

# ESIRA – ENHANCING SOCIAL INNOVATION IN RURAL AREAS

## TRAINING MODULES

### Module 3. Entrepreneurship and Innovative Social Economy Impulse in Rural Areas



## ESIRA – ENHANCING SOCIAL INNOVATION IN RURAL AREAS

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### Credits

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# Module 3. Entrepreneurship and Innovative Social Economy Impulse in Rural Areas

## Objective

This training module is an educational resource created as part of the ESIRA train-the-trainers programme, which forms part of Deliverable 5.2. Training modules, included in WP5 – Community-led innovation spaces and pilot social economy initiatives. The main objective of the train-the-trainers programme is to capacity build and to strengthen the skills of Multi-Actor Platform (MAP) facilitators and rural actors to identify, support and ensure the sustainability of social economy initiatives and develop community networks in the rural territory.

The main objective of the Training Module 3 is to provide theoretical and practical knowledge and skills to training facilitators and rural actors in the areas of entrepreneurship and innovative social economy.

## Structure

The module is organised in a progressive and practice-oriented structure that guides learners from foundational concepts to applied tools for action in rural contexts. It begins by outlining the learning objectives and introducing the key concepts of rural entrepreneurship, social innovation, and the social economy, positioning them as essential drivers for the promotion of local initiatives. The module then explores social innovation as a catalyst for rural development, followed by an analysis of the opportunities and challenges of rural entrepreneurship within the social economy framework. Learners are subsequently equipped with analytical tools through a section on environmental analysis to identify sustainable business opportunities. Building on this, the module addresses the structure of Business Model Design as a means to validate and refine initiatives efficiently, and details the steps for developing a business plan using the Business Model Canvas. Further sections focus on strategies to promote rural products and services, taking into account specific marketing keys for rural markets, as well as the principles and application of ethical financial management. The module also highlights new opportunities for rural entrepreneurship arising from digitalisation, introduces methods to manage and measure corporate sustainability indicators, and explores ways to strengthen motivation for sustainable entrepreneurship. Finally, the module concludes with a summary and a compilation of success stories, offering practical inspiration and real-world examples to reinforce learning outcomes.

**The content of this training module is complemented by the following materials in Deliverable 5.3 “Training Modules Updated”:**

- **ESIRA Guide to supporting innovative social economy initiatives.**
- **Practical Tools 3.1, 3.2, 3.3 and 3.4 (Annex).**



## 1.1 Innovative Social Economy Initiatives in the ESIRA Project

The module “Entrepreneurship and Innovative Social Economy Impulse in Rural Areas” is designed to provide comprehensive theoretical and practical support for those interested in rural entrepreneurship as a driver of sustainable development, rural resilience, and responses to societal challenges. It also targets those who wish to contribute through innovative social economy initiatives (e.g., rural entrepreneurs, training facilitators, rural multi-actor platforms, social enterprises, community leaders, associations, NGOs, students), in which people and social and/or environmental purposes take precedence over profit, aiming for collective or general interest through participatory approaches.

This module explores the concepts of rural entrepreneurship, social innovation, and the social economy; offers tools for the rural environment analysis, identifying business opportunities that leverage local resources and address the specific needs of these communities; introduces the Business Model Canvas as a tool for designing sustainable business models; and presents the Lean Start-up methodology to train potential entrepreneurs to validate their business ideas in an agile and efficient manner.

The ESIRA project aims to reduce the risk of poverty and social exclusion for vulnerable groups in rural communities. Through innovative economic practices, the creation of strong social networks, and the enhancement of participatory policies, ESIRA seeks to foster inclusive development in rural communities based on social innovation and the social economy. The project emphasises reducing social exclusion among the most vulnerable groups and implementing participatory initiatives led by the rural community itself. To achieve this aim, the ESIRA project highlights social innovation as a driving force for transforming rural environments, enabling the development of new solutions that integrate technology, digitalisation, and innovative social-economy business models that respond to local needs. This approach not only enhances communities’ economic well-being but also strengthens their ability to address social issues innovatively. This module aims to provide both a theoretical and practical foundation for understanding how social innovation and social-oriented entrepreneurship can not only generate economic development but also improve social cohesion and contribute to environmental sustainability in these regions.

Additionally, the module explores specific marketing strategies for rural products and services, focusing on effectively communicating the added value they offer: sustainability, authenticity, and positive social impact. New opportunities provided by digitalisation, sustainable tourism, and the enhancement of cultural heritage are also examined, driving comprehensive and inclusive economic development in rural areas. Through examples of success and the analysis of key indicators, the module seeks to inspire and provide tools for social economy rural entrepreneurs to turn their ideas into viable projects, contributing to the triple objective of economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental protection.

In conclusion, **rural entrepreneurship can also serve as a mechanism for the social inclusion of vulnerable groups in rural areas by adopting sustainable business models** that empower these groups to become productive partners, transform their needs into demand, integrate different stakeholders as co-owners and co-managers such as community-led approach, adjust differential pricing for low-income groups, or provide essential services or products free of charge.

## 1.2 Learning Objectives

This module aims to train rural actors in the creation and implementation of business models for social economy initiatives, seeking not only economic viability but also environmental responsibility and social benefit in rural areas. The learning objectives are designed to equip participants with the necessary skills to identify opportunities, design innovative and sustainable social-economy business models, and manage their projects ethically and efficiently.

The objectives of this module focus on developing entrepreneurial skills that integrate sustainability at every stage of the process, from identifying opportunities in the rural environment to implementing digitalisation and marketing strategies tailored to rural products and services. Businesses based on social economy and social innovation follow the same phases as traditional innovation: ideation, prototype creation and testing, execution and implementation, and transfer of successful projects. Additionally, this module addresses examples of sustainable business models that empower vulnerable groups to become productive partners, transform their needs into demand, integrate different stakeholders as co-owners and co-managers, adjust differential pricing for low-income groups, or provide essential services or products free of charge. These objectives can be summarised as follow:

### 1.2.1 Identifying Opportunities for Sustainable Businesses

The first objective is for participants to learn to analyse their rural environment to identify societal needs and challenges that can be turned into business opportunities aligned with sustainability principles. This includes recognising the available local resources and understanding market trends that favour ecological or socially responsible products and services.

Through this objective, participants will build capacity to evaluate the potential of different sectors, such as organic agriculture, health and care, sustainable tourism culture, or renewable energy, and to develop a business vision that leverages these resources innovatively and responsibly.

### 1.2.2 Designing Innovative and Sustainable Business Models

The second objective focuses on teaching rural actors to design a solid business model using tools such as the Business Model Canvas and the Lean Start-up methodology.



These methodologies will enable them to validate their business ideas and social economy initiatives quickly and efficiently, minimising risks and adapting to real market needs.

Rural actors will develop the skills needed to structure their value proposition, identify their customer segments and relationships, optimise the use of local resources, identify key activities and collaborators, and define income and expense structures, ensuring that their business models are flexible, innovative, and deeply aligned with sustainability principles.

### 1.2.3 Developing a Comprehensive Business Plan

A key objective is for rural actors to master the stages required to develop a comprehensive business plan that covers all operational, financial, and strategic aspects of their project. This includes everything from resource planning and financial projections to setting clear goals and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators).

The business plan will serve as a roadmap guiding entrepreneurs in implementing their initiatives, ensuring that every decision is oriented towards economic viability and positive social and environmental impact, including the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups.

### 1.2.4 Developing Marketing Strategies for Rural Products

Marketing is an essential component of business success, and in the rural context, it presents unique challenges and opportunities. This learning objective aims to equip participants with the skills to design marketing strategies tailored to rural products and services, using both digital and traditional channels to reach a broader target audience and vulnerable groups that are more difficult to reach with conventional marketing strategies.

### 1.2.5 Ethical Financial Management

This learning objective aims to help rural actors understand the importance of ethical financial management for the success of sustainable entrepreneurship projects in rural environments. They will learn to implement financial management that not only maximises financial gains but also aligns with sustainability, social justice, and transparency principles. Additionally, it will highlight how ethical management can ensure efficient and responsible use of resources, generating a positive impact on the local community and environment.

### 1.2.6 Integrating Digitalisation and Heritage in Rural Businesses

Digitalisation is a key factor in enhancing the competitiveness of rural businesses. This objective seeks to equip rural actors with the skills to use digital tools to optimise operations, expand their market, and improve process efficiency. It will also explore how

tourism, social services, culture, and heritage can be integrated into business models to generate added value.

Rural actors will learn how to leverage technology to connect with a global audience while preserving and promoting local culture and heritage as a fundamental part of their value proposition, avoiding digital exclusion of the most vulnerable population or those without access to technology.

### 1.2.7 Inspiration through Success Cases & Business Sustainability

The final objective is to motivate rural actors by exposing them to successful cases of sustainable entrepreneurship and social economy initiatives in rural areas. This learning, based on real examples, will help them understand how others have overcome similar challenges and successfully integrated sustainability, the social economy, and vulnerable groups into their projects.

They will study business sustainability indicators to measure and manage the environmental and social impacts of their initiatives, ensuring that the businesses they start are not only profitable but also responsible and sustainable in the long term.

## 1.3 Rural entrepreneurship, social innovation and social economy in rural areas

### 1.3.1 Rural entrepreneurship

Entrepreneurship is a crucial driver of economic growth in rural areas (Asmit et al., 2024) and a vital solution to the social, economic, and environmental challenges these regions face. Rural areas have been recognised as a **core part of EU identity and economic potential** (European Commission, 2024). Rural, mountainous, and isolated areas in Europe make up almost 80% of the EU's territory and encompass 57% of the total population. These regions are of significant economic importance, accounting for 46% of Europe's total gross value added. Furthermore, most natural sites, cultural heritage segments, and historical monuments are located in rural and mountainous areas. However, these regions face significant social challenges, including low GDP (Gross Domestic Product) per capita, high unemployment rates, low wages, depopulation, and a rapidly ageing population, all of which place a heavy burden on residents in rural communities. Among those problems, depopulation is a primary challenge affecting life in rural areas. These regions have suffered a steady decline in population due to a lack of economic opportunities and migration to urban areas in search of better living conditions. Without young people to maintain economic activity, these regions risk disappearing, losing their traditions and cultural identity in the process.

This disadvantaged situation discourages private investment in rural entrepreneurship because obtaining a financial return is difficult. However, a new vision of rural entrepreneurship as a place-based, social-oriented and collaborative process holds the



potential to make rural areas more resilient to these problems (Hudson, 2010; Williams, 2007). Therefore, new types of entrepreneurs and organisations are needed to seek new solutions to these challenges from the perspective of social innovation. Social economy-based organisations have been pioneers in the search for solutions to these challenges, so social economy includes organisations that aim to benefit either their members or the community in which they operate.

**Rural entrepreneurs act as agents of change** in supporting rural resilience and enhancing community (Steiner & Atterton, 2015), by creating direct and indirect job opportunities. In the rural context, it is essential to understand the connection between entrepreneurial activity and the spatial context in which it occurs, going beyond the rural location of the action and defining rural entrepreneurship as engagement with its rural environment, as this gives it unique characteristics (Korsgaard et al., 2015).

Social structures and local embeddedness in rural communities suggest that rural entrepreneurs are less focused on monetary incentives and individual profitability and more concerned with social and community interests (Granovetter, 1985). They have a significant connection with all stakeholders in the rural community, resulting in more sustainable value creation for all (Marcos & González-Masip, 2025). This sustainability orientation of rural entrepreneurs is particularly valuable for identifying opportunities to create sustainable economic, environmental and social value.

