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Entrepreneurs Interview in the LAG Aizkraukle District Partnership

Activity 2. Survey

Ilvija Asmane
7-14-2025



Farm Eģīši

<http://www.justbio.lv/>

Company Overview

We are a family-run farm, working with love for both our craft and nature. We grow cereals, have established a 4-hectare sea buckthorn orchard, offer transportation services, and welcome guests to our holiday home.

All products from “Eģīši” farm are organically certified. Sustainable farming practices are essential to us, ensuring that the products we offer are environmentally friendly and safe for our customers in Latvia and around the world.

Current Approach to Sustainability

Sustainability is reflected in our status as a certified organic farm — both in the cultivation of cereals and sea buckthorn, as well as in the products we offer, which are made from our own organically grown ingredients.

The products we produce on our farm are sold in local shops and cafés. We produce in small quantities and follow a zero-waste approach, as sea buckthorn is a unique plant where every part can be used.

We welcome guests in a natural rural setting, offering peace, quiet, fresh air and views of the surrounding sea buckthorn fields.

We collaborate with other local farmers, fostering mutual support.

Our organic farming is based on respect for nature, people, and future generations.

Adoption of Good Practices

The main motivations for implementing sustainable practices are maintaining a clean environment around us and using organic food in our daily lives — both for ourselves and for the people of Latvia.

Organic farming allows us to protect the surrounding nature, people and animals by providing access to natural, healthy food and ensuring a living environment that won't be damaged in the long term by chemical fertilizers.

In today's society, natural and sustainable farming methods are becoming increasingly important. People are willing to pay more for high-quality food and the health benefits it brings.

As an organic farm, we also gain additional advantages in various European Union projects

focused on agricultural development. We have received EU funding to start and expand berry processing, as well as to develop our tourism sector.

In cooperation with the Aizkraukle District Partnership, we promote our farm and increase recognition in our region. We are building trust as small-scale producers, making it easier to establish partnerships with other organic businesses.

Perception of the Green Deal

We feel like a small part of a greater European goal — because meaningful change can only be achieved together, through action. For our farm, this is not about politics, but a mindset and a way of life.

We want to live in a natural, beautiful, and well-kept environment — one where our children will also be able to live.

Healthy food means a healthy body, mind, and spirit.

Our company stands for environmentally conscious farming. Our goal is to deliver quality over quantity to the consumer.

The Green Deal helps shift people's mindsets by raising awareness of important global and European issues.

People have become used to buying everything in stores, which has led to the rise of many large industrial companies.

The Green Deal strategy could be further advanced if more enterprising individuals created small businesses in their regions, helping to build self-sufficient local communities.

Key Obstacles

Starting a business involves a long and bureaucratic process to obtain organic certification. Initially, it requires significant financial investment — both for acquiring and maintaining the certificate — as well as managing a large volume of annual reporting.

Climate conditions are unpredictable each year, making it difficult to plan harvest volumes and income. This, in turn, affects our ability to purchase appropriate organic fertilizers and green manure seeds.

Large amount of information and innovations that change every season. Difficulty in understanding all the necessary information, reporting and direct payment information, which also includes the consequences of adverse weather conditions, support and compensation.

Slowing Factors

These are mainly climate change and weather conditions. Changing weather conditions pose the greatest risk to organic farms, because we are not allowed to use synthetic products. Economic and market conditions – organic products have a high cost, so consumers must be prepared to pay more to get the quality of the product. Public demand increases depending on the level of education and income of the public. By visiting regional markets, we inform and educate residents about healthy and sustainable food. Changes in regulatory frameworks and state policies do not allow us to plan the development of the company in the long term.

Necessary Support

The current European and national support for local partnerships is important for small businesses to be able to “survive” and develop. More campaigns need to be continued to encourage the use of local products and to inform about the importance of organic food. This creates a strong community that promotes sustainable and local growth in the region. Facilitate the establishment and tax policies of new and small businesses, thus creating more family businesses that create products with a story, origin and quality. Which in turn will ensure a self-sufficient community and significant benefits for the standard of living, education and development of the population in the long term.

