

Case Study Booklet

for rural agri-food producers



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Foreword

This case study booklet has been developed as an output of the Erasmus+ funded “Digital Readiness for Agri-Food Entrepreneurship Training: Addressing the Digital Competence of VET Educators (DigiFE)” project. The main aim of the DigiFE project is to review and enhance vocational education and training in order to respond to the specific digital training needs of agri-food entrepreneurs in accordance with the digital competence framework. This project is led by the Atlantic Technological University in partnership with Macra na Feirme, Ireland, Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori Toscana (CIA), Italy, and The Polish Farm Advisory and Training Centre (PFA), Poland.

This case study booklet is a collation of case studies that highlight innovative strategies, best practices, and the various uses of digital technologies in agri-food entrepreneurship. Each of the case studies explores the unique approach taken by the involved agri-food businesses to develop and enhance their practices with digital technology. From small-scale farms to established brands, the information and experiences shared through this booklet offer other agri-food entrepreneurs a valuable insight into strategies, challenges, resolutions, and lessons that may accompany their entrepreneurial ventures. With this knowledge from this booklet, agri-food entrepreneurs will be more prepared for their own ventures, ultimately contributing to a more digitalised, innovative and resilient agri-food entrepreneurship sector.

Introduction

Nutshed was founded by sisters Evie and Eliza in 2013 as a shed-like stall located at Limericks Milk Market.



They serve sweet treats made of a mixture of dates, nuts, seeds, cacao, and Irish sea salt. They now supply cafes around Ireland with trays of their products and in 2018 they launched an award-winning single-origin peanut butter in shops across the country. The company is made up of a team of 8 people currently. They spend approximately 60 hours weekly in the company headquarters to freshly roast peanuts and prepare their produce. The resulting products are supplied to over 600 shops in Ireland and have just launched their sales in South Korea.

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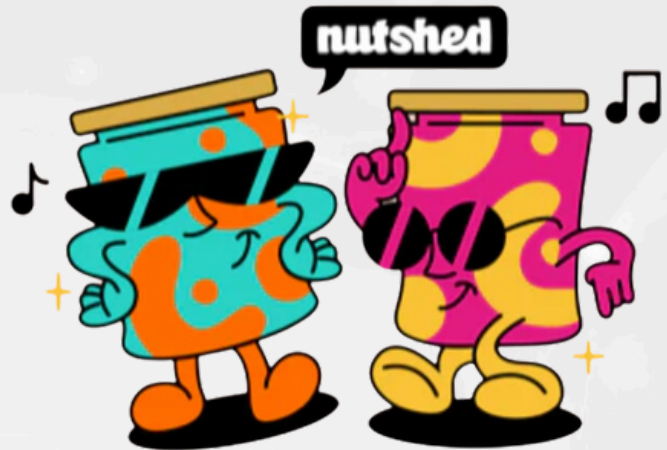


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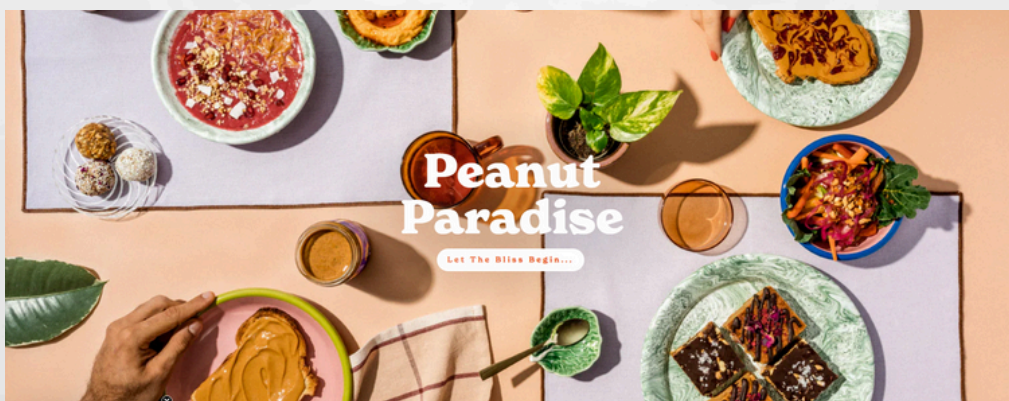


Digital Tools for Innovative Solutions

Soon after launching their peanut butter product and making it available in various flavours, the team at Nutshed decided to conduct a 'brand refresh'. This was a full re-brand of their business and included developing a new website and an e-commerce platform. Before this rebranding, the Nutshed team were focused on selling their products to independent stockists.



