and the processing of cow’s and goat’s milk. They developed a new product that is a speciality on the Slovenian market – goat's milk ice cream. Their experience in vending machine sales has contributed to the creation of a successful model for the joint sale of products in vending machines.

- **The Municipality of Solčava Local Community** which enabled the co-financing of investments in the development of manufacturing and tourism by publishing municipal tenders, as well as by investing in the vending machine, thus supporting the joint sales initiative.

- **The potential of young farmers** who have recognized the opportunities offered by rural development and have entered the local market competitively with new approaches and technologies.

  **To conclude:** one of the key success factors was the integration of the non-governmental, economic and public sectors.

**Lessons learned**

While implementing the Good Practice what challenges were faced, and how were they overcome? Click to add your text

The challenges that needed to be overcome have been present since the beginning of the restructuring of basic agricultural production. During the period of the ‘milk route’, most farms raised a grey-brown breed of cattle which has a relatively good milk yield. After this period, the introduction of other breeds of cattle of a smaller size suitable for grazing on steep, hilly terrain began. Less than a third of breeders decided to breed the Slovenian indigenous breed of “Cika cattle”. The animals are more suitable for all year-round grazing and give satisfactory amounts of milk and meat. At the same time, the rearing of the indigenous Jezersko-Solčava sheep increased and consequently the amount of wool increased to.

The Farms that opted for investments for their home processing faced a lack of financial resources for investments. By applying for tenders and by implementing planned projects investments were made easier.

Food manufacturers faced the challenge of how to market and sell their products. The first common marketplace was in the newly built Solčava centre for sustainable development – the Rinka Centre. Following the implementation of measures to curb the coronavirus pandemic the demand for local products for tourist consumption decreased while the demand from by residents for local products...
increased. The Association of Farmwomen came up with the idea of selling local products made by various manufacturers in a joint vending machine.

We considered how to connect local producers, and how to implement the vending machine supply logistics and how to share the earnings among individual producers depending on the effectiveness of sales of their products. The Association of Farmwomen played a key connecting and encouraging role in organizing sales. The municipality of Solčava financed the purchase, installation, labelling and promotion of the vending machine. The experience of the Matk farm contributed to an easier transition to the new way of marketing and communicating with each other in the form of IT support and monthly sales management assistance for all sales participants.

Another of the challenges was how to connect tourism providers with producers of basic food and producers of products that are in short supply in the local area while still retaining the character of a nearby local market due to their proximity. The majority of business contacts with tourism providers were established by producers themselves. In the field of the supply of vegetables some tourism providers have connected with producers of basic vegetables in the Upper Savinja Valley also with the help of the Agricultural Advisory Service.

The challenges in the field of wool processing were enormous. We were faced with a new technique of processing wool into a variety of products based on the process of making felt. This required a lot of personal engagement by individual members, learning about new techniques and efforts to promote these products. Our efforts have borne fruits as our products have become recognizable under the Bicka brand. We have spread our knowledge to other areas of Slovenia. Wool has become a prized raw material. The felting technique requires a lot of space and it was difficult to find a suitable location. We started work in the old primary school, which was intended for demolition then, and later on at two other locations.

**Results, achievements and recognitions**

*What were the qualitative and quantitative results of the good practice? Has it received any rewards?*

Click to add your text

The results we have achieved are reflected in all areas of work and life. We attach great importance to the awareness of the population and self-sufficiency, which remains our challenge in the future as well. All these efforts lead to goals that have a positive impact on our environment, especially in the light of climate change.

**Results:**

1. In the area of Logarska dolina - Solčavsko destination, as many as 22 farms out of the total of 52 farms currently supplement their activity by focusing on tourism. This represents 42% of all farms. Of these farms 19 farms offer accommodation, while three are excursion farms. Being tourism-orientated is the best marketplace for the direct sale of home-grown food and the best example of a short supply chain.
2. Many farms have registered their supplementary activities for the processing of home-grown raw materials. Eight farms have registered their processing of meat into dried meat products, seven farms have registered their processing of milk, six farms have registered their bakery products, five farms deal in the production of plants, while one farm produces spirits. The remaining registered activities are various service activities, such as the extraction of renewable energy sources and wood processing, all of which provide support for local consumption while also being a short supply chain.

3. Good home-made food, produced and processed in the place of origin from quality home-made raw materials is a ‘Taste of home’. This is something that in today’s state of burnout due to our lifestyle means: ‘that something more’ which we seek there where mankind is still closely connected with nature, something that is the food for the body and soul.

4. The destination features three tourist providers with an eco-label recognised by the Green Scheme of Slovenian Tourism. Hotel Plesnik is the recipient of the Green Globe logo, the Eco House na Razpotju guesthouse is the recipient of the Ecolabel logo, while the Ramšak Organic Tourist Farm is the recipient of the Green Key logo. They are all important purchasers of local products and meet demanding environmental standards.

5. Significant developments have taken place in the field of wool processing. Wool has become a prized raw material and is no longer a by-product of sheep farming. It is estimated that the entire 800kg of wool produced by sheep breeders in the area is processed. We have also implemented this knowledge in many other areas in Slovenia. We encouraged entrepreneurship. Today, one local entrepreneur is independently engaged in wool processing and wool processing as a supplementary activity has been registered on one farm. The members of the Bicka Association of Solčava Felters process wool as amateurs at home and in joint workshops. Local wool products have become valued and recognizable pieces of clothing among the local population (felt products: hats, vests, slippers, even shoes and a range of knitted products including the new ‘Solčava jacket’).

New ways of wool processing have also stimulated the development of a new tourist event – a traditional wool festival where every year the greatest achievements in wool processing and local cuisine are featured, as well as the traditional Ex filcore event, dedicated to artistic creation from wool.

‘A taste of home’ should remain in the memory and hearts of those who wish to visit Logarska dolina - Solčavsko region. Welcome!
The coexistence between nature and man has shaped a landscape where visitors experience the authenticity of the area, with a touch of archaism and nostalgia for something not yet lost.

The authenticity of ‘A taste of home’ in Logarska dolina - Solčavsko region is what the land has provided us with and what has been produced and processed through the diligent work of our smallholders.

References:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlaWIlzpDmM
‘Agriculture is our sustainable source’ – a recording of the 2020 municipal holiday celebrations of the municipality of Solčava, in which the main focus of the event was the importance of home-grown food and self sufficiency with products from Solčava farms

http://www.solcavskapanoramska-cesta.si/si/
The Solčava Panoramic Road – tourist providers along the Solčava Panoramic Road offer visitors home produced food

https://www.bicka.si/
The Bicka Association of Solčava Felters, a group of women who joined together and founded the association changing the general attitude that wool is not a waste product; today wool is a useful and prized raw material

https://www.tk-ramsak.com/si/
The Ramšak Organic Farm – a recipient of the Green Key Certificate for organic production of milk

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dWw2JtWZ1Ok
The Matk Tourist Farm, an organic and Ark Farm – the production of goat's milk and other dairy products

https://www.plesnik.si/
Hotel Plesnik, Green Globe Certificate – the hotel offers their guests locally produced food

https://www.logarska-narazpotju.si/
Eco House na Razpotju guesthouse, Ecolabel Certificate, the hotel offers their guests locally produced food