

ADDING VALUE THROUGH FOOD AND TOURISM

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The Saxon villages area of southern Transylvania is a High Nature Value farmed landscape, where rich biodiversity co-exists alongside traditional agriculture. Continued traditional management is required to maintain the rich mosaic of habitats: thus conservation of grassland and other biodiversity must be combined with the provision of adequate incomes and community infrastructure. Fundația ADEPT is implementing various measures to reconcile these issues, with special emphasis on the flower-rich grasslands which occupy a central position in plant conservation, food production and eco-tourism in the Saxon Villages. ADEPT cooperates closely with the Romanian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and Ministry of Environment and Forests.

ADEPT is focusing on an 85.000 ha area, Târnava Mare, a semi-natural landscape of remarkable biodiversity. It is an area of small-scale farmers. It has recently been designated a Natura 2000 site both under the Birds Directive and the Habitats Directive. But this designation alone will not conserve the area for its biodiversity and broader public goods benefits. ADEPT's vision is to achieve biodiversity conservation at a landscape scale not primarily by creating protected areas, but by working with small-scale farmers to create incentives to conserve the semi-natural landscapes they have created. Measures include:

1: Agri-environment payments. ADEPT consultancy has been effective in raising participation by small farmers in agri-environment schemes, both SAPARD 3.3 pilot measure, and PNDR Measure 214. ADEPT also contributed to the design of these measures. But in addition to agri-environment measures, we need markets for local products.

2: Dairy sector. Small-scale dairy production is key to the survival of the HNV landscapes of Romania. Over 50% of registered producers in the Târnava Mare area have fewer than 5 cows, over 75% have under 10 cows. The small-scale farmers, who have created these landscapes, depend mainly on dairy cow or ewe products for their income. There is a collapse in the market for milk and therefore a collapse in cow numbers. Cow numbers have fallen by 25% in the last year alone. ADEPT is working with farmers to improve hygiene at milking time, and at the village milk collection points. The Delne milk collection point, in Harghita, an innovative programme, was a model for this.

3. Adding value to agricultural products

In 2005 ADEPT began a processing and marketing programme in the Târnava Mare area. This shows how branded local products can evolve with effective marketing. ADEPT developed consistent quality and hygiene standards and a local brand, and helped producers get to farmers markets as well as offering them the opportunity to sell jams and pickles in the tourist information centre. Producers now travel to farmers markets without assistance from ADEPT. This generated €43,661 extra income in 2009 for 25 producers (jam and cheese), in direct sales by producers at farmers markets and through the Saschiz Tourist Information Centre established by ADEPT in cooperation with Saschiz Town Hall. The producers are now commercially sustainable, and ADEPT is encouraging more farmers and farmers wives to join the informal producer group, the Târnava Mare Producers Association. It is worth noting that the sale of these products in farmers markets was threatened by inconsistent interpretation of

EU hygiene regulations, especially those relating to authorisation of premises for small-scale production and of points of sale. ADEPT and NGO partners WWF and Milvus worked with the state food hygiene agency ANSVSA to clarify that a flexible approach should be applied to direct sales by small-scale producers in marginal areas. This message was published in a booklet in 2007.

4: Development of agro-tourism in Târnava Mare area

ADEPT has also promoted diversification in the Târnava Mare area, resulting in growth in the number of visitors, according to records taken by the Tourist Information Centre. The tourists are attracted by a varied offer of cultural and nature-watching pursuits developed by the NGO: guest houses, meeting producers, guided nature walks, etc. This resulted in €62,000 extra income in 2009 for 30 guest house owners and service providers. ADEPT achieved this growth of numbers by carrying out a number of very practical agro-tourism training courses.