Doing this significantly helped the company to grow and expand. In 2021 they saw rapid growth in their business. This further grew when they developed new peanut butter flavours, expanding from their initial 2 flavours to 5, then to 6. All Nutshed products are produced in a kitchen facility in Nenagh, which makes the manufacturing process extremely hands-on. To keep up with the increasing demands for their products, the Nutshed team spent a year analysing the steps of their production process and streamlining a more efficient way to produce their peanut butter. This resulted in them installing a completely new production line creating a more controlled and less labourousome process for the production of their award-winning peanut butter.



Digital Strategies and Innovations

The Nutshed founders were raised in a food business environment and because of this, they understood the importance of relationships with Irish retailers. It is through developing and strengthening these relationships the Nutshed team have been able to establish their products on Irish shelves. As they originally began their business as a street stall, using social media has been their primary method for communicating with their customer base. Though they no longer have this market stall, it taught them the importance of connecting with the people who are interested in their products.



The Nutshed teams pride themselves in having always listened to their customer feedback and using this to change their market offerings, product labels and product packaging. When the Covid-19 pandemic hit, the company became focused on e-commerce and their online presence. Though their online sales increased over time, the general feedback from customers was that their website was difficult to navigate, placing an order was time-consuming, and that the overall user experience was poor. This feedback was considered when Nutshed underwent a full brand refresh. The new brand visuals incorporated bright colours and various shapes with the aim of standing out from other brands in the same market. Additionally, implementing digital elements such as QR codes on labels (which bring customers who scan them to a specific recipe on the Nutshed website) has helped the brand to strengthen the connection they have with their customers.



Obstacles Encountered

Throughout the Nutshed brand refresh, the team encountered various obstacles and challenges, which is to be expected with such a large endeavour. The biggest two issues were cost and time constraints. The team wanted to work with an external design agency, who would offer a fresh perspective on their company, and so partnered with one in Columbia. Though this agency did offer a new perspective on the Nutshed brand, the large time differences between locations caused complications. The entire brand refresh lasted 6-8 months and throughout this period the teams' design taste and preferences changed. This took place during a time when the market was quickly and constantly changing, and responding to these changes was a continuous challenge. In order to adequately respond to these changes, the Nutshed team specifically dedicated time to their brand development and digital marketing strategy while also focusing on improving their manufacturing process to retain sales and keep the business stable throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Evaluation of Results

The Nutshed founders are confident that their brand refresh was essential and enables their business to continue growing. Upscaling their production facility has allowed the Nutshed team to improve the efficiency of their processes while maintaining full control over the quality of their resulting products. Updating their brand has strengthened their online presence and helped them to stand alongside some powerful household names while being able to tell their story and maintain their individuality. Aside from the resulting growth that they have experienced in Ireland, their brand refresh has resulted in a recent partnership with a distributor located in South Korea. Moving forward, the Nutshed team are confident that their brand refresh will continue to support their growth and help them to engage with the online audience most interested in their products.



Perspectives and Suggestions for other Agri-Food Entrepreneurs

The Nutshed owners recommend allocating a significant amount of time to conducting market research. In their experience, 'when you rush a project, you will want to redo it almost immediately'. They emphasise the importance of allocating time to decide what is a definite change in your business and what you are prepared to leave behind.

Introduction

Ailbhe Gerrard is the farmer, beekeeper, craft-maker, agricultural researcher, and teacher behind Brookfield Farm. After working and living in Dublin then abroad she returned to farm near her family home. Ailbhe has incorporated several elements into her rural business. These include a diverse farm with crops, sheep, bees, trees, agriculture research, teaching and consultancy, a craft business based around hive



products, as well as agri-tourism with farm tours, honey tasting and craft demonstrations. Driven by her vision of bringing agriculture back to its sustainable roots, she is determined to produce good food for people, and bring rural communities together to address climate change and biodiversity loss. Ailbhe has farmed Brookfield Farm for over twelve years, growing skills, developing new ideas and making collaborations with skilled farmers, beekeepers, and consumers.

