

National Rural Network for Malta

newsletter

3rd Edition
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National Rural Network Malta,
Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs, Managing Authority,
Block A, Luqa Road, Qormi, QRM 9075, Malta
Tel: 00356 2292 4188 • Email: rdd.mrra@gov.mt

www.mrra.gov.mt/ma



Dear All,

Welcome to the third edition of the NRN Malta newsletter! First-rate feedback has been received following the publication of the first two newsletters. The themes covered were highly appealing not only to rural stakeholders but also to the general public.

The third issue of the NRN newsletter revolves around the theme of quality in agricultural produce from a wide angle. Various sub-sectors contributed to this issue including the pork, organic, dairy, and poultry.

In addition, this newsletter offers an overview of activities held by the various stakeholders within the National Rural Network Malta since the publication of the second newsletter and a glimpse of planned activities.

We hope you find this edition valuable for acquiring a better overview on Malta's rural characteristics!

The MNRN Team
rdd.mrra@gov.mt



The EAFRD Financial support for quality improvement



Quality is an attribute that safeguards the competitiveness and sustainability of Malta's agricultural industry. Maltese farmers, live-stock breeders and food processors alike are well renowned for their ongoing effort to produce a wide variety of high quality agricultural produce. Notwithstanding, it must be recognised that a more coordinated and holistic approach may be required for National food quality schemes.

It is quite tough for Maltese agriculture to compete on the basis of quantity. Malta aims to offer differentiated, high quality produce that promotes the distinctive Maltese nature of the produce being marketed.

The funds through the Rural Development Programme (RDP) for Malta 2007-2013 are proving to be instrumental for improving the quality of local agricultural produce, both directly and indirectly. Various sectors within the agricultural industry are reaping the benefits from this Programme. The Common Agricultural Policy strives on the importance of quality in agricultural produce with the least environmental impact; thereby the projects selected for funding are as much as possible in line with this strategic objective.



Measure 121 'Modernisation of Agricultural Holdings' and Measure 123 'Adding Value to Agricultural Products' proved particularly successful among local farmers and producers respectively to ultimately improve the quality of their produce and enhance the competitiveness of local holdings. In fact, just from the first call, more than €18 million have been contracted under these two measures.

Meeting quality standards and obtaining the necessary quality certification is usually

financially costly. Farmers may receive financial compensation under Measure 132 "Participation of farmers in food quality schemes", for the additional costs and obligations arising from participation in the organic food-quality scheme. Measure 132 is a great opportunity not only for farmers fully certified as organic by the Malta Standards Authority but also for those under conversion to organic production.

As a result of the farmers' participation in such quality schemes, local consumers are provided with assurances on the quality of the product or the production process used. The most typical assurance is that the product consumed is of a higher nutritional value and free of pesticides allowing for a healthier living. The products produced by these organic producers including grapes, citrus, table olives and extra virgin olive oil have a higher value-added, thereby market opportunities both at local and European level have been enhanced.



To further exploit the opportunities quality certification brings forth, Measure 133 provides financial support to producer groups that promote and inform farmers to convert to food agricultural produce certified as organic. Farmers must be actively encouraged and informed that investments in organic farming are sustainable given that the demand for organic products is gradually increasing.

The Malta National Rural Network ensures that the local agricultural sector is equipped with the right tools and vision for continuous product quality improvement. Organic certification and other local and European Union quality schemes are critical milestones to realise this vision.

Daniel Grima
EU Fund Officer
Managing Authority



The Maltese Pork Sector: an image of quality

There are many different aspects to quality when it comes to foods. In case of Maltese pork, high product quality is ensured and maintained through a variety of measures which start from the farms of origin and go all the way to the shop from which the final product is sold to the consumer.

The breeds of pig from which Maltese pork is derived have been specifically selected to meet the quality requirements of the local consumer. They produce very lean meat with good flavour, and grow very quickly and efficiently, minimizing waste production and ensuring a reasonable product price.