In this sense, rural entrepreneurship and social economy have the potential to offer a viable solution to rural areas' development by facing social problems and creating new job opportunities that attract young people and improve local quality of life. Additionally, social economy initiatives encourage current residents to stay, strengthening community spirit and local roots. Initiatives like community cooperatives, associations, and social enterprises are key to combating depopulation, fostering social cohesion, and promoting sustainable economic development. These cooperatives allow resources to be shared, costs to be reduced, and mutual support systems to be created, while social enterprises work directly to solve specific community issues, ranging from access to basic services to the creation of new local products. Furthermore, the participation of young people in these projects not only revitalises the economy but also drives innovation and the adoption of new technologies, thereby making productive activities in rural settings more efficient.

### 1.3.2 Social Innovation as a Driver of Rural Development

The challenges in rural areas mentioned above, such as depopulation, a lack of economic opportunities, and an ageing population, require innovative approaches. Social innovation has been the latest addition to the family of innovations, alongside material and product innovation, innovation in production processes, marketing, and organisational innovation in the economic sphere, among others. Innovation reflects the capacity to create and implement new ideas that are likely to deliver value.

Social innovation has been defined as “the reconfiguring of social practices, in response to societal challenges, which seeks to enhance outcomes on societal well-being and necessarily includes the engagement of civil society actors” (Polman et al., 2017). This definition, developed as part of the SIMRA project (Social Innovation in Marginalised Areas), implies:

- A reconfiguration of social practices (e.g., relationships, collaborations, networks, institutions, governance structures) in response to societal challenges.
- The reconfiguration takes place in new geographical settings or contexts.
- The reconfiguration involves members of civil society as active participants.
- The new social practices engage voluntary civil society actors as a result of the social innovation.

These social innovation characteristics highlight its ability to create new possibilities for addressing challenges and social, environmental, and economic problems in rural areas, benefiting a range of social actors, not necessarily disadvantaged groups.

Social innovation could lead to organisational innovation, such as the implementation of a new organisational method, not only in the private sector but also in the public sector and hybrid public-private bodies, and to institutional innovation.

For all these reasons, social innovation offers key elements for developing projects that improve the inclusion of vulnerable groups and promote environmental protection through sustainable practices, thereby benefiting the rest of the rural community. For instance, social agriculture not only produces food but also integrates people at risk of exclusion, offering them employment and development opportunities. For a product, service, activity, or project to be considered socially innovative, it must share the following characteristics: it must be oriented towards the common good in response to societal challenges, include a participatory or collaborative process, and involve an effective transformation of social behaviours and practices.

Social innovation facilitates collaboration among actors such as NGOs, public institutions, and local entrepreneurs, driving initiatives with both economic and social impact, making it a complementary tool in the social economy.

The ultimate goal of social innovation is to create social value for all in terms of well-being, quality of life, social inclusion, solidarity, citizen participation, environmental quality, healthcare, education, and to generate positive change in response to unmet social needs. The Table summarises the main features of the social innovation.



**Table.**

The main features of the social innovation.

Dimension	Key aspects of social innovation
<b>Main features</b>	<b>Novelty and effectiveness:</b> Introduce new or significantly improved solutions (products, services, processes) that prove more effective, sustainable or appropriate than existing alternatives
	<b>Community involvement:</b> Solutions are co-created with actors directly affected, ensuring relevance, ownership and contextual fit
	<b>Cross-sectoral collaboration:</b> Rely on multi-sectoral partnerships (public sector, private actors, civil society) to develop, test and implement solutions
	<b>Procedural dimension:</b> Progresses through iterative phases of experimentation, prototyping, piloting and collaborative refinement, moving from concept to tangible impact
<b>Aim</b>	<b>Addresses a social need:</b> respond to unmet social needs and improve individual and community well-being, generating social value for society
	<b>Sustainability:</b> Ensure long-term viability by embedding innovations in local systems and strengthening financial and organizational durability
<b>Impact</b>	<b>Measurable outcomes:</b> Achieve measurable improvements in social conditions, practices or services
	<b>Empowerment:</b> Strengthen community agency, by building local capabilities and improving access to resources for beneficiaries and communities
	<b>Stimulate collective action:</b> Reshape social and power relations, foster more inclusive and resilient communities

Source: Sforzi et al. (2025)

In this context, technology has become an essential ingredient in a very high percentage of social innovations, and therefore, there is a close relationship between technology and sustainable development. **Technology and digitalisation are tools that empower social innovation to create more efficient and scalable solutions to social problems** (Herrero de Egaña, 2021). In settings with limited infrastructure, digitalisation and technology adoption become essential tools for driving development.

Access to advanced technologies and new forms of business organisation can transform rural areas, promoting modernisation and enhancing residents' quality of life. Additionally, the implementation of technological solutions allows for the optimisation of productive processes in sectors such as agriculture and tourism, increasing efficiency and reducing operational costs. Digitalisation also facilitates the creation of online platforms for the marketing of local products, connecting rural producers with wider markets and thereby improving their economic opportunities. By empowering communities through digitalisation and the creation of support networks, inclusive and sustainable rural

development can be fostered, addressing both economic and social needs. Collaboration among local actors, such as governments, NGOs, and private companies, is essential to maximise the impact of these initiatives and ensure their long-term sustainability.

Digitalisation is one of the keys to overcoming the barriers that have historically isolated rural areas. Access to digital technologies allows rural entrepreneurs to reach new markets and improve their competitiveness, opening up opportunities for local products and services to reach a much broader audience.

Digitalisation also supports the formation of online communities where rural entrepreneurs can share knowledge, access training, and generate collaborations that strengthen their initiatives. Additionally, technology applied to sectors such as agriculture or eco-tourism improves efficiency and sustainability, promoting resilience in rural economies. For example, in agriculture, the use of sensors and data analysis tools optimises the use of resources such as water and fertilisers, reducing costs and minimising environmental impact. In the tourism sector, digital platforms help connect potential visitors with authentic rural experiences, driving sustainable tourism and encouraging the conservation of natural and cultural heritage. The implementation of these technologies not only improves efficiency but also increases rural communities' capacity to adapt to economic and environmental changes.

On the other hand, the digital divide is the gap that exists for people who are not familiar with or capable of using internet technology. The population at risk of digital exclusion includes people with disabilities, older people and generations who were not born or did not grow up in the digital age, so-called digitally illiterate people who, due to their economic and cultural situation, have not had the opportunity or motivation to learn about and acquire knowledge related to technology, people at risk of poverty, people living in remote areas without internet access, etc.

**“Digital social innovation (DSI)** involves the use of digital technologies in the development and implementation of innovative products, services, processes and business models that seek to improve the well-being and agency of socially disadvantaged groups or address social problems related to marginality, inequality and social exclusion” (Qureshi, Pan & Zheng, 2021), being an emerging phenomenon that leverages digital technologies to address societal challenges (Buck et al., 2025).

Social innovation also contributes to the co-creation and design of new sustainable business models that prioritise both people's well-being and environmental sustainability. These models aim not only to generate profitability but also to address specific social and environmental problems, adding value to rural communities.

Social entrepreneurship and social economy enterprises in rural areas have demonstrated that it is possible to create economically viable models that also generate positive social impact, strengthening community bonds and promoting efficient resource use. These



business models also encourage community participation and foster a sense of belonging, which is essential for social cohesion and sustainable development.

Social innovation can be applied through methodologies such as the Business Model Canvas and Lean Start-up, which are valuable tools for developing sustainable business models, enabling rural entrepreneurs to minimise risks and tailor their initiatives to the real needs of the community. Thanks to Lean Start-up, entrepreneurs can quickly identify what works and what doesn't, making real-time adjustments to ensure the project's viability. This facilitates adaptation to changing environments, particularly in rural areas where resources are limited and conditions can be unpredictable. Additionally, implementing social innovation practices creates support networks among actors, such as local organisations, governments, and educational institutions, thereby enhancing the sustainability and scalability of projects. Together, these approaches allow for the development of creative and resilient solutions that benefit not only the economy but also people's well-being and the environment.

### 1.3.3 Opportunities and Challenges of Rural Entrepreneurship through social economy

The social economy organizations are entities that provide goods and services to their members or society at large, namely **cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations,<sup>1</sup> and foundations**. These organisations share common principles and features, i.e. the primacy of people as well as social and/or environmental purpose over profit, the reinvestment of most of the profits and surpluses to carry out activities in the interest of members/users ('**collective interest**') or society at large ('**general interest**'), and democratic and/or participatory governance (European Commission, 2021).

**Table.**

The main features of the social economy.

Feature	Social economy
<b>Objectives</b>	Carry out activities in the interest of members/users or society at large
<b>Distribution of profits</b>	Primacy of people and social purpose over capital in the distribution and use of surpluses and/or profits, as well as assets. This includes reinvestment of most of the profits and compliance with asset lock
<b>Governance</b>	Democratic and/or participatory governance
<b>Resources</b>	Resource mix depending on whether an organisation is market-oriented (cooperatives, mutual benefit societies) or not (e.g. charities)
<b>Type of entities</b>	Market-oriented and non-market-oriented entities

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<sup>1</sup> Including charities.

<b>Legal forms</b>	Cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations (including charities), foundations and social enterprises
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Source: Sforzi et al. (2025)

The social economy offers a unique opportunity for economic, social, and environmental development. It is a way of doing business that combines general or social interest, economic results, and democratic governance, which can stimulate sustainable entrepreneurship in rural areas. It uses community action and co-entrepreneurship, with strong local roots and a great capacity to identify the potential of territories and detect local needs. The social economy has been a pioneer in identifying and implementing social innovations, in comparison to the market economy. The principles underpinning the social economy and its close connection with local communities make initiatives grounded in this social economy in rural areas more flexible and more resilient in critical situations. Furthermore the social economy can play a decisive role in the field of social innovation, which is extremely important in rural areas, thanks to its ability to provide basic services for the community and promote social inclusion such as social and health services, education, training, environmental products and services, food production, distribution, and consumption, culture, and tourism and in other sectors such as organic agriculture, rural tourism, and renewable energies present high growth potential, not only because of their capacity to create jobs but also due to their contribution to sustainability and the preservation of the natural environment. These activities allow for the diversification of the rural economy, increasing its resilience against economic and environmental crises. However, the backdrop is that social entrepreneurs and enterprises intend to compensate for decline and de-investment by private and public sectors in rural areas (Olmedo et al., 2023).

However, rural entrepreneurs face challenges such as limited access to adequate infrastructure, the lack of stable financing, and the need for specific training to manage socially innovative and sustainable businesses. Bureaucracy and the lack of fiscal incentives often become obstacles that hinder the development of rural entrepreneurship. To overcome these barriers, entrepreneurship through social innovation practices and social economy organizations can be the solution to these challenges by addressing new social needs and challenges with community-led and rooted new solutions.

Entrepreneurs must receive institutional support at both local and national levels, as well as access to training programmes that equip them with skills in business management, technology, and sustainability. Collaboration among institutions, communities, and entrepreneurs will be crucial in capitalising on the opportunities presented by this type of entrepreneurship, promoting a comprehensive approach that includes infrastructure development, improved access to financing, and the strengthening of support networks and cooperation among the different actors involved. Only through joint and coordinated



action can rural entrepreneurship achieve more equitable and sustainable development for rural communities.