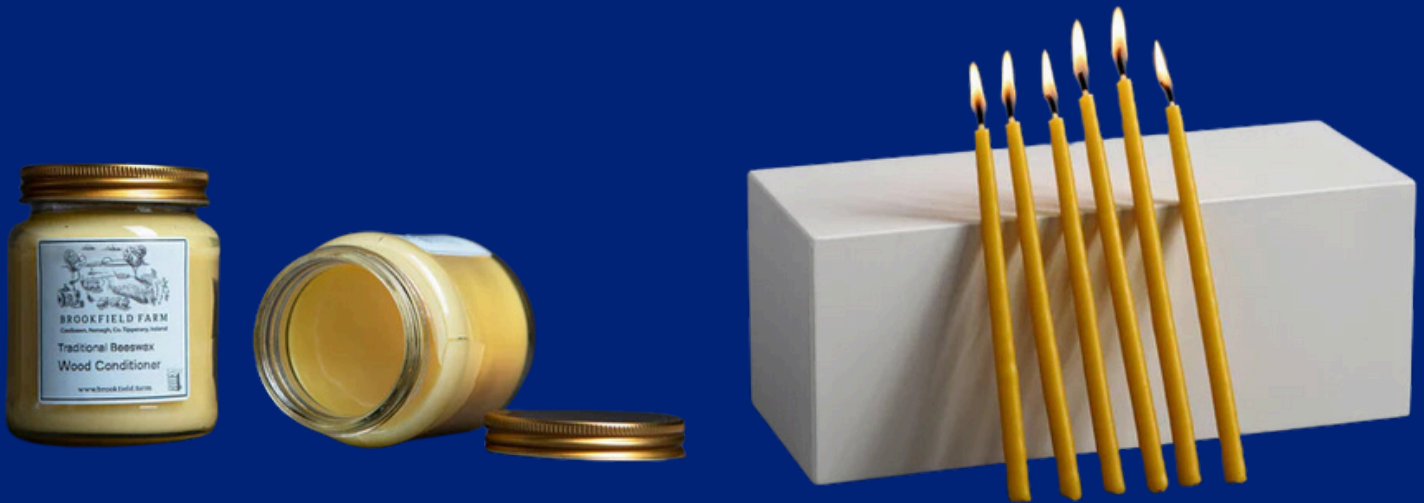


Ailbhe studied for a Master of Science degree in Sustainable Development in University College London, and a Master of Science degree in Organic Agriculture in the renowned Scottish Agricultural College (SRUC). Ailbhe also lectures at Gurteen Agricultural College, teaches Regenerative Agriculture for the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM), the Global Organic Agriculture Organisation and consults on Sustainable Development Goals and Regenerative Agriculture. As well as farming the land, Ailbhe offers Brookfield Farm Hiveshares and Hive Gifts. Hiveshares allow people to buy shares in the farm hives to enjoy honey from their own hives. Hive Gifts can also be purchased separately from the Brookfield Farm website and have been selected for numerous awards and are on the Department of Foreign Affairs approved embassy list for craft gifts. Currently Brookfield farm consists of 84 acres, 11 of which are rented to other farmers for similar activities. These acres include diverse farmland, and a mixtures of trees, bees, crops, and sheep. Brookfield farm has fully converted to organic practices since its opening, with the exception of the rented areas. Trees are necessary for the bees, so supporting native woodland and planting native Oak is an essential practice at Brookfield and helps to replace Ash trees suffering from a disease called Ash Dieback. Brookfield is currently involved in 'Radiant Farmers', a European Union pilot project focusing on growing grain. Over 4.5 hectares at Brookfield have been allocated solely for the production of 7-8 different varieties of grain which are suitable for human consumption. The bees at Brookfield support the growth of these crops with their pollination processes.



Digital Tools for Innovative Solutions

With the rise of social media, farmers can connect with large groups of consumers more easily than before. At Brookfield, Ailbhe decided to incorporate a click and deliver system with the honey produced at the farm. She is also active on social media, where she posts information about her company and products, and can connect with her customers who purchase online but have not met her in person. Additionally, she has a website which she keeps up-to-date with information on Brookfield farm to entice people to visit, upcoming activities at the farm, and gift promotions for customers to purchase.



Digital Strategies and Innovations

Ailbhe incorporated the aforementioned aspects into her business as she did not want to be just a farm, but instead wanted to do something different that would stand out from other similar businesses. For example, she got involved in the crops project as it was overall positive from every angle (i.e. the bees got extra food and the plants on the farm got extra pollination). She also noticed that though Ireland has a high consumption of honey, it is a challenge to find Irish honey in large supermarkets. They are the dominant shopping systems in Ireland but hard to branch into selling your produce through. Instead, she supplies her local product to co-ops as she saw this as a real opportunity to increase the consumption of such products.

