

Training project on sustainable and innovative rural entrepreneurship in Jämtland, Sweden

SUMMARY

The 'Good Business through Strong Partnerships' initiative, led by the Torsta AB organisation, worked to boost rural economies in Sweden's Jämtland region **by promoting sustainable and profitable business practices**. It provided support to rural entrepreneurs with **tailored business coaching, workshops, and pilot tests** focused on sustainable food production.

The initiative addressed local challenges such as disrupted food supply chains by **encouraging circular resource use and collaboration** among regional actors. It resulted in improved business strategies, validation of new business concepts, and stronger regional cooperation.



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CONTEXT

Recent global crises, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and inflation, have disrupted food supply chains in Sweden's Jämtland county, a region which is already fighting low population density (2.7 people per km²) and harsh northern climate. Such challenges have resulted in increased costs for producers.

The 'Good Business through Strong Partnerships' training project addressed these by enhancing local food security and supporting resource efficiency.

OBJECTIVES

The initiative aimed to strengthen rural businesses and enhance sustainable practices by:

- > fostering innovation and capacity building among rural entrepreneurs through mentorship, training, and business development strategies;
- > strengthening the resilience and sustainability of the local food supply chain by encouraging circular practices and resource efficiency;
- > promoting the use of agricultural by-products, such as whey and manure, to reduce waste and create additional revenue streams;
- > encouraging collaboration among rural actors to build a stronger, self-sufficient local economy.

Themes: Entrepreneurship, employment, forestry, agriculture and food, value chains

Country: Sweden

Organisations:

- > Torsta AB – Knowledge Centre for the Green Industries, private organisation
- > Mid Sweden University, academic/research institution
- > Eldrimner – National Resource Centre for the Development of Artisan Food Production, public authority
- > Matfiskodlarna, NGO
- > LRF, NGO

Start & end date: 01/2023- 12/2024

Budget: EUR 303 330

Funding sources: Jämtland county administrative board (regional authority), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD)

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The project kicked off with a marketing campaign to attract participants and continued with a series of **tailored business coaching** sessions to support rural entrepreneurs in goal setting and capacity building for sustainable growth. This mentoring helped participants identify areas for **business improvement and sustainability practices**.

Simultaneously, the project organised **workshops and seminars** on sustainable business models, circular practices, and food value chain efficiency. These events targeted both established and aspiring rural businesses, offering practical strategies for sustainable operations.

The project also recorded **interviews with entrepreneurs** who had successfully realised their ideas, providing valuable insights for other rural businesses. Additionally, **explanatory videos** were created to demonstrate how to profit from by-products and apply small-scale industrial symbiosis for increased efficiency.

A **hackathon** allowed entrepreneurs to present their by-products and receive expert input on potential business opportunities and innovative uses for these materials.

The initiative conducted **pilot tests to explore innovative food production techniques**, such as freeze-drying, allowing rural businesses to experiment with new methods for product diversification.



RESULTS

- > Engaged over **70 rural businesses** in inspiration-driven events and **29 rural entrepreneurs** in coaching-style conversations to explore business strategies;
- > Provided **12 businesses** with in-depth coaching, resulting in new tools and operational improvements;
- > Tested and validated **13 business ideas** through structured experimentation, including sustainable and innovative rural enterprises dealing with whey-based wood glaze, mushroom cultivation, and freeze-dried broth;
- > Strengthened collaboration among rural stakeholders, enhancing the resilience of the regional economy.



SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > The success of this project lies in **adapting efforts to the specific conditions of rural areas** where the concept of 'innovation' can often be difficult to grasp. The initiative has effectively brought people together, demonstrating how rural innovation can be applied in practice, making it more relevant and beneficial to local businesses.
- > Tailored coaching provided by experienced **mentors with a deep understanding of rural realities and a wide professional network** has allowed entrepreneurs to receive hands-on guidance suited to their unique business contexts.
- > The support from the Jämtland County Administrative Board was instrumental in **aligning the project's efforts with regional priorities**. The Board's knowledge of local needs and challenges ensured the project remained relevant and impactful.
- > The project is **highly replicable** in other regions due to its focus on local needs, strengthening networks, and promoting circular practices. It is both financially and environmentally sustainable, as it encourages green practices, reduces waste, and generates long-term value.
- > Key lessons learnt: align sustainability initiatives with local conditions; forge strong and reliable partnerships; and encourage rural businesses to adopt innovative and sustainable practices through trust and practical demonstrations.



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