Fundatia ADEPT Transilvania

Funding proposal – micro-cheese processing unit for Saxon Villages, Romania

Summary
The following is a proposal for a micro-scale cheese processing facility in the Saxon Villages area of Transylvania, which will give added value to milk linked to high biodiversity landscapes, and so support the survival of these landscapes and of the farming communities that live within them and manage them. The village selected as the most suitable for this pilot project is Viscri, which already has a national reputation for tourism and food products (Viscri jams and preserves). Viscri milk production is average 1,400 litres of milk per day, of which 700 litres/day is collected by the Viscri Association, from 54 members with 180 cows. The proposed equipment, sufficient for 3,200 litres of milk/day to allow for expansion, would be installed in a converted local building, and so would be consistent with the built heritage of the village and have local support. Approximate budget USD170,000. This project will also bring additional social and economic benefits: improved trust and cooperation at community level; improved appreciation of the value of their natural landscapes for the prosperity and quality of life of local communities.

Background
The Târnava Mare area of Transylvania is an EU protected area (Natura 2000 site), owing to its remarkable biodiversity. The area is home to many species and habitats that are threatened in Europe. This unique European landscape has been preserved by the traditional farming methods carried out by the small-scale farming communities that live within it. The villages are architecturally interesting – several are UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

The village of Viscri in its remarkable high biodiversity farmed landscape offers a model for sustainable, nature-friendly food production and prosperous small-scale farming communities. The proposed milk processing unit would be housed in the disused farm buildings on the far right of the photograph.

However, the survival of the landscape and its communities is threatened. The area has suffered from lack of investment, lack of markets for products, falling milk prices and falling animal
numbers. The future of such areas is not to be found in trying to prevent change and maintaining traditional farming practices. The future can be assured by joining tradition to innovation, so that the important aspects of the landscape are preserved and village prosperity promoted by linking nature-rich landscapes to added-value products and commercial viability through smart product development and marketing.

This is the basis of the proposal of Fundatia ADEPT Transilvania; village-scale development where landscape/natural heritage, architecture/built heritage, and commercial reward/village prosperity can be linked and promoted together.

The village of Viscri has been selected as the most promising site for the processing unit. The village is remote, and surrounded by pastures and meadows with exceptional diversity of wild flowers and herbs, which have a strong effect on milk quality and also present a strong marketing image for products linked with the grasslands, including milk and meat.

Haymeadows and cattle grazing in Viscri. The exceptional diversity of wild flowers and herbs in the grazing pastures and hay meadows have a strong link to milk quality and also present a strong marketing image for products linked with the grasslands, including milk and meat.

Milk is the main cash product of Viscri and other villages in the area. The village of Viscri has about 350 cows, of which 180 supply milk to the Viscri Grazing Association. Most households are directly involved in dairy farming. In the summer the smaller farmers bring about 700 litres/milk/day to the village Milk Collection Point, which Fundatia ADEPT installed for the village. The high quality assured by the renovated milk collection point has already achieved a 50% increase in milk price, which is bringing extra income to the village and halting the loss of cows which was undermining the balance of the landscape management. Haymeadows are the key to biodiversity in the area: and each cow = 1 hectare of haymeadow maintained by the villagers.

Marketing concept

High quality local products, backed up by smart marketing and achieving added value, would create long term economic support for the area’s high nature value farmed landscapes and the communities that maintain them. A micro-scale processing unit would add value to milk products, directly linked to the landscape, and so secure a better price for village milk and improve village prosperity.

The Viscri milk collection point would supply the milk to the processing unit. If the processing unit is able to offer a higher milk price, as planned as a result of value added by cheese-making, most of the other villagers would supply the collection point. Thus we should plan for processing on 1500 l./milk/day (peak summer production) with spare capacity to allow for expansion of number of cows, and possible purchasing milk from neighbouring villages, in response to demand.
The processing unit would initially make fresh cheeses, which can be used in local hotels, guesthouses, and sold in local markets. Also, a mature cheese will be developed which will uniquely from the village. These cheeses will help give the village community a secure future.

**Branding ideas**

- We have developed a local Tarnava Mare brand. Could be used, although the image is more linked to crafts than to food/flower-rich grasslands.

- We have developed a ‘High Nature Value’ brand, intended as an umbrella brand for wider use in Romanian traditional farmed landscapes.

- Each of the Saxon villages had a brand for the animals of the village, which they also used to mark products such as bags of grain.

- The brand for Viscri is shown here. Could these historic brands be used for village cheeses?

**Plant and products**

**Capacity:** the plant will require a minimum of 300 litres/day, and be able to process a maximum of 1,600 litres/day with one 8-hour shift, or 3,200 litres/day with two 8-hour shifts per day. **Full technical details of the plant to be supplied are available on request.**

**Products:** fresh milk, yoghurt, fresh cheese such as telemea, mature cheese. For mature cheese we will need (in addition to fresh cheese equipment) cheese press and molds, maturation chamber with controlled moisture/temperature, cellar for further maturing.

**Product Description**

- Drinking yoghurts, yoghurts with or without fruit flavour- 300 litres / shift (there may be one or two shifts per day, according to milk supply);
- Fresh or flavoured milk - 300 litres / shift;
- Mature cheese - 50 kg / shift (= 500 litres of milk)
The building

The processing unit will be installed in existing, disused farm buildings on the edge of Viscri village. These building are privately owned: the owners are keen to support the enterprise and will offer good rental terms.

Budget

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Thus, funding required is approximately USD170,000.