PACT

RURAL Regional innovation hub boosts sustainable food supply and resilience in rural Slovenia



Resilient

SUMMARY

The 'Green Point' Living Lab is a regional innovation hub in Pomurje, Slovenia, which strengthens local food systems through blockchain-based traceability, circular economy pilots to reduce waste, and low-emission logistics to reduce the carbon footprint of deliveries. Coordinated by the NGO Murska Sobota, the initiative connects farmers, SMEs, researchers, and local communities to co-create sustainable food solutions improving food transparency, support innovation, and build resilience in Pomurje's rural economy.

Activities include smart delivery, surplus transformation, and hybrid sales models combining digital tools with local retail. Over 100 farmers and producers were involved in the 2022–2025 period, and the model is now being promoted across Europe for replication.

CONTEXT

Green Point operates in Pomurje, a key agricultural region in northeastern Slovenia, located at the crossroads between Austria, Hungary, and Croatia. Known for its fertile land and strong food production sector, the region faces several structural challenges, including a high dependency on imports, fragmented supply chains, and economic pressure on small-scale producers.

The initiative responds by strengthening local food systems through a short supply chain that connects producers directly with consumers and public institutions.

OBJECTIVES

- > Improve the transparency and sustainability of local food supply chains by using blockchain technology;
- > Support local farmers and SMEs through circulareconomy approaches that reduce food waste and create added value;
- > Promote climate-friendly logistics by using smart tracking and electric vehicles;
- > Engage citizens, businesses, and public institutions in the co-creation of a resilient rural food system;
- Test and demonstrate scalable models for the digital and green transitions in rural communities.



Themes: research and innovation; access to services; smart and start-up villages; digital technologies; transport and mobility; climate; nature and environment; land use; bioeconomy and circular economy; agriculture and food; value chains.

Country: Slovenia

Organisations:

- Innovation Technology Cluster (ITC) Murska Sobota, NGO
- DIH AGRIFOOD, international rural network
- European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL), international network
- · University of Maribor, research institution
- Green Point, private business
- · Hudo Dobro, private business
- · Green Point Living Lab, association
- Demo farms, association

Start & end date: 11/2022 - 08/2027

Budget: EUR 1 000 000

Funding sources:

- Interreg Alpine Space programme (2021–2027) 'SmartCommUnity' project
- Interreg Central Europe programme (2021–2027) 'More than a village' project
- Interreg ADRION transnational programme (2021-2027) 'ADRURAL' project
- Horizon Europe programme (2021–2027) 'VERNE' project

Website: https://zelena-tocka.si/

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ACTIVITIES, KEY ACTORS, AND TIMELINE

The Green Point Living Lab was **launched in November 2022** under the coordination of Innovation Technology Cluster (ITC) Murska Sobota, in collaboration with local SMEs (Green Point, Hudo Dobro), the University of Maribor, and a network of farmers and citizens. The Lab became **fully operational in April 2023**, acting as a **regional innovation hub** for smart rural development.

The project team organised a series of **introductory workshops** for local farmers and producers, **demonstrating the use of blockchain technology** to improve transparency in food supply chains. By the end of 2023, five farmers were successfully onboarded into the blockchain-based traceability system, with an expansion target of at least 30 farmers by 2027.

Green Point is establishing **pilot collaborations** between demonstration farms and regional SMEs to **test circular economy models**. These pilots transform surplus agricultural produce into new products, such as fermented vegetables and dried fruit snacks, to minimise food waste and create added value for local businesses.

The Living Lab introduced a **smart electric delivery van**, equipped with GPS tracking and smart routing technology. This van was used to optimise local food deliveries to public institutions, such as schools and municipal kitchens, and the HORECA sector's customers across Pomurje, helping to reduce emissions from rural logistics.

To strengthen local market access, Green Point developed a **hybrid sales model** combining an online ordering platform with physical retail points, including direct-to-consumer deliveries and partnerships with village shops.

RESULTS

- Five producers have been integrated into the blockchain traceability system, ensuring full transparency from farm to consumer, based on records of origin, handling, and delivery data. Plans are in place to onboard at least 30 producers by the end of 2027.
- > Public institutions, including schools and municipal kitchens, along with HORECA sector in Pomurje, are now supplied via a combined **digital platform and physical retail network**, strengthening the link between local producers and consumers.
- > Pilot collaborations with regional SMEs and demo farms resulted in the transformation of surplus vegetables into new food products, reducing food waste and supporting circular business models.
- > The introduction of a smart electric delivery van has reduced the carbon footprint of rural logistics.
- > Over **100 local farmers and producers are actively engaged in the supply chain**, with continuous participation in educational and co-creation events organised through the Living Lab.
- > The Green Point hub has **reached hundreds of consumers** through online sales, local delivery, and retail partnerships with village shops, demonstrating the potential of hybrid rural supply models.
- > Green Point has been recognised as a Living Lab reference model for rural Slovenia and is featured in European cooperation projects like <u>SmartCommUnity</u> and <u>ADRURAL</u>, highlighting its replication potential in Alpine and Central European rural areas.

SUCCESS FACTORS/LESSONS LEARNT

- > The quadruple helix model, involving public, private, academic, and citizen partners, ensured strong local ownership and innovation relevance. Close collaboration with SMEs enabled practical circular economy pilots, reducing waste and creating economic value.
- > Co-creation through Living Lab formats fostered trust and adaptability among stakeholders, overcoming initial resistance to change.
- > The flexible, modular structure of the initiative allows for scalability and transferability to other rural regions with similar challenges.



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