

# Open farms in Zala Thermal Valley

(source : THE BOND PROJECT

<https://www.bondproject.eu/open-farms-in-zala-thermal-valley/>)



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## Short description



Where is the initiative based (region )? HUNGARY  
Country Zala County

What kind of initiative (farm, private, network, other)? This is a network of 15 producers of high value added food products and rural service providers opening their farm and food processing plant for customers to visit on a regular, transparent basis. The OPEN FARM Association is facilitated by the local LEADER group and was elaborated due to 2 international research projects. The network of farmers provides common marketing image (logo, roll-ups, signs, image films, website etc.); a well-designed internet platform + smart phone app. including push notification.

Name of the initiative? Open farms in Zala Thermal Valley

What is the goal of your initiative? The aim of the initiative was to build up a local network with local stakeholders to attract visitors from nearby tourist attractions such as Hévíz (thermal bath) and Lake Balaton. The network implemented its own quality assurance system (with internal governance and decision making) for creating adequate environment at the farm to be able to accept visitors (toilets, hygiene, aesthetics, etc.). In that way the network can guarantee the high-level services for Hungarian and foreign tourists. The initiative is a possibility for social learning, networking, and building regional identity for producers.

What are the activities involved? At the first stage (during 3 years) the LEADER working group built up a working group with farmers and service providers. During this period stakeholders had regular meetings on invention of common activities, goals and intern rules for quality assurance system. The stakeholders learnt together and shared their notions about common activities. From the starting point they have been involved in marketing activities (short film, photo making, handbook preparation) and they have organised the first open farm events eg.: open apple day, open cellar tour, etc.

**What are the results?** The programme so far created a coherent, long term framework for the efforts to develop local economy, economic and social networks, consumer and production culture, in a sustainable rural development context, channelling efforts and giving strategic direction to the local development programme. It has created a reflexive and adaptive internet platform (and smart phone app) that can be dynamically updated by the producers themselves; reinforced social and economic networks among producers, giving space for social learning, personal and community development and provided new cooperation model.

**What are your ambitions for the future** We plan to organise regular opportunity to buy good quality local products on the farm, in an 'experience economy' framework and not just on opportune days. The facilitators intend to develop more type of programs with the cooperation of 2-3 farmers. For example Hungarian spirit tasting, guided excursion and local food dinner or apple picking with farmers, horse riding and common cooking from local products. The objective is to provide more marketing tools for farmers, enhance know-how transfer and involve more international knowledge and competences from other sectors.

## Success factors and needs

**Please write, in a nutshell a short story about the core of your initiative.** The Zala Thermal Valley LEADER group is a civil organisation that was established in 2008 in the western part of Hungary, in the northeast part of Zala County. The undeveloped part, long-ago decisively an agricultural area, underprivileged in social and economic aspect with high rate of unemployment, is Zalaszentgrót and the surrounding settlements. The main purposes of the local action group are: improvement the quality of life by renewing and utilizing art relic buildings, preservation of natural and cultural heritage, enhancement of the local economy by motivating the preparation of local product, development of tourism activities; support of establishment and development of SME's. Due to this developing approach the LEADER group (LAG) managed more research projects involving external experts to observe local opportunities for tourism and short food chain development. The LAG had already provided Rural Development Funds for local stakeholders in order to develop their processing plants, farms, tourism facilities. In 2013 it was time to start the reorganisation of these developments and motivate local actors in a new network, however in Hungary there wasn't such good practice for network building in short food chains and rural tourism.

In the frame of one project the managers of the LAG visited the French *Bienvenue a la Ferme* national tourism and SFSC network and a South-French Leader group and finally they decided to implement these good practices in the microregion. A new study was conducted on local food systems during which local farmers defined their needs for local tourism development and collective work. As well they defined their slogan: "in small region, small treasurers, small green hearts". In the study local restaurants and service providers were interviewed: these pronounced their need for local raw materials in an organised channel. The LAG examined the level of competences of the possible actors which has led to organise marketing, local tourism, business development, social media training.

During this time the LAG prepared another workshop with the core team where stakeholders had discussions on group building up, mutual requirement, mutual support, definition of quality of services and local products and process of internal quality assurance. According to the internal rules. All the applicants were visited and controlled if they meet all the requirements.

On 24th July 2018 the Open Farm network was launched officially where all the participants received a certification of membership. The LEADER group set off the new

common website, Facebook page and smartphone application. From this point the members can organise their individual open events which are communicated on Open Farms' channels and they can also organise common events on special seasoning periods.

#### What are the main lessons you learned?

1. It is important to use real existing results (social networks, trust, existing enterprises) to base your new SFSC on.
2. It is important to involve strong local actors, gate keepers, opinion leaders, to create empowerment and ownership.
3. It is important to have strong management, facilitation with (at least at the beginning) external/additional funding and make sure that this management is continuously available and financed for a longer period of time (some years at least)
4. It is important to close the communication gap between local actors and IT experts and ensure real understanding when designing internet platforms, apps. etc.

**Kindly say a few words about the process** The whole process started in 2008 and the process of network building started 5 years ago. During this time more than 40 workshops were organised in order to transform local actors for cooperation and mutual support. In the group there is a strong management team who know very well the local environment and are motivated to develop their microregion. Between the involved members there are more who arrived from other sectors, other regions and they have clear heads for common activities.

**Anything else you would like to mention?** The main challenge is the power of management, the common understanding, and the common benefits.

**Can you please list 5 key words that best represent your story?** Open farm Short chain

**Knowing more**

**If someone wants to know more, do you have a website? Others?**

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[www.agrishort.eu](http://www.agrishort.eu)



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Repository compiled by: Katalin Kujani

E-mail contact:kujanikatalin@gmail.com