## 1.4 Environmental Analysis: Identifying Opportunities for Creating Sustainable Businesses

Analysing the environment is a crucial step in identifying sustainable business opportunities in rural areas. A structured approach allows us to understand the various dynamics that influence the success of rural entrepreneurship, considering both the general factors that affect the region and the specific characteristics of the local business landscape. In the context of sustainable rural entrepreneurship, it is essential to analyse the available resources, emerging opportunities, and specific challenges that characterise each environment. This comprehensive approach helps identify market niches, efficiently utilise combinations of local resources, and establish strategies that promote economic and social development with a positive environmental impact.

The analysis of the rural environment will not only allow us to identify threats and opportunities in the environment, but also to understand rural entrepreneurship as the result of an entrepreneurial activity that is involved and integrated into its spatial context through the use of resources. For this reason, it is not possible to replicate it elsewhere without losing all or part of its key value proposition due to its close relationship with the place.

Below, we examine the main environmental factors and how these influence the identification of opportunities for creating sustainable businesses, with a constant focus on the potential of sustainable rural entrepreneurship.

### 1.4.1 General Environmental Factors

- **Economic:** The economic context plays a fundamental role in determining opportunities for rural entrepreneurship. Factors such as economic growth, per capita income, poverty risk, the unemployment rate, the inflation rate, available investment, tax incentives, or public aid and subsidies can facilitate or obstruct the creation of new businesses. For instance, a growing economy with a focus on sustainability may offer better opportunities for the development of organic products or responsible tourism services. Additionally, grants and financial support programmes for sustainable rural initiatives, both nationally and from the European Union, can be key to lowering entry barriers and fostering innovation in rural areas.
- **Political and Legal:** Government policies and the current legislative framework also play a key role in rural development (Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), LEADER/CLLD programme). In the European rural context, policy actions have notably overlooked the capacity of locally based organisations to tackle social and economic concerns, and policy schemes are usually sectoral and top-down driven

(Sforzi et al., 2025). However, laws that incentivise social economy organisations that operate in all economic sectors (cooperatives, foundations, associations, etc), the use of renewable energy, environmental regulations that promote organic farming, or the conservation of natural spaces are aspects that can favour the creation of sustainable businesses. Moreover, simplifying administrative processes for rural entrepreneurship could facilitate new entrepreneurs' initiatives. A political environment that values and supports local community participation and sustainability can translate into concrete opportunities for those who wish to establish businesses aligned with these principles.

- **Social and Demographic:** Understanding the social and demographic structure of the rural population is essential for identifying specific opportunities. Population ageing, youth migration to cities, educational level, consumer tendencies, prevalent religiosity, minorities and the arrival of new residents with entrepreneurial profiles are shaping the landscape of needs and opportunities. For instance, an ageing population may require specialised healthcare services for older adults, or even adapted recreational activities, while the arrival of young people could create demand for rural co-working spaces, access to technology, training programmes, and digital services. This analysis may also reveal vulnerable groups to whom training and employment could be offered, thereby contributing to social cohesion.
- **Environmental:** The natural and landscape resources available in rural areas represent a fundamental asset for sustainable entrepreneurship. These resources can serve as the basis for projects such as organic farming, eco-tourism, or renewable energy generation. Access to natural resources, biodiversity, and unique landscapes enables the development of activities such as sustainable aquaculture, regenerative livestock, forestry management, nature tourism, or organic food production. Moreover, environmental conservation and the responsible use of local resources align with current trends towards more conscious consumption, thereby increasing the appeal of sustainable rural products and services.
- **Technological:** Technology including infrastructure, digitalisation, and connectivity, has the potential to transform rural businesses, overcoming physical and geographical barriers. Access to high-speed internet, improvements in road infrastructure, and public transport can facilitate local economic development. Connectivity allows rural businesses to participate in e-commerce, connect with clients worldwide, and access information and resources to enhance their operations. Digital platforms and social networks facilitate the marketing of local products to broader markets, enabling rural entrepreneurs to reach consumers who value unique, sustainable products. Digitalisation also enables new business models based on remote work, online sales, or digital services, increasing income opportunities in rural settings. For example, in the agricultural sector, technology



enables precision farming and drone-based crop monitoring. Moreover, better transport infrastructure facilitates the distribution of local products to urban markets and increases the competitiveness of rural businesses by reducing costs and transportation times. Therefore, technology is a fundamental factor that determines the competitiveness, resilience, inclusion and development of rural areas.

#### 1.4.2 Factors Related to the Local Business Landscape

- **Competition:** Understanding who the local competitors are and how they differentiate themselves is fundamental to defining an effective positioning strategy. In rural settings, competition may be lower than in urban areas, but it is also possible to find established businesses with a loyal customer base. Analysing which products or services are available and how one can offer something different or complementary is key to a new venture's success. Competitive advantages could include a unique focus on sustainability, the use of local resources, or the ability to customise products and services according to consumer needs.
- **Collaborations:** Alliances and collaborations are essential to success in the rural setting. Partnering with other local businesses, cooperatives, NGOs, and government institutions can provide access to shared resources, generate synergies, and improve operational efficiency. For example, a cooperative of small farmers could partner with a distribution company to market their products in larger markets, or with a tourism organisation to offer agri-tourism experiences that connect visitors with rural life. Additionally, these collaborations can contribute to creating a circular economy, where one business's waste becomes resources for another, optimising local resources.
- **Value Chain:** Analysing the value chain in rural areas helps identify missing links or inefficiencies that could become business opportunities. For example, in many rural areas, raw material production is not accompanied by adequate local processing, offering the potential to develop small-scale industries that add value to products before they reach the market. Thus, producing jams, artisanal cheeses, or essential oils can increase the value of local resources and generate new sources of income. Additionally, support services for producers, such as logistics, marketing consulting, or training in new technologies, could be established to strengthen the productive chain and make it more competitive.

Therefore, environmental analysis for identifying sustainable business opportunities in the rural sphere requires a detailed understanding of the general and local factors that influence the development and potential success of initiatives. This approach allows us to detect opportunities where local resources, innovation, and consumption trends align

to create businesses with a positive impact on the economy, society, and the environment.

### 1.4.3 Proposed Exercise: Sustainable Business Opportunities Map

#### **Objective:**

Participants must conduct a comprehensive analysis of a specific rural area, identifying sustainable social economy business opportunities based on local resources, demographics, culture, consumer trends, and institutional support.

#### **Instructions:**

1. **Group Division:** Participants will be divided into groups and will select a rural area of interest, either a region close to their localities or an example provided by the training facilitator.
2. **Strategic Landscape Map:** In the chosen virtual tool (Miro or Mural) or physical whiteboard or flipchart, each group will create a “Strategic Landscape Map” including the following categories for analysis:
  - **Economic Environment:**
    - Available investments and grants.
    - Tax incentives for sustainable entrepreneurship.
    - Income per capita.
  - **Political and Legal Framework:**
    - Regulations that favour sustainability (renewable energy, organic farming).
    - Simplified administrative processes for rural businesses.
    - Government support programmes for sustainable rural development.
  - **Social and Demographic Factors:**
    - Population structure (balance between men and women, depopulation, ageing, youth migration, minorities, new residents).
    - Specific needs of the population (elderly healthcare, youth training and employment capacity building).
    - Inclusion of vulnerable groups in training and employment projects.
  - **Natural Resources and Environment:**
    - Availability of resources such as water and biodiversity.
    - Potential for activities such as eco-tourism, organic farming, and renewable energy.
    - Environmental conservation and sustainable resource use.
  - **Technology and Innovation:**
    - Connectivity and digitalisation in rural areas.
    - Application of technology for precision agriculture, crop monitoring and livestock
    - E-commerce and remote work as rural business models.



- **Local Business Landscape:**
    - Competitors and market analysis.
    - Collaborations with local businesses, cooperatives, associations and NGOs.
    - Integration of the circular economy and synergies between sectors.
  - **Local Value Chain:**
    - Processing and added value for local raw materials (artisan products, agribusiness).
    - Support services for production, such as logistics and training.
    - Identification of missing links to improve competitiveness.
  - **Infrastructure and Connectivity:**
    - Access to the internet and road infrastructure improvements.
    - Transport and logistics to facilitate access to external markets.
    - Impact of connectivity on the competitiveness of rural businesses.
    - Digital divide and digital inclusion.
  - **Climate Change and Social Sustainability:**
    - Climate adaptation strategies (reforestation, water management).
    - Sustainable practices to reduce ecological footprint.
    - Resilience to extreme climate events and resource conservation.
    - Strategies for inclusion of vulnerable groups (job opportunities, community events).
3. **Local Research:** Participants gather basic information about the chosen region. They can use online resources, statistical data, or local reports and document this information on the digital map.
  4. **Identification of Opportunities:** Groups place virtual post-its on their map, identifying specific opportunities for creating sustainable businesses within each category (e.g., in biodiversity: eco-tourism, species conservation).
  5. **Prioritisation:** Groups identify and rank the three most promising business opportunities, qualitatively evaluating them based on economic viability, social impact, and environmental benefits.
  6. **Presentation of Results:** Each group presents its analysis and the opportunities identified to the rest of the group, explaining the reasons behind their selection and how they believe these opportunities could be implemented.

#### **Recommended Tools:**

- Miro: An online tool that offers great flexibility with interactive visual maps and customisable templates. <https://miro.com>
- Mural: An online tool ideal for real-time collaborative sessions, with an intuitive and easy-to-use interface, perfect for large teams. <https://mural.co>
- Physical whiteboard or flipchart, sticky notes, markers.

## 1.5 Business Model Design

Designing a solid business model is crucial for any entrepreneurial project, especially in a rural setting where resources are limited and market conditions can be unstable. In this context, it is essential to use tools that allow entrepreneurs to structure, validate, and improve their business models in an agile and efficient manner.

**A business model describes how an organisation does an economic activity**, and consists of a **value proposition** (the product or service offered), the creation of that value (how it is produced or carried out), **the delivery of that value to customers** (how that product or service is made available to customers) **and the capture of value for the company** (how that value is monetised for the company or captured in any other way), bearing in mind that these elements may vary (Bocken and Short, 2016).

The concept of value creation in rural entrepreneurship is close to the shared value concept by Porter & Kramer (2011:66). They defined it as "policies and operations that enhance a company's competitiveness while improving economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates." The shared value approach has tremendous potential in rural areas, as it is about creating value, distributing the value created, and generating new collaborative processes that generate synergies, allowing all interested parties to benefit.

One of the most recognised methodologies in this field is the Lean Startup methodology, which relies on tools such as Business Model Canvas (BMC) by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010). The BMC is not a methodology in itself, but a key tool that facilitates the visualisation and structuring of the business model. By using the BMC within the Lean Startup methodology, rural entrepreneurs can design innovative, socially responsible, and sustainable business models that adapt to market needs and environmental sustainability demands. Social economy initiatives also need a structured representation of how an organisation creates, delivers, and captures value, but in this instance, considering the primacy of social benefit over economic benefit, a democratic and participative structure, and the reinvestment of most of the profits and surpluses to carry out activities in the interest of members/users (collective interest) or society at large (general interest).