Obstacles Encountered

Ailbhe has encountered an array of obstacles while learning how to be a farmer and, more specifically, an organic farmer. These obstacles included developing a network of likeminded individuals working in a similar environment, feeling that she had a lack of knowledge, and being new to the various machinery used and skills needed to grow as this type of business. She addressed these through using existing contacts and focusing on networking to reach likeminded individuals.

Evaluation of Results

Ailbhe emphasised the importance of including new technologies in a business to support its development and knowing when using these technologies are the right choice. For example, with her forestry a horse proved more



useful than heavy machinery for drawing out trees during the thinning process. Conversely, technology has been extremely useful for connecting with her customers and developing a community-like feeling amongst her shoppers.

Perspectives and Suggestions for other Agri-Food Entrepreneurs

Planning permission was recently granted to turn some areas into visitor facilities which will greatly improve the offering for visitors to the farm and possibly sales on the farmland. Continuing with social media and website selling, as well as continuing to seek new opportunities for growth are key focuses at present. Ailbhe suggests making a deliberate effort to try to connect with as many networks of similar people as possible. She suggests doing things like attending network events, going to other farms, and looking to gain experience and knowledge from others.

Introduction

Mary O'Sullivan grew up on a suckler farm in Kerry, Ireland. After leaving school she studied Wildlife Biology and then continued her studies with a Master of Science degree in Evolutionary Biology. After working in the plant-breeding industry for several years, she decided to start her own business, using plants to make strongly flavoured alcohol with enhanced aromatics.

Digital Tools for Innovative Solutions

Mary realised the importance of a lot of exposure to a product to increase sales and develop strong relationships with customers. Because of this, she makes a deliberate effort to attend as many markets as possible. At these, she can converse with potential and existing customers, educating them on her products, listening to their wants and needs, and gathering their feedback. The information she gathers at these events support her in refining and updating her products so that they best suit her target customers. Mary now uses a website to sell her award-winning cocktail bitters to customers. This site also allows her to share information about her business and its history, where it is stocked, and offer an array of different recipes customers can make using her products.



Digital Strategies and Innovations

Mary believes that selling online is a necessary element to a successful business. This means that digital tools and strategies that could influence digital trends are necessary to be aware of and competent with. For example, Tiktok is the major social media platform influencing customer purchasing trends and habits. Using data from Tiktok (such as analytics on the amount of times a video is viewed) can help a business-owner to understand the likes and dislikes of their customers.

Obstacles Encountered

Mary encountered a range of obstacles throughout developing and expanding her business, including feeling that customers were unfamiliar with the type of product she was offering and as a result were not making purchases. This she counteracted through attending events where customers were and explaining her product to them. She also found that the process of gaining different licences and managing the various aspects of her supply chain were challenging, and need to be thoroughly investigated by business-owners.

Evaluation of Results

While the project has been less financially successful than Mary originally anticipated, it has grown in scope over time and it is currently financially self-sufficient.



Perspectives and Suggestions for other Agri-Food Entrepreneurs

Mary believes that she has made incorrect choices in the past, but they were made with the information that she had at the time, and any decision is better than indecision. She thinks that she will need to take on staff to service existing customers and to grow market share.

Introduction

Úna Sinnott is a 25-year-old female agricultural business and food management graduate from University College Dublin. She is currently in her 3rd year of a PhD with Teagasc (the agricultural authority of Ireland) and began her food business, Nutorious Nutrition, in rural Ireland in 2020. This business offers a range of healthy snacks including granola, energy balls, protein balls, and superfood brownies. They stock cafes across Leinster, sell their products at local farmers markets, take orders through their company website and social media pages, and complete corporate orders for school, organisations and businesses. Their products have previously won various Taste of Ireland awards and they have recently launched products in 7 large retail stores in their area. Nutorious Nutrition comprises of Úna, acting as operating manager, and one full time contracted staff member. Her mother is also an integral part of her business and supports her when necessary. They operate from a kitchen facility in a Community Centre in rural south-east Ireland, with all products handmade using gluten-free oats and Irish honey. They first began selling at Gorey Farmers Market every Saturday and have from then progressed to developing their website and social media pages, which is now where 70% of their sales come from.

Digital Tools for Innovative Solutions

Nutorious Nutrition, when moving into the local community centre for the kitchen facility, invested in new kitchen equipment as well as increasing their branding and marketing strategy. They also bought a trailer which allows them to travel to different markets and events with their products. They hope in the future to show innovation as they develop new products such as an extremely low sugar products range for their customers who are diabetic.