But genetics alone do not make for quality pork. In order to meet the high standards demanded by the Maltese people and relevant legislation, pigs must be reared under comfortable conditions which avoid stress. Significant investment has taken place on most Maltese pig farms in order to meet these requirements, and the majority of these investments were made possible through co-financing provided by the European Union and local government under the Rural Development Programme for Malta (RDP) 2007 - 2013.

Furthermore, in order to achieve a high quality product, pigs must be adequately fed with suitable feeds produced from high quality ingredients, and managed properly throughout their lives. In order to achieve this, farmer education is essential. Free courses for pig farmers are already under way, funded under Measure 111 of the RDP 2007-2013. Farm Advisory Services (FASs) have been set up with the aid of funding under Measure 115. Farmers' use of these FASs is being subsidized under yet another RD Measure; Measure 114, which is currently open for the benefit of all farmers and live-stock breeders.

On reaching a desirable slaughter-weight, pigs are transported to the Civil Abattoir, where the slaughter process is monitored and controlled by Official Veterinarians to ensure both welfare and hygiene. Immediately after slaughter, carcasses are cooled to below 8°C, and will not be released from the abattoir until they have passed laboratory tests for bacteria, parasites and chemical residues.

The results of these tests are normally in by early the next morning, at which point pigs can be collected in refrigerated vehicles and delivered to local shops and processing plants. This brings us to one of the most important aspects ensuring the exceptional quality of local

Maltese pork; freshness. Thanks to Malta's small size, it is possible for fresh Maltese pork to get from the farm to the plate within 24 hours.

Under Measure 123, local processors applied for co-financing of investments aimed at adding value to local agricultural products, incentivizing the use of high quality local pork in processed products as well as for sale as fresh meat. This measure is helping to improve the quality of processed meat products produced in Malta.

Another important aspect of food quality is genuinity. In order for consumers to make their own purchasing decisions, they must be fully informed and aware of what they are buying. Otherwise, they may be handing over their hard-earned money for products which do not meet their expectations. This is why the Pig Breeder's Cooperative Society of Malta has created the brand and logo of 'Majjal ta Malta'.

The cooperative urges all retailers of local pork to voluntarily sign a legal contract which obliges them to clearly and honestly label local pork; clearly differentiating it from imported products. On signing up to the scheme, retailers receive stickers for their shop windows, and meat-markers which make it even easier for consumers to know what they are buying. The details of their shop will also be listed on the Majjal ta Malta website, allowing consumers to determine, from the comfort of their own homes, which local shops are participants in this scheme.

For more information about pig farming in Malta or the Pig Breeders' Cooperative Society, one may visit the cooperative's website; www.kim.coop. For more information about the Majjal ta Malta scheme or pork in general, one may visit the Majjal ta Malta website; www.majjaltamalta.com.



Dr. Oliver Frendo,
General Manager, KIM

The Organic Sector – the future of agricultural produce



With more than half the EU's land being in some way influenced by farming activity, farming has an extensive impact on the EU's natural environment. Farming has shaped and contributed over the centuries to creating and maintaining a unique countryside. Agricultural land management has been a positive force for the development of the rich variety of landscapes and habitats, though but not always positive to the environment. It is important that the ecological integrity and the scenic value of landscapes which make rural areas attractive for the establishment of enterprises, for places to live, and for the tourist and recreation businesses are retained and conserved.

The natural environment and farming practices are complex, with deep links between the two. Many valuable habitats in Europe are maintained by extensive farming and a wide range of wild species rely on this for their survival. However, inappropriate agricultural practices and land use can also have an adverse impact on natural resources, like pollution of soil, water and air, fragmentation of habitats and loss of wildlife.



The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) ensures that its rules are compatible with environmental requirements and that CAP measures promote the development of agricultural practices preserving the environment and safeguarding the countryside. With such regulations, farmers are encouraged to continue playing a positive role in the maintenance of the countryside and the environment.

This is being achieved by targeting aid at rural development measures promoting environmentally sustainable farming practices, like organic farming.

Our environment can provide farming systems with all the resources they need to produce fresh, tasty and good quality food for human consumption. Organic farmers return the favour by maintaining and, where possible, enhancing the natural levels and quality of these resources.