Collaboration and Innovation

Farms that are able to cooperate, build a more united and resilient community, as well as be self-sufficient, can ensure the food supply of their region, which is important in times of global turmoil. The involvement of local government officials and rapid resolution of problem situations is an essential condition for the development of business, that is, the maintenance of roads, communications, schools and kindergartens, and ensuring good quality. The initiatives of local governments and local associations to create a comfortable environment to attract residents, families with children, an essential condition is the quality and accessibility of the place of residence. All this creates a desire and opportunity to develop both business and provide a workforce in local enterprises. We believe in teamwork and cooperation, because only together and with like-minded people can we build a greener future.



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Ilvija Asmane
7-16-2025



Skrīveri home-made ice cream

<https://www.majassaldejums.lv/>

Company Overview

We are a family business from Latvia, the wonderful region – Skrīveri, with strong values and traditions. We have been passionately producing home-made ice cream since 2006. We are FOOD ARTISANS! According to the original recipes of our parents, ice cream is made using local and fresh ingredients – milk from the neighbourhood farm; dairy products (like buttermilk and curd) from artisan dairy and eggs. Also, we have a garden, which gives us independence of creating original recipes. Ice creams are free from synthetic additives, colourants and fake flavours. Main idea is to feel the charm of the nature for your life to become more delightful.

As we are not a big company, located in small village, we intend to do different activities, like

- Cafe and manufacture – the place where we prepare ice cream and show of
- Tourism – expanding our philosophy of delightful life and importance of healthy eating habits
- Gardening – as big part of ingredients, it grows nearby
- Collaborations with fine food stores, restaurants, also exclusive collaborations in a way of private labelling
- Going to the people – farmer markets, city festivals, corporate events, birthday and wedding parties.

The signature dish is Mamma's beetroot salad with horseradish ice cream and sardines.

Current Approach to Sustainability

We produce ice cream already for 18 years. One of most important things to nurture sustainability is learning and working – nonstop improving the quality and sophistication. The roots of our business are being original, local, seasonal and natural. Believe in yourself, there are no one else like you in this world and do as much as you can to live in harmony.

The first, choice of ice cream flavours and ingredients - we don't have pistachio ice cream, because there are no pistachios in our climate growing. The bestseller year after year is uplifting curd ice cream with fantastic raspberries. All are local ingredients, so we are not supporting any industrial semi-preparations - that is a way of reducing transportation emissions. And we produce not in advance as factories may do it, but as much as needed, so the ice cream is always fresh. That is also the way of avoiding chemical additives, which are no good for our natural human being bodies. After all those 18 years, we see there are whole new generation growing up with our ice cream. We will always stay in their childhood memory and

they will remember this natural taste. So they will always know – there are ways how to cook with no synthetics.

The second, following the seasons, in spring we invite children to excursions. We teach, we show, we educate. All summer is dedicated to ice cream manufacturing and receiving guests. In autumn we go to work in garden to collect the harvest. In winter we focus on local speciality – gingerbread cookie doughs – you can buy it and bake it at home. The beginning of the year usually is for getting ready for the next season. Living according to natural rhythm allows us to spend less energy.

The third, we invite our ice cream-lovers to reuse packaging of ice creams as much times as possible. We offer discount if they do.

Building the manufacturing, we have been restoring the old buildings in the centre of village. And we have created a natural sewage treatment system at the manufacturing.

Adoption of Good Practices

Motivation – if you start from nothing that is the only way of long-term business. Also, that is an education we have been taught by our parents.

Economic benefits have been growing year after year. Slowly, but always up. This kind of attitude is also helpful to stand strong amongst strong competitions. 18 years are not a lot, but there are still lots of directions to develop.

Perception of the Green Deal

We perceive the goals of the European Green Deal as strongly aligned with our values and everyday practices. The focus on climate neutrality, biodiversity, sustainable food systems, and circular economy feels like a confirmation of the direction we've naturally taken since the very beginning.

As food artisans rooted in a small Latvian village, we've always prioritized local ingredients, seasonal rhythms, and low-impact production methods. The Green Deal validates these choices and encourages further development of such responsible models. We appreciate its vision for a healthier, more resilient Europe — not just economically, but socially and environmentally as well.