Digital Strategies and Innovations

Nutorious Nutrition has a strong social media presence, particularly on Instagram. They use their social media presence to accept requests from customers to order online, sign up for subscription services, and to share nutrition information. They create videos and reels to post on their social media pages and engage with their customers. However, this can sometimes be quite time-consuming. They have found that using a subscription-like service where people can order small amounts of their products to be delivered weekly or monthly to their desired location to be a service unique to them, allowing them to stand out from their competitors. Additionally, this delivery service means that people can easily send gifts to one another directly from their website, which was a particularly popular option during the lockdowns resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic.

Obstacles Encountered

The team at Nutorious Nutrition found that issues with the checking-out and payment processes for online sales were difficult to initially set-up. They are aware that at the moment, this process is awkward to use and not very customer friendly, and so they are dedicated to working on the website over the coming months to improve this experience. They find this challenging to balance as the usual week's work still needs to be done such as making the products, and packaging and dispatching orders.



Evaluation of Results

The team are confident that their business adds huge value to their locality and region. They offer employment, pay for rent in the local community centre that would otherwise be empty, stock cafes with quality products, and offer the general public healthy, convenient snacks. Their vision for the future is for them and their local farmers' market to continue to grow and for more entrepreneurs to become involved in similar endeavours.

Perspectives and Suggestions for other Agri-Food Entrepreneurs

Úna feels that in the past she has been slow to make decisions and navigate her way through the business, and believes that while sometimes this is good, it can also have negative impacts on the growth of the business. In terms of product development, she is happy with all of her current products and would like to expand to adding more products in the future. Part of this, she believes, is gathering feedback directly from her customers, which can greatly help in refining products so that they best respond to the target customers wants and needs.

She also emphasises the importance of having a work-life balance, which is something that was slightly overlooked in the past prior to hiring an additional full-time contracted staff member. She highlights that taking care of one's health and wellness is of huge importance for entrepreneurs and can support their overall productivity. Úna encourages individuals interested in becoming

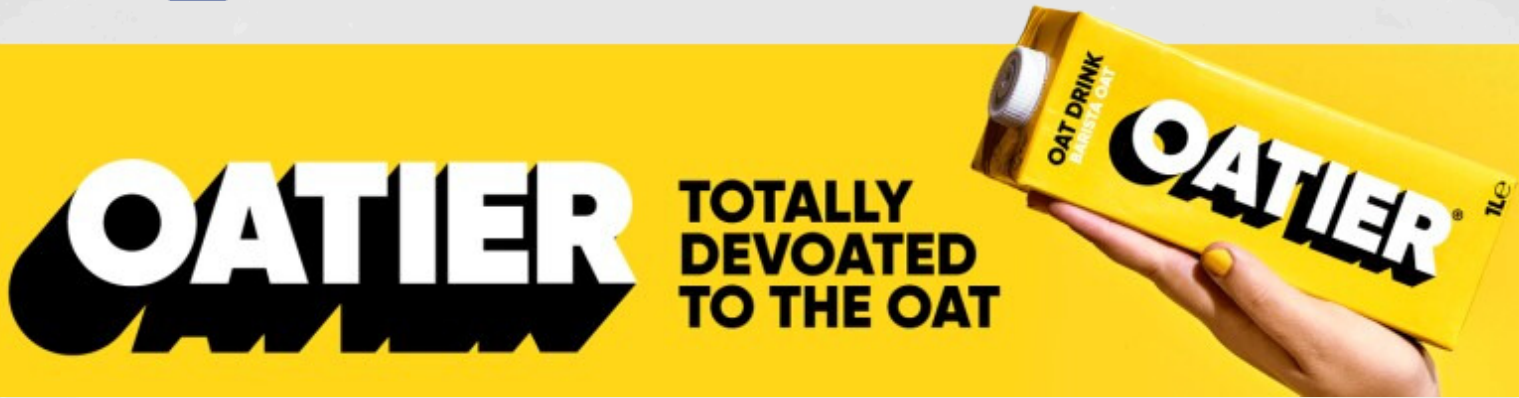


entrepreneurs to take the leap forward and go for it. She recommends starting small and taking it slow at the start to avoid becoming overwhelmed and overworked. She highly suggests trying to accept failure rather than fearing it, as she believes there is no such thing as true failure. Instead, there are opportunities to learn from to support the business in being successful in the future.