### 1.5.1 Introduction to the Business Model Canvas

The Business Model Canvas (BMC), developed by Osterwalder and Pigneur (2010), is a visual tool that helps entrepreneurs design, analyse, and modify their business model in a structured way. This tool establishes **a common vocabulary for discussing business models in a simple, intuitive way**, facilitating their study and discussion among the different stakeholders in the entrepreneurial process. It is applicable in different contexts; in particular, it is valid for a social economy business, although it is used from a different perspective. In this case, the business must pursue the creation of social and economic

value that benefits society. These are businesses that pursue economic, social and environmental sustainability. The Business Model Canvas defines a business model through nine blocks, visually represented on a canvas, allowing an understanding of what the business idea entails, how it is concretely implemented, and the process for generating a return from that idea. These blocks or dimensions are: value proposition, customer segments, distribution channel, customer relationships, key resources, key activities, key partners, revenue streams, and cost sources. This approach allows entrepreneurs to visualise all the components of the business on a single page, facilitating understanding of the initiative's overall functioning.

In the case of a social economy business, each of these should be examined in depth in terms of their social impact (e.g., through the inclusion of vulnerable groups or gender aspects) and their environmental impact (e.g., benefits for the planet).

These nine blocks are:

- **Value Proposition:** This block describes the set of products and services that create value for a specific customer/user segment as they alleviate or satisfy needs. In the case of social economy initiatives in a rural setting, the value proposition should include not only the product or service's functionality but also its positive impact on the environment and the community.

When analysing social impact, we should ask ourselves whether our product or service enables social inclusion and improved living conditions for vulnerable groups (older people, youth, women, migrants, etc.) and whether it is accessible to people with functional diversity. Some examples include thinking about the problems faced by older people and developing products or services that make life easier for this group, or a rural tourism project could offer authentic experiences that preserve local heritage and reduce environmental impact.

When analysing environmental impact, we should ask questions such as whether the product or service protects the environment or enables reduction, recycling, reuse, etc.

- **Customer Segments:** This block defines the different groups of people or entities to which the business is directed. Segmenting consumers, i.e., creating groups of customers with the same characteristics, allows you to better identify and meet their needs, as each segment or group will have similar needs, behaviours, and purchasing habits within the same group and different ones between segments. In the rural context, customer segments may include rural inhabitants, tourists seeking sustainable experiences, consumers who value organic locally sourced products, and local communities that benefit from social projects.

The social and environmental impact must also be considered here, analysing, for example, whether vulnerable groups have been included in our customer/user segment and, if not, how this could be done; by ensuring that our products and services are accessible to customers regardless of their abilities (physical,

economic); or whether customers/users are concerned about the environment and, if not, how they could be made aware of this.

- **Channels:** This block describes the means through which the business communicates and delivers its value proposition to customers/users. In a rural setting, channels may include digital platforms, local markets, eco-friendly product fairs, and proximity distribution networks. Recently, novel channels are seen in rural areas such as mobile delivery units (mobile vans or pop-up trucks that periodically bring groceries, health services, or administrative services), digital or hybrid platforms managed by cooperatives or community groups that aggregate local producers' goods and organise shared logistic services, local pick-up points (community centres, libraries, village shops) where residents can collect online orders, or pilot initiatives using drones to deliver medicines or urgent supplies to isolated rural locations.
- **Customer Relationships:** This block describes the type of relationships the business establishes with each customer segment. In rural entrepreneurship, it is essential to build trust-based relationships that emphasise authenticity and sustainability, which can be achieved through transparency in the production chain or the active participation of the community.
- **Revenue Streams:** Here, the business explains how it generates revenue from each customer segment. A business model can involve two revenue streams: revenue from individual, one-off customer transactions, or recurring revenue from the continued delivery of value to the customer or from post-purchase support. Revenue streams therefore come mainly from the sale of assets, usage fees or charges, subscription fees, loans, rentals, leasing, licences, commissions and advertising. In any case, the sources of revenue depend on the value proposition offered to customers and users. The mechanisms or policies for setting prices will vary depending on that value, the sector, the quality of the product, the characteristics of the market segment for which the company's products are intended (purchasing power or bargaining power, establishing differential pricing for low-income groups, or providing essential services or products free of charge), supply and demand, etc. It is crucial to find a balance between economic profitability and social or environmental impact.
- **Key Resources:** This block identifies the most essential resources required for the business model to function. In a rural setting, key resources may include fertile land, water, local labour, or traditional knowledge. In a social economy venture, we must not forget the social and environmental impact of our resources, such as the gender impact or whether the resources are socially and environmentally responsible, whether non-material resources that are not visible in traditional ventures, such as family support, work-life balance, ethical finance, carbon footprint reduction, etc., are valued.



- **Key Activities:** This block describes the most important actions the business must carry out for its model to function. We are referring to activities related to production (design, manufacturing, distribution, transport, logistics, etc.), organisational activities that enable problem solving (management and administration), and activities that enable interaction with other people, companies, and institutions (marketing, communication, social media, networking, maintenance of virtual platforms, etc.). In a sustainable project, key activities may include organic production, renewable energy management, or the implementation of circular economy practices. In addition to taking into account the social and environmental impact of these activities, such as the role played by women and other vulnerable groups in the distribution and execution of tasks, whether there is a wage gap, equal opportunities, whether there are unpaid tasks, whether resources are used efficiently, and whether environmental awareness activities are carried out.
- **Key Partnerships:** This block refers to the network of suppliers, allies, and collaborators that enable the business model to function. Collaborative networks have become the cornerstone of many business models and enable companies to gain advantages in securing key resources and performing activities they would otherwise be unable to carry out. In a rural context, key partners may be local cooperatives, NGOs that promote sustainability, private-public alliances, or institutions that fund social impact projects.
- **Cost Structure:** Finally, this block describes the most important costs associated with operating the business model. These costs arise from the resources, activities and relationships necessary in a business model. In general, they refer to fixed operating costs, such as facility rental, and variable costs related to the volume of production or activity, such as the cost of materials or inputs. In a sustainable business, it is essential to manage costs related to ecological practices, the use of clean technologies, and social impact.

### **Social Economy Initiatives and Business Models**

Social economy initiatives need business models that show **how to include and empower social and vulnerable groups** to become productive partners and turn their needs into demand. Lüdeke-Freund, Breuer, and Massa (2022) identify different sustainable business model patterns that can be applied to social economy initiatives to guarantee access to products and services for vulnerable groups through social segmentation and to generate revenue in a field where customers (e.g., long-term unemployed, migrants, youth, low-income inhabitants) often cannot pay for the services they use. These are some of those business model patterns<sup>2</sup>:

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<sup>2</sup> All these patterns are in Lüdeke-Freund, Breuer, and Massa (2022).

- **Differential pricing:** different target groups pay different prices for the same offering. Charging groups with higher payment thresholds, higher prices can be a way to subsidise those in need who cannot afford to pay as much and lack access to basic and sometimes urgently needed products and services.
- **Social Freemium (free + premium):** to unbundle an offering and provide a basic service or product free of charge, while charging a fee for advanced features and functionality. These free basic offerings allow businesses to serve customers who are unable or unwilling to pay, while they make money from customers who pay for the premium offering. It can be implemented in sustainability-driven businesses that often face weak demand for their products and services.
- **Customer financing:** to use financing schemes that lower purchasing barriers for customers, because sustainable value propositions are perceived as too expensive or too different.
- **Crowdfunding:** to mobilise an online network to raise capital through relatively small contributions from a large number of individuals. Crowdfunding helps to reach out to potential investors for financing sustainability-driven initiatives. This pattern involves lower levels of risk on both sides of the investment.
- **Microfinance:** to provide small loans or microloans, and other financial services such as savings accounts, insurance, and money transfers to low-income or poor individuals and groups without access to conventional loans.
- **Profit reinvestment:** to focus primarily on solving social problems rather than maximising financial returns for investors, using financing models without interest or dividend payments to investors. Financial gains are reinvested to expand outreach, improve product or service quality, or fund new social business models. Targeted social groups benefit from better quality products and services and lower prices.
- **Buy one, give one:** to donate goods or services to those in need in a fixed ratio to regular sales, thereby creating both commercial and social value. The cost structure of this model depends on the firm's ability to charge a premium price for its offerings or increase its sales by attracting more customers who identify with its social mission.
- **Data for social good:** to satisfy the consumption needs of a social group by offering a product or service for free, while at the same time allowing the firm to accumulate, curate, and commercialise data generated by using the product or service. A free offering attracts a targeted social group, which becomes a “data resource” for a second, paying target group.
- **Expertise broker:** to accumulate insights and expertise on social groups and their special situations and needs as a resource for commercial and non-commercial offerings, generating revenues from other stakeholders, for example, municipalities, associations, policy-makers, NGOs, governments, etc.



- **Employing minority talent:** to offer productive, meaningful, and suitable job opportunities to otherwise marginalised social groups with special needs and talents, creating value for them and the company by leveraging and improving their skills.
- **Soup kitchen:** to satisfy the consumption needs of a social group lacking the money to purchase needed products or services by drawing on third-party resources from donors. The business model finances its operations through donations of money, time, goods, or services. These donors are a second customer segment which “buys into” the entire social mission.
- **Socio-economic empowerment:** to offer new business opportunities for self-employed workers and low-income entrepreneurs caught in poverty traps through the provision of financial and social resources. Entrepreneurs are financially empowered by gaining access to formal labour and capital markets, asset building, and establishing a credit record. They are socially empowered through additional mentoring and peer support programs.
- **Two-sided social business:** to offer a platform to match two social groups, one on the production side and one on the consumption side, that have interrelated needs and shared interests. The group on the production side is willing to offer something for free to engage in a social mission in a productive and meaningful way. The group on the consumption side needs a product or service that is unavailable or unaffordable.
- **Cooperative ownership:** to turn stakeholders into owners and decision-makers, helping them to realise their economic and social needs and aspirations. Cooperatives are typically owned by the same people who operate them, and their main goal is to provide equal benefits to each member, reinvesting most of the profits and surpluses to carry out activities in the interests of members or users.

These socially-oriented business models can be combined, with those business models that combine a social and commercial mission having the most potential to generate income.

### 1.5.2 Applying the Lean Start-up Methodology

The Lean Start-up methodology, popularised by Eric Ries (2011), is an approach that allows entrepreneurs to **develop businesses and products through rapid experimentation**, continuous validation, and agile adaptation to customer needs. Its objective is to avoid significant investments of time and money before being certain that there is market demand for a product or service. This methodology is deeply influenced by Steve Blank’s Customer Development and the Lean Manufacturing concepts developed by Toyota, adapted to the entrepreneurial world. It has also been enhanced by contributions from later authors like Ash Maurya (2012), who added new tools for business model validation, such as the Lean Canvas.

Aware that the objectives of a social enterprise are different from those of a business venture, Dave Moskovitz and Rowan Yeoman (2013), two consultants from New Zealand, adapted the Lean Canvas to social entrepreneurship and proposed their Social Lean Canvas, which analyses the triple bottom line in business: long-term economic viability, positive impact on society and the least possible impact on the environment. This justifies the Social Lean Canvas, adding some blocks to the Lean Canvas, such as the objective or purpose and the impact.

#### **a. Origin and Foundations of Lean Startup:**

The Lean Startup's roots lie in Steve Blank's Customer Development, an approach developed in the 1990s that centres on customers throughout a business's creation process. Blank observed that many businesses failed because they invested substantial resources in product development without first validating whether there was actual demand for their products. From this observation, he proposed a method where entrepreneurship should begin with the search for and validation of a business model before scaling, with an emphasis on customer discovery and understanding their needs.

Lean Startup takes the core principles of Lean Manufacturing, such as waste reduction and continuous improvement, and applies them to entrepreneurship. Instead of developing fully finished products and waiting until their launch to receive feedback, Lean Startup proposes building **minimum viable products** (MVPs), launching them as early as possible, and collecting real data from customer behaviour. This feedback is essential to decide whether to "pivot" (change direction) or "persevere" (continue in the same direction), thus optimising resource use and minimising risks.