The Green Deal is highly relevant to our sector — artisanal food production and local tourism — and has a direct impact on many aspects of our business:

- Sustainable food systems: this is at the heart of what we do. We do not use industrial semi-preparations or imported tropical ingredients like pistachios, choosing instead to

work only with what grows in our region — such as curd, raspberries, beetroot, and horseradish etc.

- Reduction of emissions: by sourcing locally and producing in small batches only as needed, we naturally reduce food waste and transportation emissions.
- Circular economy: we promote reuse of packaging, offer discounts for customers who bring it back, and educate people — especially children — about the importance of low-waste lifestyles.
- Energy efficiency and renovation: we restored old village buildings to house our manufacturing and created a natural sewage treatment system, which mirrors the Green Deal's emphasis on green infrastructure and sustainable renovation.
- Environmental education: through seasonal events and excursions for children, we support awareness-building and knowledge-sharing, which are vital for long-term change.

So, while we are a small company, our philosophy and actions are fully in line with the spirit of the Green Deal, and we see it as an opportunity — not a burden — to deepen our commitment to sustainability and local resilience.

Key Obstacles

Latvia is young country, there are still much work to do in sustainable practice applications to everyday life. Our country is still learning to find the best options for sustainable life in this new era.

As a small producer working in the food sector, we have found some regulatory and bureaucratic aspects to be quite complex and time-consuming, especially considering our limited human resources. Some specific challenges include:

- Food safety and hygiene regulations: while we fully support the importance of food safety, the level of documentation, inspections, and formal procedures can sometimes feel overwhelming for small-scale, hand-crafted production. These requirements are often designed for large industrial producers and don't always match the realities of artisan operations.
- Access to funding and sustainability programs: While the Green Deal and other EU initiatives offer support for sustainable practices, the application processes for funding or participation in green innovation projects are often too complex and bureaucratic. Navigating these systems usually requires external help or consultants, which is not always feasible for a small rural company.

Slowing Factors

As I mention in the beginning, one of basic of sustainability is learning. The passion for fast consumption has accustomed people to quick satisfaction and a life without effort. Life has become like a two-way street. You can enjoy bread or ice cream made traditionally from fresh milk, berries. And you can also get it with flavour enhancers, made from powders and artificial flavours. To a large extent, sustainability has become a matter of education, lifestyle and habits of the family, local community.

Necessary Support

As a small, rural, artisanal producer, we believe that several targeted tools and supportive policies would make a real difference in helping us and similar businesses deepen our commitment to sustainability:

1. Simplified Access to Green Funding and Grants

We often hear about EU and national support schemes for sustainability, innovation, or rural development — but the application processes are often too complex, time-consuming, and bureaucratic for small family businesses.

A simplified, "light" application model for small-scale rural producers would be extremely helpful — especially if it came with hands-on guidance or a local support person.

2. Practical Sustainability Toolkits for Small Producers

Many toolkits are made for large businesses and don't reflect our realities.

We would benefit from a simple, practical set of guidelines, best practices, and small investments that show:

- How to reduce energy use
- How to improve packaging sustainability
- How to reuse and recycle more effectively
- How to track and reduce our carbon footprint in a way that fits a small business

3. Support for Local Ingredient Chains and Artisan Networks

Policies that encourage cooperation between local producers, artisan food companies, and eco-tourism would help build regional resilience and reduce transport emissions.

For example, support for creating shared logistics, local processing facilities, or farmers' hubs would benefit everyone in the chain.

4. Recognition and Promotion of Natural, Non-Industrial Approaches

Many policies favour high-tech or large-scale solutions. It would help to also recognize the value of traditional, low-impact, nature-based practices, like gardening, small-batch production, or restoring old buildings (as we did with our manufacturing).

A "green label" or certificate for sustainable rural businesses could help customers identify truly responsible producers.

5. Education and Youth Engagement Support

Since we already organize tours, excursions, and education for children, funding or materials for sustainability education would support our role as ambassadors of green practices in the community.