Introduction

Oatier is a startup plant-based food company. The Oatier team comprises of 10 people and has been trading since 2015, primarily selling Irish oats in Italy and Slovenia. More recently, they have launched an oat-based drinks range after a number of years of product development. Their team focuses on research and development of products, sales and marketing strategies, and working with manufacturers across mainland Europe to develop quality products. They sell their products to health food stores in Italy and their oat flakes to Eurospar shops in Slovenia. Their oat drinks are sold both directly and through distributors to cafes in Ireland. They do not currently sell to retailers in Ireland but will be doing so in the future through distributors. A small proportion of their sales come from e-commerce, with these direct sales accounting for less than 5% of their total revenue.





Digital Tools for Innovative Solutions

As a company focused on innovation, as well as research and development, the Oatier team are driven to develop products better than other leaders in the same market. They have invested heavily into developing bespoke products, partnering with numerous research institutes and experts in the field to craft products which beat their competitors. To ensure that the products are developed without personal biases, they have invested significant sums of money into carrying out sensory testing with trained experts, baristas, and consumers. The output of this research is that Oatier is continuously better in its taste and foaming than other similar brands like Oatly and Alpro, which has been verified by an independent 3rd party research institute. They are currently utilising various systems and processes such as Microsoft Teams, Salesforce, and Shopify to scale their business while avoiding manual roadblocks as much as possible.

Digital Strategies and Innovations

For the Oatier team, the rationale behind investing in innovation was that they would not have a viable business if it could not compete with other top sellers on the market. They believe that a 'me-too' brand, one which is extremely similar to others on the market, would not survive long-term, and so they have dedicated a large amount of time and resources to research, development, and innovation. They developed a benchmark for product performance and utilised design-thinking to create a process of creating, testing, refining, and re-testing products before they are finalised and ready for selling. These efforts, along with partnering with experts in the field and those with academic backgrounds in product development, has resulted in a positive outcome and the Oatier team has big ambitions for the future, hoping to expand to an international level.

Obstacles Encountered

The Oatier team experienced a number of obstacles in running a startup business, such as managing finances, seeking new investors, hiring experienced staff, and a variety of technical challenges as they were scaling up their products and selling online.

Additionally, with the Covid-19 pandemic and the ceasing of international travel, it was challenging to manage relationships with partners and complete the relevant paperwork together.



Evaluation of Results

The research and development investments have yielded positive results for Oatier. They believe this endeavour brought their team closer as they tackled problems as a team with a shared goal of improving them.

Perspectives and Suggestions for other Agri-Food Entrepreneurs

The team at Oatier feel that capital allocation determines everything in a business. There were many times where, with additional funding, the team would have been able to move and develop their products faster. However, they think that focusing on the negative (such as thinking about how little money you may have) is pointless, and that entrepreneurs should instead take a more positive approach and question how best they can use their finances to have the best results. They would have liked more resources to put into product development, but are overall happy with the result of their previous work and spendings. Being an entrepreneur can be tough both physically and mentally, and to make a business work it is important to make some sacrifices with your time. However, dedicating time to your health should not be completely ignored. It is also important to get out there and talk to other entrepreneurs so you can learn from the mistakes of others, and build a network of likeminded individuals around you who you can turn to for advice and support.

Introduction

The **Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori Toscana (CIA Toscana)** is a **professional farmers association**. The CIA Toscana represents and protects the farmer's economic, social, and civil interests and the rural community and affirms agriculture's fundamental importance to the economy and in society. The CIA Toscana is a democratic association, independent from political parties, trade unions and government. Farmers and agricultural enterprises agree together with conceding of rural country-estates, pensioners, confederation's employees, its institutes, associations and societies, the technicians and whoever works in a rural environment. It is organized in provincial, regional, and national associations which are legally independent. CIA Toscana is based in Florence and represents 20,000 farmers and more than 70,000 stakeholders. It works to affirm and to improve the female farmers' profession, the development of the agricultural enterprise, the diffusion of innovation, and the protection of the social and civil rights in rural communities.