#### **b. The Build-Measure-Learn Cycle:**

At the heart of the Lean Startup methodology is the Build-Measure-Learn cycle. This cycle is a continuous repetition of three steps:

- **Build:** The entrepreneur creates a minimum viable product (MVP), a simplified version of the product that allows testing of a specific hypothesis with customers. The goal is to invest the least time and money possible in this phase to create the first functional version of the product.
- **Measure:** Once the MVP is launched, the entrepreneur measures customer behaviour. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected about how customers interact with the product and what issues or benefits they experience. This phase involves validating the business model's initial hypotheses, including the value proposition, customer segments, and distribution channels.
- **Learn:** Based on the collected data, the entrepreneur evaluates whether their hypothesis was confirmed or refuted. From here, they decide whether to continue with the original plan (persevere) or make a significant adjustment in approach (pivot). This learning is crucial for adjusting the business model at each cycle iteration.



### **c. Innovation Accounting:**

A critical aspect of the Lean Start-up methodology is innovation accounting. This is a way of measuring a business's progress by focusing on what has been learned, rather than relying solely on traditional indicators like sales or rapid growth. In other words, it involves evaluating whether the business is genuinely learning about what customers want and whether its ideas are working.

To carry out innovation accounting, specific metrics are used at each stage of the Build-Measure-Learn cycle. First, a simple version of the product called a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) is created, then customer reactions are measured, and finally, lessons are learned to make improvements. The key is that each experiment should help answer important questions about the business, such as "Are customers interested in this feature?" or "Are they willing to pay for this product?"

For example, imagine a rural entrepreneur who wants to launch a new type of sustainable honey. They might create an MVP by producing a small batch of honey with simple packaging and selling it at a local market for a week. They would then observe how many people buy the honey, how many try a sample but do not purchase, and how many show interest but mention that the price is high. All of these are metrics that help understand how well the product is performing.

Based on these observations, the entrepreneur might learn that customers like the honey but find the price a bit high. With this information, they could adjust their business model, perhaps by producing more honey to reduce costs or finding a more economical way to package the product. This process is repeated several times: build something (in this case, the packaged honey), measure customer reactions, and learn what can be improved. This is the essence of innovation accounting: ensuring that each step leads to learning something important about improving the business.

In the context of sustainable entrepreneurship in rural areas, innovation accounting not only measures financial success but also the social and environmental impact of the business model. For example, the honey entrepreneur could also measure whether their production methods help conserve local bees or if they reduce the ecological footprint compared to more traditional methods. This helps ensure that the business is not only profitable but also beneficial for the community and the environment.

**The integration of the Business Model Canvas (BMC) with Lean Start-up is achieved through successive iterations, where the entrepreneur builds their business model based on experiments, customer validations, and constant adjustments.** Each block of the Canvas can be tested with prototypes or minimum viable products (MVPs), allowing for direct customer feedback to refine the value proposition and other aspects of the business with each iteration.

For example, a rural entrepreneur launching a new sustainable agricultural product could start by testing their value proposition with a small group of local customers, adjusting production and distribution channels according to their responses. This approach ensures that the final product is better suited to market needs, minimising the risk of failure.

Continuous validation is one of the key principles of the Lean Start-up methodology. Through innovative accounting, entrepreneurs can measure their initiatives' progress, not only in terms of economic growth but also in terms of social and environmental impact. Innovation accounting involves establishing clear metrics for each BMC block and adjusting activities based on the results obtained.

For example, if an entrepreneur finds that their value proposition is not generating the expected environmental impact, they can modify their business model by introducing new production practices or adjusting their relationships with key partners to include more sustainable suppliers. This approach ensures that the business model is in constant improvement, aligned with sustainability and innovation principles.

### 1.5.3 Proposed Exercise: Applying the Lean Start-up Methodology in Sustainable Rural Entrepreneurship

#### **Objective of the Exercise:**

The purpose of this exercise is to apply the principles of the Lean Start-up methodology to develop a sustainable business model in a rural setting. Using tools like the Business Model Canvas and the Build-Measure-Learn approach, participants will learn how to validate their business ideas in an agile and efficient manner, minimising risks and optimising resources.

#### **Exercise Context:**

Imagine you are an entrepreneur in a rural community who wants to launch an organic farming project focused on high-quality organic produce. Your objective is to create a business model that is not only profitable but also contributes to the community's well-being and environmental protection.

#### **Part 1: Generating an idea:**

Try to devise possible solutions to customer/user problems. To identify issues and opportunities, you can use the "Strategic Landscape Map" of the environmental analysis. Try to find solutions to these issues through tools such as brainstorming or drawnstorming.

#### **Part 2: Designing the Business Model**

Using the Business Model Canvas (BMC) to describe each part of the initiative.



- **Value Proposition:** Define the value proposition of your sustainable venture. What value are you creating for customers? What problem are you solving?
  - Example: Offering organic agricultural products that respect the environment, without pesticides or chemicals, and supporting local biodiversity.
- **Customer Segments:** Identify your potential customers. Who is your product or service aimed at?
  - Example: Environmentally conscious consumers, local markets, and organic product stores.
- **Channels:** Describe how you will deliver your value proposition to your customers. What channels will you use to reach them?
  - Example: Direct sales at local markets, organic stores, and online platforms.
- **Customer Relationships:** Define how you will interact with your customers. What kind of relationship will you establish?
  - Example: Personalised relationship through direct sales at markets and social media, focusing on transparency in the production process.
- **Revenue Streams:** Identify how you will generate income. What are the main revenue sources?
  - Example: Sales of organic products through physical and online channels.
- **Key Resources:** Define the resources needed for your project. What resources are essential?
  - Example: Fertile land, local labour, sustainable agricultural tools.
- **Key Activities:** What are the most important activities to carry out your business model?
  - Example: Organic farming, distribution, and marketing of sustainable products.
- **Key Partnerships:** Who will you partner with to carry out your venture?
  - Example: Agricultural associations, organic product stores, local distributors.
- **Cost Structure:** What are the main costs of your business model?
  - Example: Seeds purchase, organic production costs, transportation, salaries, taxes and marketing, promotion, etc.

### Part 3: Creating the Minimum Viable Product (MVP)

Using the BMC you developed, identify the **riskiest hypothesis** of your business model (for example, that the local public is willing to pay more for organic products). Next, design a Minimum Viable Product (MVP) that allows you to validate this hypothesis with the minimum investment of time and resources.

- **Define your MVP:** What is the simplest version of your product or service that allows you to test your hypothesis?
  - Example: Create a small batch of organic products (fruits and vegetables) and sell them at a local market for a week to see if customers are willing to pay more for them.
- **Test your MVP:** Take your MVP to the market and measure the results. How many products do you sell? What feedback do you receive from customers?

### Part 4: Build-Measure-Learn Cycle

- **Build:** Implement your MVP as defined in Part 2. Make sure to focus on validating your hypothesis.
- **Measure:** After launching your MVP, measure the results. Gather both quantitative data (number of sales, accepted prices) and qualitative data (customer feedback). Ask your customers about their opinions and perceptions of the value of your products.
- **Learn:** Analyse the collected data. Have you validated your hypothesis? Are your customers willing to pay for your organic products? What adjustments should you make to your business model based on these results?

### Part 5: Iteration and Pivot

Based on what you have learned from the Build-Measure-Learn cycle, **make one of the following decisions:**

- **Persevere:** If your hypotheses are validated (for example, customers are willing to pay a premium for organic products), you can continue with your business model by increasing production or seeking new sales channels.
- **Pivot:** If your hypotheses are not validated (for example, customers are not willing to pay more for organic products), make a significant adjustment to your business model. You may need to change your value proposition, adjust pricing, or target new customer segments.

### Part 6: Innovation Accounting

Finally, establish key metrics to track your venture's progress. These metrics should align with sustainability objectives and social impact. Some potential metrics include:



- **Sales and Growth:** Number of products sold in local markets and online platforms.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Reduction in water or pesticide use compared to conventional methods.
- **Social Impact:** Number of jobs created in the local community or community involvement in agricultural activities.

Ensure you continuously follow this iterative process, improving and adjusting your business model based on the data you obtain.

## 1.6 Making a Business Plan

**Creating a business plan is one of the most important steps** after designing the business model through the Business Model Canvas methodology and validating the value proposition and business model using methodologies like Lean Startup. This phase marks the beginning of the detailed structuring of the venture, facilitating a comprehensive vision and organising all key aspects for the project's implementation, growth, and scalability. A business plan not only guides operational and strategic processes but also serves as a reference document for potential investors, partners, and collaborators.

The business plan should focus on three pillars: economic viability, positive environmental impact, and social contribution. This plan is intended to guide rural entrepreneurs as they transition from business model validation to execution and scalability. It will rely on the KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) obtained in the validation phase to establish a clear path toward long-term success and sustainability.

The key components of a business plan include the following:

### 1.6.1 Executive Summary

The executive summary provides a clear, **concise overview of the project**, highlighting its social purpose, value proposition, economic model, impact on the rural community, and key expected results. This section should be brief yet impactful, as it is often the first (and sometimes only) part of the business plan that investors or partners will read.

Example: Suppose the project is an organic dairy farm in a rural area with high biodiversity. The executive summary would highlight how this venture will use sustainable livestock practices that not only offer high-quality products but also contribute to the conservation of local flora and fauna, create jobs for community residents, and generate both economic and social benefits.

### 1.6.2 Business Description

- **Mission and Vision:** The **mission** is the reason for an organisation's existence in the present, defining its purpose, its activity scope, and how it operates, while the **vision** describes the desired long-term future it aspires to achieve. Specifically,

the **social mission** is the statement that clearly and concisely defines the central social purpose of a social economy organisation or social enterprise. It explains which social, environmental, or community problem it aims to address, for whom, and through which general approach.

- Example: For a rural tourism project focused on well-being, the vision might be “To be a leading sustainable tourism provider in the region, offering immersive experiences that connect visitors with nature and local traditions.” The mission, in turn, could be “To offer eco-friendly tourism services that respect the environment while preserving local culture and generating income for the rural community.”
- **Sustainable Value Proposition:** This section should explain how the business will generate not only economic value but also social and environmental benefits. It is crucial to highlight how the venture will stand out from competitors and how it will benefit both the community and the natural environment.
  - Example: An organic farming project might offer fresh, pesticide-free products to the local community and larger markets, focusing on soil regeneration and responsible water use. The value proposition could include, for instance, direct-to-consumer sales through a circular economy model, where agricultural waste is transformed into compost to improve soil health.
- **SMART Objectives: Define specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) objectives.** These objectives should address not only economic growth but also the improvement of the project’s social and environmental impact.
  - Example: “Increase production by 25% over the next two years while reducing energy use by 30% through the implementation of solar panels and recycling 80% of agricultural waste.”

### 1.6.3 Market Analysis

Building on the environmental analysis described in Section 3, a market analysis will be conducted to determine how the business model fits into the specific context of the rural environment. This analysis will focus on identifying existing opportunities based on demographic, socio-economic, and natural resource conditions, to adapt the business model to the characteristics and needs of the rural market.

The market study will be a key tool for assessing demand potential, identifying competitors, and defining appropriate customer segments. Specific aspects to address include:

- **Demand Study:** In this section, analyse the demand for sustainable products or services at both local and broader market levels. This involves researching



consumers/users' preferences, purchasing trends, and customers' willingness to pay a premium for sustainable products or services.