While the Maltese consumers are becoming ever-more conscious of the source of their food and the implications of environmentally-damaging practices to produce this food,

traditional farmers are very reluctant to forgo the use of pesticides and artificial fertilizers. Unfortunately organic farming in Malta only forms a small portion (0.26%) of the total arable land, however, slowly but surely, through the use of tailor-made education programs explaining the benefits of cultivating products organically, the number of farmers opting for this healthier, ecologically-friendlier alternative is slowly increasing.

In the Maltese scenario, where land is small and fragmented, the number of rural farmers decreasing and local produce finding it ever more difficult to compete with the low prices of imported produce; growers must increasingly depend on the added quality of their products. Organic produce can offer to the grower an opportunity to present quality produce. These products are produced on small farms or fields, by very dedicated farmers who are certified by one of the two organizations entitled to issue the necessary Certificates for farmers who undergo the three years of transition to convert their farms from a conventional system to one based on the principles of ecological sensitivity, animal welfare and social justice.

One only hopes that the increasing consumer demand is met by a resolute will of suppliers to choose the green leaf logo characteristic of healthy, environmentally-friendly products. To this end, the Malta Organic Agriculture Movement (MOAM) will seek to further its efforts to educate the local farmers and consumers alike to choose quality products that respect the environment.

John Portelli
Public Relations and Marketing Officer
Malta Organic Agriculture Movement



Quality and the Dairy Sector in Malta

The dairy sector in Malta is one of the most important sectors mainly because it is the main source of supply of fresh milk and fresh milk products. Local milk production is more than 90% cows' milk which is delivered daily to the processing dairy, whereas less than 10% is goats' and sheep milk, mainly used for on-farm production of traditional cheeselets.



In the last years the Maltese dairy sector has strived hard to focus on quality in its widest sense and throughout the whole supply chain from "stable to table". In this respect, the sector has witnessed an intensive programme of vast investments and a variety of measures leading to a continuous improvement in quality.

In this process, the milk producers cooperative (KPH), which incorporates all the licensed milk producers delivering the cows' milk to the processing dairy, has been instrumental through its verticalised structure to support and promote these investments and measures towards quality improvement along the whole supply chain.

At farm level, milk producers invested heavily under Measure 121, to upgrade and restructure their farms and to modernise their equipment to become fully compliant with all EU regulations and standards regarding food safety, hygiene, animal welfare and environment. As a result of more comfortable conditions with less stress for the milking cows, efficiency and milk quality improved. These farms are duly licensed and registered and are regularly inspected to ensure compliance with all the required standards and quality.

Quality improvements have also been sustained through improved cow genetics and the resulting milk quality and productive capacity through artificial insemination and cattle breeding services provided by KPH.

Better cow nutrition also contributed to improve milk quality. A nutrition advisory service and the availability of suitable feeds produced from high quality feed ingredients - both provided by the cooperative KPH - ensures that each farm can have a nutrition and feeding programme to meet the particular requirements, including milk quality improvements of each individual herd. In this respect, KPH is also running a research project, assisted under RDP Measure 124 to continue to improve milk quality through better feed efficiency.

The cooperative advisory services and training programmes also proved greatly beneficial and helpful to milk producers to improve their knowledge and farm management, contributing also to milk quality improvements. RDP Measure 111 provided assistance for training programmes.

Raw milk quality has been encouraged through the Quality Payment Scheme adopted by the processing dairy for the payment of the raw milk delivered, giving the right incentives for better quality. Raw milk is delivered everyday to the dairy, where it is tested and subjected to laboratory surveillance using modern laboratory equipment, thus ensuring intensive milk monitoring of each individual supplier.

To ensure high quality products, the local main processing dairy has also undertaken a vast investment programme to upgrade and modernise the plant, machinery and equipment; the production processes and controls. The dairy is fully approved to meet all EU standards. The dairy also benefitted from assistance under RDP Measure 123.

The range of milk products includes fresh pasteurised milk and milk drinks; yoghurts, desserts, cream, mozzarella, cheeselets and irkotta.