Digital Tools for Innovative Solutions

CIA Toscana, owner of the 'Qualità Toscana' brand, has published a portal (www.qualitatoscana.com) where member companies can promote their services and products. The platform aims to connect demand with supply. The marketplace brings together the producers and agritourism of the CIA network and has the function of enhancing the internal supply and demand of agricultural products and services. The service is managed directly by CIA, which enters and creates the profiles of member companies in the portal and activates the functions for the promotion of products. Interested companies can choose to remain on the portal to offer products or services or only to search for the products they need. The offer of the farms is interpreted by the system, which proposes the relevant product categories. Producers can upload their product offers into the system, setting prices, payment, and delivery methods. Users can navigate the offering through the map and the product categories based on suggestions made by the platform that proposes a match between needs and offers. The matching system is based on the needs, location, and suggestions of the companies. The marketplace is not an online shop for the time being.

Digital Strategies and Innovations

In Tuscany, in addition to welcoming tourists in their facilities, agritourism conveys Tuscan agricultural excellence by offering a catering service based on local ingredients and by retailing the producers' products, thus also becoming a shop window. For farmhouse owners, finding Tuscan agri-food products to use in catering can sometimes be difficult. The need to get in touch with other businesses that can meet their needs in terms of products is strongly felt by operators. Computer tools and the networks come to their aid. Unfortunately, not all farms are yet digitised to the point of having their own website where they can offer their products or simply present them. To support all farms, and particularly those not yet present on the internet, CIA Toscana has designed and implemented the marketplace in the portal www.qualitatoscana.com. Even those that are not present on the internet or do not use social media to promote themselves, thanks to Qualità Toscana, can make themselves known and promote their products.

Obstacles Encountered

The idea of a marketplace for the member companies of CIA Toscana was born from the analysis of the needs of the companies themselves and was developed by looking for solutions that would allow access to digital tools for all companies, both the more advanced and the less advanced in digital terms. In realising a tool such as the marketplace was needed, CIA Toscana had to consider many management aspects and collaborate with a group of experts to ensure that all the administrative and bureaucratic aspects relating to conditions of use and privacy were relevant and applicable. Another aspect that will soon have to be managed and that can be considered an obstacle to the development and widespread use of the platform concerns the ability to keep companies themselves interested in the marketplace. Unfortunately, it is not always easy to introduce innovations among operators in the agricultural sector because technological and digital innovations are often perceived as hostile and not as opportunities.



Evaluation of Results



The 'Qualità Toscana' Marketplace Project has just been born and is taking its first steps. Overall, CIA Toscana strongly supports the decision to develop the project for numerous reasons. One of

the organisation's main activities is to support agricultural entrepreneurs and facilitate them in their activities. The subject of digitalisation, which is still unexplored for a large part of the operators in the agricultural sector, is now more topical than ever. The use of digital tools to promote one's business and to conquer and assert oneself in the market today is fundamental. The 'Qualità Toscana' Marketplace Project, even though it may not be able to completely fill the digitalisation gap for companies in the agricultural sector, is intended to be a pilot experience.

Perspectives and Suggestions for other Agri-Food Entrepreneurs

The 'Qualità Toscana' Marketplace Project is designed so that it can change over time according to the needs and demands of companies. For the time being, it is a showcase of agricultural products and services where supplier producers make their products available to user producers. In fact, for the time being, there are no plans to make commercial transactions directly on the site. The structure of the site and portal, however, is designed so that in the future it will be possible to create a real digital marketplace where users can make purchases directly. The fact that the steps to switch to digital sales take place in a protected environment supervised by the association will help farmers to approach the use of innovative tools that technology makes available to us today with less diffidence. One of the most important aspects in the management of agricultural and agri-food enterprises is the marketing of products. The consolidation of acquired markets and the conquest of new market segments nowadays also pass through the digitisation of commercial operations. Every company should have its own space on the web to sell its products or even just to advertise and promote them. Having a company website or having a profile on social networking sites is more essential than ever to reach current customers and to find new ones. Every company today has many tools to support being present online and there are many possible paths, from do-it-yourself to being supported by experts.



Introduction

The owner of the Pliczko Company and founder of the Incubator is Mr. Bartłomiej Pliczko, a graduate of Agricultural Production Economics at the Agricultural University in Krakow. The company launched in 2012 and deals with the production of cold-pressed oils, flours and natural cereals, groats, and oats. This vast experience enabled establishing The Local Processing Incubator at Pliczko Farm in 2019. It aims to provide access to the infrastructure necessary to produce regional products based on local raw materials and traditions.

The whole business is run by Mr Pliczko and his wife. Pliczko's company is in an old barn which has been adapted into a store to sell food products as well as goods from local farmers. A second store is in Katowice and has been open for over 6 years. At the start of 2014, the company also decided to expand their business nationwide through mail order via purchasing on the internet. The online sales helped build a strong brand with loyal customers.