- Example: For an organic dairy product project, you could investigate the growing demand for organic foods in the region, identifying niches like health-conscious consumers or families seeking pesticide-free products.
- **Competitor Analysis:** This section should identify direct and indirect competitors and highlight the sustainable business's competitive advantages. It should compare both local competitors and those in nearby markets that may also offer sustainable products or services.
  - Example: In an agri-tourism project, competitors might include other rural accommodations. The sustainable venture's competitive advantage could lie in its unique offerings, such as permaculture workshops or gastronomic experiences featuring locally grown ingredients.
- **Customer Segmentation:** Precisely defining the business's target audience is crucial for creating an effective marketing strategy. It is important to consider customers' needs and preferences, as well as their willingness to pay for sustainable products or services, while being aware of the purchasing power and potential vulnerabilities of the selected social groups.
  - Example: In a direct-to-consumer organic vegetable project, customer segments might include urban, middle-to-upper-class consumers interested in healthy, environmentally friendly eating.

#### 1.6.4 Sustainable Marketing Plan

- **Product/Service Strategy:** Detail the distinguishing features of the product or service, emphasising the sustainable aspects that make it attractive to consumers.
  - Example: For a rural solar energy company, the product strategy could focus on offering affordable and sustainable energy solutions for rural households, highlighting long-term savings and reduced carbon footprint.
- **Pricing Strategy:** The pricing policy should reflect the added value of sustainability. While sustainable products are often priced higher due to production costs, consumers are willing to pay more for the positive impact they provide. However, pricing strategies such as "differential pricing" or "social freemium" can incentivise the purchase by low-income groups.
  - Example: For organic dairy products, the pricing strategy could be based on superior product quality, as well as the company's commitment to animal welfare and responsible production.
- **Distribution Strategy:** Distribution channels should be efficient and low in environmental impact. This may include direct-to-consumer sales at local markets or the use of sustainable e-commerce platforms.

- Example: An organic farm could distribute its products via a home delivery service using bicycles or electric vehicles, minimising the carbon footprint.
- **Promotion Strategy:** The communication plan should highlight the project's sustainable benefits and its positive impact on the rural community.
  - Example: A sustainable rural tourism project could be promoted through social media campaigns showing how the activities respect nature and offer an authentic, eco-conscious experience.

### 1.6.5 Sustainable Operational Plan

- **Processes and Technologies:** Describe the operational processes and technologies that will be employed to maintain sustainability. This may include renewable energy sources, low-impact agricultural practices, or waste reduction methods.
  - Example: A sustainable honey production company could implement eco-friendly beekeeping practices that respect the natural life cycle of bees, using renewable energy for extraction and product processing.
- **Resource Management:** Explain how natural resources will be managed responsibly.
  - Example: An organic farm might implement crop rotation and composting to maintain soil fertility without the need for chemical fertilisers.
- **Supply Chain:** Detail how sustainability will be integrated into the supply chain, prioritising local suppliers and ethical practices.
  - Example: A natural cosmetics producer could source ingredients exclusively from small, local farmers who practice regenerative agriculture.

### 1.6.6 Organisational and Human Resources Plan

- **Organisational Structure:** Define roles and responsibilities within the team, participatory practices and democratic governance, including functions related to sustainability.
  - Example: In a sustainable agricultural cooperative, roles could include a sustainability manager responsible for overseeing water efficiency and composting practices.
- **Hiring Policy:** Establish hiring criteria that prioritise local people and promote minority talent and diversity, to offer productive, meaningful, and suitable job opportunities to otherwise marginalised social groups with special needs and talents, creating value for them and the company by leveraging and improving their skills. This section must include an Equality and Social Inclusion Plan for the company.
  - Example: A rural tourism project might prioritise hiring local guides with extensive knowledge of the area's culture and natural environment or



employ vulnerable groups, such as migrants, people with disabilities, women, or unemployed youth.

- **Staff Development:** Plan for continuous training programmes on sustainability, circular economy, technology, digitalisation, and social inclusion.
  - Example: In a sustainable textile production company, regular workshops could be organised for employees on new techniques to reduce waste and use recycled materials.

### 1.6.7 Choice of legal form

The social economy encompasses a wide range of organisations and enterprises, from traditional structures such as **cooperatives, mutual benefit societies, associations (including charities), and foundations** to more innovative ones such as **social enterprises**. Although they are regulated specifically in each Member State of the European Union, they share a way of doing business that combines the general or social interest with economic viability and democratic governance. The social economy overcomes the limitations of the economy with social and environmental considerations.

Their focus on people and the environment over income and their close relationship with local communities make them highly relevant to entrepreneurship in rural areas. In this way, it meets the social service needs of the most vulnerable (the elderly, migrants, young people, people with disabilities, etc.), education needs, food production and distribution needs for isolated people, creates jobs and collaborates in the digital transition. In other words, it stimulates entrepreneurship in response to the basic needs of areas where the traditional economy does not reach due to low profit expectations.

The legal form that best suits the product/service offered must be chosen, as well as those who can collaborate in establishing it: from the users themselves through an association, the workers through a cooperative, or the sponsorship of institutions or individuals who contribute their resources to the creation of a foundation, in addition to a company with a traditional legal form but with limited profit distribution in its statutes and which contributes to the social and environmental development of the area.

### 1.6.8 Economic and Financial Plan

- **Initial Investment:** Outline the start-up costs, including all necessary investments for initial operations, with a particular emphasis on sustainable technologies and essential resources for business operations. These costs may cover infrastructure, equipment acquisition, clean energy technologies, and hiring specialised staff in the early stages of the project. It is essential to consider all necessary resources to ensure efficient and sustainable operation from the beginning.
  - Example: A renewable energy company may need an initial investment for the purchase and installation of solar panels in rural communities.

Additionally, they should consider training local workers for the maintenance of these panels and implementing remote monitoring systems to ensure long-term energy efficiency.

- **Financial Projections:** Provide detailed projections of income and expenses, including analysis of possible scenarios for business development, such as optimistic, pessimistic, and realistic outlooks. It is crucial to estimate not only potential revenue growth but also variable and fixed costs, along with investments needed in marketing, technology, and human resources. Including a cash flow projection to ensure the project's liquidity during its early years is also essential.
  - Example: A direct-to-consumer organic food venture could project an annual sales growth of 20% due to rising demand for healthy, sustainable foods. Additionally, they should estimate the cost of expanding to new markets, including logistics, digital marketing, and organic certifications needed to attract more discerning consumers. A reinvestment plan for profits should also be included to enhance production and distribution efficiency.
- **Funding Sources:** Identify potential funding sources, such as grants for green projects, social investors, low-interest loans, or crowdfunding. Diversifying funding sources is essential to reduce risks and enhance the project's financial stability, while taking advantage of government and international support programmes that promote sustainable development. Partnerships with companies sharing the project's sustainable vision could also be considered, potentially resulting in financial or in-kind contributions.
  - Example: A rural tourism business could access rural development funds or financing programmes for sustainable tourism. Additionally, it could explore collaborations with NGOs supporting environmental conservation initiatives, attracting investors interested in the project's positive social and environmental impact. Another option would be using crowdfunding platforms to involve the community and generate initial capital, fostering a sense of belonging among future clients and collaborators.

### 1.6.9 Social and Environmental Impact

- **Sustainability Metrics:** Define key performance indicators (KPIs) that measure social and environmental impact.
  - Example: In an organic farm, an environmental KPI could be reducing water usage by 30% through efficient irrigation techniques, while a social KPI could be the number of people with disabilities involved within the value chain.
- **Evaluation Plan:** Establish a monitoring and evaluation system to measure progress towards sustainability objectives.



- Example: A renewable energy project could conduct annual evaluations of energy savings and CO<sub>2</sub> emissions reductions.
- **Risk Management:** Identify potential risks and develop mitigation strategies.
  - Example: In an agricultural project, climate risks could be managed by diversifying crops that are more resistant to droughts.

### 1.6.10 Conclusions and Future Projections

The conclusions and future projections section in the business plan is crucial, as it provides a final overview that summarises the project's viability and long-term outlook. This section presents a consolidated analysis of all aspects covered in the plan, highlighting the most relevant points regarding economic, social, and environmental sustainability. Additionally, it should outline a clear vision of how the enterprise will evolve and scale in the future, underscoring its potential for growth and replicability in other rural contexts.

**The conclusions should demonstrate that the project is financially viable and has a positive social and environmental impact,** reinforcing the value proposition developed in the business plan. It is important to summarise the following key points:

- **Economic Sustainability:** Summarise the elements that ensure long-term profitability, such as financial forecasts, established demand for products or services, and identified growth opportunities in the market. This includes justifying that the business model is profitable and capable of sustaining itself through consistent revenue generation.
- **Social Impact:** This section should summarise the social benefits the project will bring to the rural community. This may include local job creation, the promotion of social inclusion, and how the project helps improve the population's quality of life. For instance, the enterprise might offer training and employment to disadvantaged groups within the community, such as youth without job opportunities or women in rural areas.
- **Environmental Impact:** Finally, it is essential to highlight the positive impact the business will have on the natural environment, emphasising sustainable practices implemented. This could include reducing the use of non-renewable resources, conserving biodiversity, or minimising waste. For example, an agricultural venture might mention the use of regenerative agriculture techniques that not only preserve the soil but also improve it.

**Future projections** should present a clear vision of how the business **plans to scale and consolidate over the coming years**, based on the experience gained during the project's initial phases. It is important for these future projections to focus not only on financial growth but also on how the project will maintain and expand its positive impact on communities and the environment.

- **Market Growth:** Project how the business plans to expand its market reach in the coming years. This could involve broadening the range of products or services offered, exploring new geographic markets, or increasing the customer base.
  - Example: If the project is an organic farm currently selling products in local markets, future projections could include expansion to regional or even national markets through e-commerce channels. Product diversification, such as introducing organic dairy products and selling them in specialised health food stores, could also be planned.
- **Business Model Replicability:** A sustainable rural project can have significant potential for replicability in other rural communities with similar characteristics. Projections should include how this model can be adapted to other environments, allowing more regions to benefit from the experience gained.
  - Example: A successful sustainable rural tourism business in a mountainous region could replicate its model in other rural areas with similar attractions. The focus on sustainability, including offering ecotourism experiences and preserving natural heritage, can be a competitive advantage that can be replicated in new locations, benefiting both the community and the environment.
- **Investment in Innovation and Sustainability:** Future projections should include plans for continued innovation to maintain competitiveness and improve business impact. This may involve investment in new sustainable technologies, improved production processes, or the adoption of more advanced sustainability practices.
  - Example: An organic farm might project investments in precision irrigation systems to further reduce water use or install technology for real-time soil health monitoring. Such investments not only improve operational efficiency but also reinforce the business's commitment to sustainability.
- **Scalability:** It is essential to anticipate how the business can scale sustainably. Scalability implies increasing production capacity without compromising core sustainability values. Planning for growth should ensure the business maintains its positive impact on the environment and community.
  - Example: A renewable energy venture in a rural community could project expanding its energy generation capacity by installing more solar panels or wind turbines, supplying more local homes and businesses. As demand for clean energy grows, the business can scale while prioritising sustainability and responsible resource use.
- **Collaborations and Strategic Partnerships:** Finally, future projections may include establishing new partnerships and collaborations with other businesses, local governments, or NGOs that can contribute to the business's growth and strengthen its social and environmental impact.
  - Example: A reforestation business in rural areas might seek partnerships with international NGOs supporting environmental conservation initiatives. These



collaborations would not only provide additional resources and visibility but also increase the project's positive environmental impact.