Tools to help connect rural producers with schools and youth programs would build long-term awareness and appreciation.

In short, we don't need big machines or factories — what we need is tailored support that respects and strengthens the small, local, nature-connected way of doing business. That's the real path to sustainable change.

Collaboration and Innovation:

It would be easier to achieve Green Deal's objectives, if we could establish local producer networks and cooperatives, because it would allow us to share resources (e.g., cold storage, packaging, transportation), develop joint marketing for sustainable local products and offer shared educational activities or events. This would help shorten supply chains, reduce waste, and build stronger local economies — all key Green Deal objectives.

Small businesses like ours would benefit from collaborating with municipalities or regional development agencies to improve energy efficiency in old rural buildings (e.g., insulation, solar panels), support sustainable waste and water systems (like our natural sewage treatment) and create eco-friendly public spaces for tourism and community education. These types of partnerships can bring funding, expertise, and coordination, making green upgrades more achievable for small players.

Collaborations with schools, we already invite children for excursions and teach about nature, food, and sustainability.



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Ilvija Asmane
7-18-2025



Main Discussion

Company Overview

SIA Sēļu zeme was established at the end of 2011. The company manages approximately 200 ha of land, of which 70 ha are biologically valuable grasslands. The main activity is organic beef cattle breeding, currently raising around 75 Limousin breed cows. The farm also grows organic starch potatoes on 10 to 30 ha, following proper crop rotation practices. Additionally, cereals are cultivated; however, if market prices in autumn are not favourable, the grain is turned into silage and used as animal feed.

Current Approach to Sustainability

Sustainability is at the core of our business strategy through organic farming practices. We manage 70 ha of biologically valuable grasslands, ensuring the preservation of biodiversity and soil health. Our commitment to organic production supports long-term environmental sustainability and aligns with principles of responsible land use.

Adoption of Good Practices

The main motivation for implementing sustainable practices has been the availability of financial support for organic farming, especially in circumstances where there is a lack of funds for more expensive conventional farming methods—unfortunately, that is the reality. Although organic plant protection products and fertilizers are now available, their costs are not fully covered by the farm's income. Of course, there is also a strong desire for the younger generation to have access to healthy, organic food.

There have been no significant economic benefits from production itself, as the beef calves are sold as conventional products. The organic starch potatoes are sold for organic processing, but the yields from organic farming are low. It is mainly the subsidies that help, especially when farming equipment has been purchased with bank loan. Organic farming can only remain viable with continued subsidies. Additionally, weather conditions and market prices have become highly unpredictable, adding to the challenges.

Perception of the Green Deal

Before February 24, 2022, when the geopolitical situation was different, the goals of the Green Deal seemed very positive and worth developing further. However, under current circumstances, they have become more of a five-year obligation that must be fulfilled. In a world facing other urgent needs, organic food is increasingly seen as a luxury rather than a priority.

I believe that the Green Deal reduces competitiveness in global markets and is detrimental to the economy. Living sustainably and following green principles is very nice in natural farming and is worth practicing daily, but I do not see a future for it in the global economy.

Key Obstacles

Organic food sells at about the same price as conventional products, and it is only in retail that it is valued. The mechanisms in the country do not work well from an economic perspective. For example, when submitting an application to the Latvian Nature Fund for maintaining meadows as biologically valuable grasslands, which meet the required criteria, inspections can take a year to occur. During that time, farming activities like plowing can damage the field, showing a disconnect from real-life farming conditions.

Additionally, agricultural plastic films are not collected properly; if plastic films are collected, then nets would not be needed.

The overall Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) plan is too complicated, fragmented, and technically difficult to implement. Unfortunately, many farmers do not even understand what the payments they receive are for. Every year, due to unfavourable weather conditions, the requirements for some measures are relaxed or cancelled.

Slowing Factors

Of course, knowledge is very important, as well as cooperation. One of the key resources needed for development is financing, which is always catastrophically lacking.

Necessary Support

Easier access to financial resources would be helpful.

Training during the winter season!

Collaboration and Innovation:

Collaboration is definitely needed, for example, learning from the practices of Polish farmers.