To ensure maximum freshness, these products are distributed everyday in refrigerated trucks to all retail outlets and other establishments in Malta. This gives the possibility to consumers to have fresh, high quality products within 24 hours from the raw milk production on the farm. For this reason, local products enjoy a significant market share in Malta.

In this respect, there is a drive to explore and develop a local quality and certification system for higher quality milk and milk products in this sector. RDP measures are expected to assist such initiatives.

The local dairy sector is determined to continue to focus on freshness and higher quality standards at farm level and along the whole supply chain, thus strengthening the local brand equity to continue to meet consumer demand and expectations.

For more information about the local dairy sector in Malta or the milk producers cooperative (KPH), one may contact us by email on info@kph.com.mt or visit the website www.maltadairyproducts.com.



**Management
KPH**

NRN Activities

The Maltese NRN is particularly instrumental in promoting the RDP Axis and Measures. NRNM played an important role in the setting up and the development of the Leader approach in Malta. It is continuously working to involve and include the participation of all rural actors and stakeholders on horizontal thematic areas.

1. Participation in ENRD Meetings

MNRN attended the 14th NRN Meeting and 1st Mediterranean Cluster held in Thessaloniki, Greece between the 1st and 3rd February. MNRN delivered a presentation on the importance of Measures 123, 132 and 133 within the RDP 2007-2013.



2. CAP Post 2013 Consultation Process

The MNRN has undertaken a wide CAP Post 2013 consultation process among rural stakeholders through focus groups. A report has been drawn up about the studies undertaken, and how the CAP reform proposals would affect Malta's agricultural sector.

3. Commissioner Ciolos visits Malta and meets rural stakeholders

The Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs had the exclusive opportunity to host a one-day visit of the European Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development, Dacian Ciolos on 28th October 2011.

Such a visit came at a turning point in one of the most important and widely debated policies of the European Union: the Common Agricultural Policy. Ongoing efforts exist to make the CAP more aware of the new realities, the diversity of farming, different climates and overall rural development needs across Europe.

Throughout the visit in Malta, apart from a meeting with rural stakeholders organised by the MNRN, Commissioner Ciolos visited a number of agricultural holdings which benefited through the various measures within the RDP 2007-2013.

A more detailed article on Commissioner Ciolos' visit in Malta can be accessed from the following link: www.mrra.gov.mt/ma



NRNM is constantly working in parallel with DG AGRI and ENRD. Throughout the year NRNM organises Steering Committee and Coordination Committee meetings to discuss the current situation of Rural Development in Malta and ways forward for the agricultural sector. NRNM representatives also attend and participate in NRN meetings organised by the different Member States.

4. Strengthening networking

Estonian National Rural Network visit in Malta

A valuable study-visit was organised between the 16th and 17th November 2011 by the Estonian NRN in collaboration with the MNRN. The objective was to share useful experiences on the implementation of the NRN and appreciate the beauty of Maltese agriculture and landscape. The study visit strengthened networking and enabled the sharing of best practice.



7. Other activities in Rural Areas....

Whilst the Had-Dingli Heritage Trail, funded under Axis 3 is being constructed, with some of the rural heritage already conserved and more recreational areas being sustainably developed, the Interpretation Centre at Had-Dingli Cliffs is now open.

It provides all the information on the area and is intended to become a local tourist office. The setting up of this Centre will help in the coordination of the Heritage Trail and its eventual expansion.

The Had-Dingli Local Council will be publishing very soon a detailed booklet about the entire trail with a map, main attractions and information. One can also find on display and on sale the traditional local products from Had-Dingli.

5. Craft Sector Support - Gozo Action Group

Gozo Action Group Foundation launched a call for proposals for Action 413.3 under Axis 4 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013. This action which was launched on 9th January 2012 and closed on the 17th February 2012 seeks to improve the competitiveness and the quality of life through funding initiatives such as innovation, production ideas, training in human's skills and also marketing. Individual craft makers, groups, businesses recommended by a craft body and also other organisations or associations registered with the Commissioner for Voluntary Organisations were eligible to apply for this action.