### 1.6.11 Practical Example

Imagine the project is an agricultural cooperative that produces and markets organic honey in a rural area. The conclusions could summarise that the cooperative has successfully created a network of local beekeepers, adopted sustainable agricultural practices that protect the ecosystem, and established marketing channels in regional markets. Future projections would include expanding the cooperative to other rural areas with beekeeping potential, diversifying into honey-derived products (such as organic cosmetics), and adopting new technologies to optimise production without compromising sustainability principles.

Regarding scalability, the cooperative could project a 30% growth in honey production over the next five years through investment in new eco-friendly hives and the implementation of digital monitoring systems to ensure bee health. At the same time, the cooperative would aim to expand its network of beekeepers by training more community members in sustainable beekeeping, generating a positive impact on local employment and biodiversity.

## 1.7 Specific Marketing for Rural Products and Services

Marketing for sustainable rural products and services plays a crucial role in the development of local economies while driving environmental preservation and social well-being. In rural settings, the sustainable approach to marketing is not only a growing trend but also a necessity. The key is to promote products and services that not only generate economic value but also respect natural resources and strengthen rural communities.

In a world where sustainability awareness is on the rise, consumers seek products aligned with their environmental values. Rural products have the potential to offer authentic and sustainable solutions, and through effective marketing, these products can reach local, regional, and even global markets. This section explores how to develop specific marketing strategies that not only boost profitability but also contribute to sustainability in rural environments.

### 1.7.1 Introduction to Sustainable Marketing in Rural Settings

Sustainable marketing in rural environments aims not only to meet consumer needs but to do so in a way that minimises environmental impact and maximises social benefits. Unlike traditional marketing approaches, which focus solely on economic profit, sustainable marketing integrates ethical and ecological principles at every stage of the value chain and is accessible to different social groups.

One of the main characteristics of rural sustainable marketing is its orientation towards shared value. This means that marketed products and services should not only be profitable but also improve the quality of life of local communities. This can be achieved through the use of local materials, the implementation of fair-trade practices, and the protection of the natural resources that are essential for rural economies.

- **Challenges and opportunities in the rural environment:** Marketing in rural areas presents specific challenges, such as a lack of technological infrastructure, limited access to global markets, and the geographical dispersion of consumers/users. However, it also offers significant opportunities, such as the authenticity of products, local culture, and the growing demand for sustainable products from conscious consumers.
- **Shared Value:** Rather than focusing solely on maximising financial return, rural marketing strategies should integrate the concept of shared value, where both the company and the community benefit. An example of this is the promotion of agroecological products that not only generate income but also foster the preservation of local biodiversity.

### 1.7.2 Market Analysis and Segmentation in Rural Areas

The foundation of any effective marketing strategy is a thorough market analysis. In the case of sustainable rural products and services, this must consider both the demographic and psychographic aspects of consumers. In rural areas, this analysis faces challenges such as the lack of detailed statistical data or limited technology presence, requiring adapted research methods.

Market analysis in rural areas should focus on identifying who the potential consumers of sustainable products are. These may include not only local residents but also tourists, nearby urban communities, and, in many cases, global consumers who value authentic and sustainable rural products. It is essential for rural businesses to understand the diverse motivations and behaviours of these segments.

- **Market Research in Rural Areas:** Due to low population density and limited access to technological tools, traditional market research techniques may not be feasible in rural settings. Instead, it is important to use more informal data collection methods, such as direct interviews with residents, surveys at local fairs, or focus groups within communities. For example, an agricultural cooperative in a rural area could conduct surveys at local markets to understand consumer preferences for organic
- **Rural Market Segmentation:** Once data is collected, it is essential to segment the market into specific groups with common characteristics. For instance, in the case of a product like sustainable artisanal cheese, market segments could include tourists interested in local products, urban consumers concerned with food



sustainability, and local customers who value traditional products. Each segment will require a tailored marketing strategy to meet its particular needs.

- **Sustainable Consumption Trends:** Globally, consumers are increasingly interested in products that have a positive impact on the environment and society. In rural areas, this trend can be leveraged to promote products that use regenerative agricultural practices, respect natural cycles, and minimise the use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers. One example is the rise of sustainable beekeeping in rural areas, where marketing focuses on bee protection and biodiversity promotion.

### 1.7.3 Development of Sustainable Products and Services

The development of sustainable products and services in a rural setting is based on creating goods that not only satisfy consumer needs but also respect ecological limits. Sustainable rural products are often closely linked to the natural environment, including organic foods, artisanal goods, renewable energies, or ecotourism services.

A key strategy in developing sustainable products is the use of local materials and traditional techniques that have proven to be efficient and environmentally friendly over time. Furthermore, it is important for these products to maintain clear traceability, which means that consumers should have access to information about the product's origin, production practices used, and the environmental impact of its manufacture.

- **Design of Sustainable Products:** For a product to be truly sustainable, its design must consider the entire lifecycle, from the sourcing of raw materials to final disposal. An example could be the design of furniture made from reclaimed wood in a rural setting, where marketing focuses not only on the quality and durability of the product but also on its low environmental impact.
- **Product Lifecycle:** In rural contexts, a product's lifecycle may be affected by factors such as seasonality, raw material availability, or climate variability. Businesses should be able to adjust their production and marketing strategies according to the product's lifecycle stage. For instance, a company that produces organic olive oil may emphasise sustainable farming practices during the growth phase, while in the maturity phase, it may focus on expanding into international markets interested in premium products.
- **Innovation in Rural Services:** In addition to tangible products, sustainable rural services like ecotourism or agricultural experiences are on the rise. For example, a rural farm offering agro-ecological tourism stays is not only marketing an experience but also promoting a sustainable lifestyle. Innovation in these services should focus on ensuring authenticity and a connection with nature, two values highly appreciated by today's consumers.

#### 1.7.4 Pricing Strategies for Sustainable Products in Rural Environments

Pricing is a crucial factor in marketing sustainable products and services in rural settings. Consumers are often willing to pay a higher price for products that are eco-friendly and sustainable, as long as they perceive added value. However, in rural areas, setting competitive prices can be challenging due to higher production costs and reduced profit margins. Therefore, rural businesses must adopt a pricing strategy that reflects both the sustainable production costs and the perceived customer value.

- **Value-Based Pricing:** Instead of simply calculating production costs and adding a profit margin, value-based pricing focuses on what consumers are willing to pay for the additional benefits of sustainable products.
  - Example: Organic honey produced in a rural area, where consumers value not only the taste and quality but also the fact that production respects bee welfare and promotes biodiversity.
- **Pricing Strategies Adapted to Rural Markets and Vulnerable Groups:** It is essential to differentiate between prices set for local consumers and those set for external markets, such as tourism or exports. Also, pricing strategies such as “differential pricing” or “social freemium” can make products and services affordable for low-income groups.
  - Example: A rural cooperative producing organic dairy products could set a more accessible price for local consumers, while premium products aimed at international markets could be priced higher due to their added value and exclusivity.
- **Incentives and Subsidies:** Many rural areas can benefit from government or international incentives and subsidies that promote sustainable production or social services. These financial supports enable rural producers to reduce costs and offer more competitive prices.
- Social economy enterprises often cover basic services such as social services for the elderly, education, the disabled and other vulnerable groups. As these enterprises do not focus on maximising profits and benefit from incentives, they are able to be economically viable while providing services at one or more different prices according to the economic capacity of the type of users they target.
  - Example: Organic farming support programmes help farmers transition to more sustainable practices without significantly increasing the cost for the end consumer.
  - Example: The Dependency Law allows part of the cost of an elderly person's stay in a day centre or residential home to be financed through the assistance they receive, with the price of the service being commensurate with their financial means.



### 1.7.5 Distribution Channels in Rural Areas

One of the greatest challenges for rural products is distribution. The distance from urban centres and the lack of adequate infrastructure can make it difficult to access markets. However, the development of efficient and sustainable distribution channels can help overcome these barriers, allowing rural products to reach both local consumers and broader markets.

- **Local Distribution:** In many rural areas, local markets, farmers' fairs, and cooperatives play a fundamental role in the distribution of sustainable products. These channels not only allow producers to connect directly with consumers but also promote a more sustainable local economy model.
  - Example: A cooperative selling organic products at a local market not only distributes its goods but also promotes a circular economy within the community.
- **Access to Urban and Global Markets:** Although local markets are important, most sustainable rural products have the potential to reach broader markets. E-commerce platforms have enabled small rural producers to sell their products nationally and internationally.
  - Example: The sale of rural crafts on online platforms specialising in ethical and sustainable products allows urban and even global consumers to access rural products without intermediaries.
- **Rural Logistics:** Logistics is an ongoing challenge in rural areas due to distances, terrain, and limited infrastructure. Companies wishing to implement sustainable distribution must find innovative solutions, such as using electric or shared vehicles to reduce carbon emissions.
  - Example: An agricultural cooperative using shared vehicles to distribute products to nearby communities, thereby reducing costs and environmental impact.

### 1.7.6 Communication and Promotion Strategies

In the marketing of sustainable rural products, communication is essential to highlight the environmental and social value of the products. Consumers need to understand how rural products contribute to sustainability and how choosing these products can make a difference. Communication strategies should be authentic and highlight the ecological, social, and economic benefits of sustainable products.

- **Relational Marketing in Rural Environments:** Relational marketing focuses on building long-term relationships with customers, based on trust and transparency. In rural contexts, this involves engaging consumers in the story behind the product, showcasing the production process, and connecting with them emotionally.

- Example: A farm offering guided tours where consumers can see first-hand how organic food is produced, strengthening trust and loyalty toward the brand.
- **Communicating Sustainable Value:** Consumers are increasingly interested in understanding the environmental and social impact of the products they consume. Rural businesses should therefore ensure that sustainability is at the core of their message. This includes highlighting sustainable practices such as the use of renewable energy, biodiversity conservation, or support for local communities.
  - Example: A company that produces handmade textiles in a rural area can promote how its production supports indigenous communities and preserves ancestral traditions.
- **Digital Marketing in Rural Areas:** Despite connectivity challenges in rural areas, digital marketing offers a unique opportunity to expand the reach of sustainable products. Social media, blogs, and e-commerce platforms allow small rural producers to connect with sustainability-conscious consumers worldwide.
  - Example: A small natural cosmetics company from a rural area might use Instagram and Facebook to promote its products and educate consumers on the benefits of natural ingredients and the sustainability of its practices.

## 1.8 Ethical Financial Management

Ethical financial management is a crucial component for the success of sustainable entrepreneurial projects in rural environments. This type of management not only aims to maximise financial benefits but also aligns with principles of sustainability, social justice, and transparency. In rural entrepreneurship, where the local community and environment play a fundamental role, implementing ethical financial management ensures that resources are used efficiently, responsibly, and with a positive impact on all stakeholders (Schoenmaker & Schramade, 2019).

Sustainable rural entrepreneurship projects can benefit from adopting sustainable finance, which seeks to balance economic growth with environmental and social well-being. This involves considering the long-term impacts of financial decisions and adopting practices that promote equity and inclusive economic development. In this context, financial ethics translates into the implementation of principles that include transparency in fund management, fair distribution of benefits, and investment in practices that protect and restore natural resources, as well as empowering local communities.