Digital Tools for Innovative Solutions

The Pliczko company store is a unique place where brand food products are sold as well as goods from local farmers such as cheese, milk, preserves, honey, and meat preserves. The store operates a zero-waste approach, i.e. all products are processed as much as possible to use their full potential. To minimize harmful waste to the environment only paper bags are used, in which all loose products are packed, or paper bags for customers of the stationary store. When goods are ordered online, packages are filled with paper and not with bubble wrap or Styrofoam. The store's assortment is being constantly expanded according to the needs and expectations of the customers. The Local Processing Incubator was launched thanks to European Union funding of the Rural Development Programme 2014-2020.

As part of the project, new equipment for food production and processing was purchased so that the company could offer new possibilities for processing raw materials, which would result in an increase to the value of the final product for the client. The incubator offers local farmers the possibility to process their raw materials. Farmers only pay for the costs of the services performed, i.e. electricity, packaging.

Digital Strategies and Innovations

The place where the farm is located (the northern part of the Silesian Voivodeship) is predominantly an agricultural area. Because of this, the idea to run a farm and have an incubator appeared to the owners naturally. They are located next to a poultry farm established by their father, Krzysztof Pliczko, in 1979. Having an incubator provides local farmers with the opportunity to use equipment which would be unaffordable for them to buy individually for their small farms. Giving themselves as well as other farmers access to an incubator has provided long-term opportunities for these businesses and enables local farmers to develop new ideas.

Obstacles Encountered

Pliczko farm already had all of the licences, labelling, and health and safety requirements necessary for making sales onsite. One of the largest challenges they faced was developing an online presence and becoming familiar with the online environment. To support them with this process, they hired a technical specialist who created their online store. To ensure this store was profitable, they had to identify locations that could act as pick-up points for



orders, calculate the cost of delivering their products, and find a reliable company to carry out these deliveries. For their advertising and marketing, they were initially worried that an online newsletter and social media posting would not reach their target customers. However, with the support of the technical specialist they had a successful launch online and many of the customers from the agri-food fairs and markets they attended in the past became online customers.

Evaluation of Results

Pliczko farm are very satisfied with their online store. Launching this store was a crucial step for growing their company and increasing their sales. They now sell their products across the whole of Poland and have been able to increase the number of individuals they employ multiple times. They are also proud of their company and the way that, to potential future employees, it is seen as a stable and reliable business to work for. Since developing an online presence, they have seen a steady increase in people's interest in their processing incubator and have subsequently created a section on their website describing the innovation to spread awareness on its uses and benefits.



Perspectives and Suggestions for other Agri-Food Entrepreneurs

Pliczko farm are currently focusing on, and consider it an important aspect to current businesses, listening to their customers' needs and develop products that respond to these needs. Similarly, they focus on listening to their customer's feedback in terms of the quality of their products. They believe this is an essential aspect for ensuring that the best possible product is available for customers. Customer feedback has been used in the past to refine things such as their website and how to navigate around it, and the aesthetics of their onsite store. Those at Pliczko farm suggest avoiding overloading any single webpage with too much content when developing a website. Instead, they emphasize the importance of having a website that is easy to navigate and includes drop-down menus or a tabs section to separate information into relevant categories, such as about the business, what it offers, frequently asked questions, and a contact information page. They suggest keeping the website visuals simple and appealing to avoid overwhelming online customers, and hiring someone externally to support them with this is an option that they will consider if they are struggling with their brand's visual identity. Including a short biography explaining the history of the business is a great way to create connections with existing and potential customers and can help with building trust in your business. Ensuring that complaints are addressed in a timely manner is also an important aspect for building a good relationship with customers. If a product or service does not reach the standards that the customer expects, you may consider offering discounts or promotions with future purchases.



Summary

This DigiFE case study booklet is a practical resource for agri-food entrepreneurs offering a valuable insight into the experiences of those from small-scale farms to larger, established brands. This booklet showcases best practices and ways through which digital technologies can be incorporated into various aspects of a business to enhance its growth. Additionally, the shared experiences of entrepreneurs in relation to their challenges and solutions can support other agri-food entrepreneurs in being well-equipped and prepared should similar struggles arise. This in turn will support agri-food entrepreneurs with the knowledge needed to develop and navigate their own digital presence, subsequently supporting the evolution towards a more digitally-equipped, innovative, and resilient agri-food sector.