Gozo Action Group

8. Pork Festival - 'Naturalment Malti'

On Sunday, 11th December 2011, the National Rural Network Malta participated in the Pork Festival organised by Naturalment Malti, within the Ministry for Resources and Rural Affairs. The Pork Festival was held in Siggiewi square. The National Rural Network provided extensive information to rural stakeholders both at one-to-one level and through the distribution of informative publications on various RDP 2007-2013 measures.



6. LEADER Progress....

Support to Culture and Arts : a Priority for the Majjistral Action Group Foundation (MAGF)

The MAGF launched the second LEADER action developed in line with its Local Development Strategy for the territory. The launch of this action was addressed by the Chairperson of the Foundation, Dr. Ian Castaldi Paris at Europe House in Valletta on the 7th December, 2011 at 17.30hrs.

Representatives from the Paying Agency, Managing Authority, Local Councils, members of the Foundation, Arts and Cultural entities attended the press conference. Dr. Ian Castaldi Paris explained that for MAGF, arts and cultural organizations serve an important role. The aim of this action is to offer support for capital expenditures to the Arts and Cultural societies which usually rely on donations and contributions and therefore have financial limitations when it comes to capital investments. Therefore in an endeavour to help this sector, for this call of applications, MAGF allocated public funds totalling €144,000. Ten projects submitted by small and micro enterprises and NGOs will be funded through this action.

Marisa Marmara
Manager MAGF

Upcoming Events

Payment Claims Campaign 2012

Axis 2 of the Rural Development Programme 2007-2013

Opening date: 15th February 2012

Closing date: 15th May 2012

A number of information sessions are being organised for local farmers in various localities around Malta and Gozo. Farmers are being informed on the entire process to renew their application for Direct and Land-Based Measures for 2012 and to apply for Measure 114.

The CAP Reform: Public Seminar End April 2012

The Monitoring Committee, NRN members and the general public will be invited to attend a public seminar to discuss the recent developments in the CAP reform.

ENRD Photo Competition

A rural photo competition is being organised in April 2012.

Prize

Participation in awards ceremony in Brussels for the local winner.

Participation in Naturalment Malti Dairy Festival

25th March 2012.

Venue: Gharghur square

Time: 11.00 am - 5.00 pm

Seminar for agricultural entities and rural stakeholders

14th March 2012

Venue: TBA

Agenda

The benefits of Measures 114, 132 and 133
Axis 2 Payment Claims Campaign

Participation in TV Programmes

Malta u lil Hinn Minnha

The Managing Authority is sponsoring two weekly features, relating to RDP 2007-2013 funded projects, on a highly popular TVM programme called 'Malta u lil Hinn Minnha'. This is transmitted on the national TV station every Sunday morning at 9.45am, till July 2012.

In the coming weeks, the Programme will continue to promote measures which the Managing Authority launches from time to time, projects being undertaken under the four axis of the RDP 2007-2013 and elements on the National Rural Network including analysis of agricultural trends, the future of the CAP, climate change, agricultural education and many others.

Mad-Daqqa t'Ghajn

As from April 2012, the Managing Authority shall be promoting RDP 2007-2013 funded projects and measures on another programme called: Mad-Daqqa t'Ghajn, featured at peak time on ONE TV.

Various.....

The Managing Authority and the MNRN ongoingly participate in local Radio and TV Programmes to promote measures and educate rural stakeholders, and the general public on the RDP 2007-2013.

Link with our European Counterparts:

**European Network for Rural
Development (ENRD):**

<http://enrd.ec.europa.eu/>

Spread the word:

Inform and encourage other stakeholders to be added to our mailing list by sending us an email on:

rdd.mrra@gov.mt

Make a link to the MA website on your own website.

www.mrra.gov.mt/ma

Let us know what you're up to:

Send us information about relevant news, campaigns and initiatives within your organisation, area or region to be promoted on our website.

Do have any feedback or suggestions?

The NRN newsletter team looks forward to receiving feedback and suggestions as to continue improving this publication. Send us an email on:

rdd.mrra@gov.mt

Rural Development Programme for Malta 2007 – 2013



Co-financed through Technical Assistance
The European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development:
Co-financing Rate: 75% European Union, 25% Government of Malta



Europe Investing in Rural Areas