### 1.8.1 Principles of Ethical Financial Management

- **Transparency and Accountability:** Entrepreneurs must ensure that all financial decisions are transparent and that the local community is informed about the use



of financial resources. This strengthens trust and enables greater stakeholder participation. For example, rural cooperatives often report to their members on the profits obtained and investments made, ensuring that funds are used to support both the enterprise and the community.

- **Investments in Sustainable and Social Projects:** Ethical management includes prioritising investments that respect the environment and contribute to long-term sustainability while generating positive social impact. This involves financing initiatives that not only promote the use of renewable energies or regenerative agricultural practices but also projects that improve the quality of life of local communities, such as creating decent employment, providing access to essential services, and promoting education and training.
- **Financial and Social Inclusion:** It is essential that sustainable rural projects include all community members, particularly the most vulnerable, such as small producers, women, youth, or families with limited resources. Through financial instruments like microcredits, cooperative loans, or ethical financing, rural entrepreneurs can ensure that project benefits are equitably shared, promoting social cohesion and reducing inequality. This fosters more inclusive development, valuing and strengthening the capacities of diverse local actors, ensuring that economic and social sustainability go hand in hand.

### 1.8.2 Application of Ethical Finance in Rural Projects

For example, an agricultural cooperative operating in a rural area can implement ethical financial management by using its profits not only to improve community infrastructure, such as access to clean water or education, but also to strengthen social cohesion by creating local employment programmes and supporting the most vulnerable community sectors. This might include training youth in sustainable agricultural practices or supporting small producers through microcredits or technical assistance.

At the same time, it can establish clear policies for reinvesting profits in sustainable agricultural practices, such as purchasing technology to reduce water or energy consumption, and in social projects that improve the quality of life in the community, such as building health centres or creating educational spaces. This approach ensures that the economic benefits generated by the cooperative have a direct positive impact on social equity, fostering inclusive and sustainable development.

This type of management not only generates economic benefits but also improves the quality of life for all community members, reduces inequality, and strengthens the project's long-term sustainability by creating a more just and balanced environment both socially and environmentally.

Ethical financial management in rural entrepreneurship is not only a matter of responsibility but a key strategy to ensure the long-term viability of projects, fostering both economic development and the preservation of the natural and social environment.

## 1.9 New Opportunities for Rural Entrepreneurship

Sustainable rural development goes beyond agriculture and natural resource management; it also involves integrating various economic and social activities that promote overall well-being and economic growth. In this context, digitalisation, sustainable tourism, social services, and the valorisation of culture and heritage play crucial roles in creating dynamic and resilient rural communities. This section explores how these elements can be integrated to promote sustainable rural development in diverse areas, from service provision to cultural heritage preservation.

### 1.9.1 Digitalisation in the Rural Environment

Digitalisation has transformed all industries, and rural areas are no exception. The implementation of digital technologies in rural areas enables small businesses and communities to access broader markets, improve operational efficiency, and develop new business models.

- **Access to New Markets:** Digital tools allow rural products and services to be marketed globally through e-commerce and digital platforms. For instance, rural artisans can sell their products on platforms like Etsy or Amazon Handmade, eliminating traditional geographical barriers.
- **Precision Agriculture:** Technologies like drones, sensors, and big data allow farmers to optimise resource management, reducing waste and increasing productivity. These innovations not only make agriculture more efficient but also more sustainable.
- **Digital Inclusion and Connectivity:** Despite the benefits, rural areas often face connectivity challenges. Improving internet access and technology availability is crucial for rural entrepreneurs to fully leverage the opportunities offered by digitalisation. Initiatives such as the expansion of 5G networks and access to online training platforms are essential steps to reduce the digital divide in these areas.

### 1.9.2 Sustainable Tourism in Rural Communities

Sustainable tourism has become a major economic activity for many rural communities, providing employment opportunities while fostering the conservation of the natural and cultural environment. This type of tourism focuses on minimising environmental impact and promoting authentic experiences that respect the local cultural heritage.

- **Ecotourism:** Ecotourism is a form of sustainable tourism aimed at connecting visitors with nature, encouraging environmental education and respect for the natural environment. Rural communities can develop small, sustainable tourist infrastructures, such as eco-lodges or interpretative trails, to attract tourists interested in biodiversity and traditional agricultural practices.



- **Cultural Tourism:** In addition to nature tourism, cultural tourism offers an opportunity for rural communities to promote their traditions, cuisine, and crafts. For example, traditional festivals or visits to historical sites can attract visitors interested in learning more about the region's heritage.
- **Community Benefits:** Sustainable tourism generates jobs and can revitalise economically depressed rural areas. However, it is essential to manage it so that the benefits are distributed equitably among community members, ensuring that neither the environment nor cultural traditions are compromised.

### 1.9.3 Social Services in Rural Areas

Access to quality social services remains a persistent challenge in rural areas. However, social entrepreneurship and innovation offer solutions tailored to the needs of these communities.

- **Telemedicine:** Digitalisation has enabled healthcare to reach rural areas through telemedicine. This allows residents in remote locations to access medical consultations, diagnoses, and treatments without travelling long distances.
- **Education and Training Programmes:** Education is key to sustainable development, and in rural areas, professional training can focus on skills relevant to sustainable agriculture or tourism. Online training and distance learning courses also enable young people to access education without leaving their communities.
- **Community Inclusion Projects:** In the realm of social services, initiatives that promote inclusion and social well-being for vulnerable groups, such as the elderly or people with disabilities, are essential. Projects that encourage digital inclusion, healthcare access, and recreational activities involving the entire community are crucial for fostering social cohesion and improving the quality of life in rural areas.

### 1.9.4 Culture and Heritage as Drivers of Development

The cultural heritage of rural communities is a unique asset that, when managed correctly, can become a driver of development. Preserving local culture not only strengthens community identity but also has the potential to attract tourism and generate income.

- **Heritage Preservation:** Conserving historical buildings, archaeological sites, and local traditions—such as festivals and cuisine—is essential to maintaining the cultural identity of rural areas. For example, in Spain, some rural villages have transformed centuries-old festivals into tourist attractions, creating jobs and increasing local pride.
- **Local Cultural Production:** Promoting cultural production, such as handicrafts, traditional music, or rural literature, can generate income while revitalising local traditions. Collaborative projects between local artisans and designers can create products that attract both tourists and international markets.

- **Integrating Heritage into Economic Development:** Integrating cultural heritage into local economic planning allows for the creation of narratives that promote both conservation and development. For instance, revitalisation programmes in abandoned or declining villages can attract investment and new job opportunities, especially in tourism and culture.

## 1.10 Corporate Sustainability Indicators

To **manage and measure the success of sustainable entrepreneurship** in rural areas, it is essential to use sustainability indicators, both **quantitative and qualitative**, that encompass economic, environmental, and social aspects. These indicators allow entrepreneurs to assess the impact of their activities and improve decision-making to ensure long-term success. Additionally, these indicators provide a comprehensive view of business performance, facilitating the identification of improvement areas and the establishment of strategies that maximise positive impacts on both the environment and the community.

Sustainability indicators not only help monitor progress toward environmental and social objectives but also enable businesses to adapt to new regulations and market trends demanding increased social and environmental responsibility. This is crucial for ensuring competitiveness and business resilience in an increasingly sustainability-focused economic environment. Implementing these indicators also promotes transparency, which strengthens trust among consumers, investors, and other stakeholders, fostering strategic partnerships and access to new financing opportunities.

### 1.10.1 Environmental Indicators

- **Carbon Footprint:** This indicator measures the greenhouse gas emissions produced by business activities. Reducing the carbon footprint is essential to minimise environmental impact. An example of its application is agricultural businesses implementing organic farming techniques to reduce the use of fossil fuels and chemicals. Additionally, companies can perform periodic energy audits to identify areas for improvement and set emissions reduction targets.
- **Efficient Resource Use:** This indicator refers to the number of natural resources, such as water or energy, that the company uses. Sustainable practices should focus on optimising these resources, such as efficient irrigation or using renewable energy in production processes. For example, drip irrigation technology can significantly reduce water consumption, while solar panel installations can decrease reliance on non-renewable energy sources.
- **Biodiversity Conservation:** Protecting local ecosystems is essential to ensure that economic growth does not degrade the natural environment. An example of this indicator is monitoring conservation areas in ecotourism projects. Companies



can also establish ecological reserves within their properties to protect native species and promote natural habitat regeneration.

### 1.10.2 Social Indicators:

- **Community Impact:** This indicator measures the positive effects of business activities on the local community. Examples include job creation in rural areas with limited employment opportunities and evaluating educational or health programmes initiated by the companies for local benefit. Businesses can also engage in community activities, such as organising training workshops or collaborating with local schools to enhance educational quality.
- **Gender Equality and Social Inclusion:** This involves the participation of women and other traditionally marginalised groups in rural businesses, including people with disabilities, migrants, unemployed youth without education, and ethnic minorities. Companies that promote gender equality, offer equal opportunities, and encourage social inclusion tend to have a more positive impact on rural communities. For example, implementing mentorship programmes for women entrepreneurs helps them develop leadership skills and access business opportunities.
- **Employee Quality of Life:** Working conditions and employee well-being are essential for the long-term success of any enterprise. Offering fair wages, professional development opportunities, and social benefits demonstrates a socially responsible company. Furthermore, businesses can introduce wellness programmes that include recreational activities, healthcare access, and support for employees' children's education.

### 1.10.3 Economic Indicators

- **Profitability:** Although sustainability encompasses more than financial success, profitability remains an essential indicator to ensure the venture can sustain and grow. Assessing profit margins and return on investment is key for measuring success. Additionally, companies should balance profitability with investment in sustainable practices, ensuring that economic growth does not compromise long-term positive impact.
- **Investment in Innovation:** Businesses that invest in research and development of new technologies and sustainable practices are more likely to stay competitive and reduce their environmental impact. This indicator measures the percentage of income allocated to innovation. For instance, adopting advanced technologies to optimise production processes, such as using artificial intelligence to improve supply chain efficiency.
- **Growth and Expansion:** Evaluating growth in terms of new products or services, expansion into new markets, or an increase in the customer base is essential to measure the business's economic progress. Rural businesses can also measure

success by opening new retail points, participating in trade fairs, and collaborating with other companies to expand their reach.

Implementing business sustainability indicators is fundamental for ensuring rural ventures strike a balance between economic growth, positive environmental impact, and social welfare. These indicators enable more effective and transparent management, providing entrepreneurs with a clear tool to assess their performance and make continuous improvements. In this way, sustainability indicators not only help measure success but also foster a business culture committed to sustainable development and a positive impact on rural communities.

### 1.11 Motivation for Sustainable Entrepreneurship

Rural entrepreneurs driven by sustainability are motivated by more than just economic benefits. These entrepreneurs often seek to enhance their environment, prioritising both environmental sustainability and social equity. Beyond financial aspects, they aspire to create a legacy that benefits their communities and the environment over the long term. This long-term vision is fuelled by a profound sense of responsibility to future generations, aiming to leave behind a healthier, more prosperous world. Personal satisfaction and a connection to the land also play significant roles, as many feel a deep commitment to the place where they live and work. Additionally, preserving rural traditions and promoting a lifestyle in harmony with nature provides a sense of purpose and personal fulfilment.

The motivation for rural entrepreneurs also stems from their ability to observe the direct impact of their work. Unlike urban enterprises, where impact might be less perceptible, rural entrepreneurs can tangibly see how their efforts benefit their communities and natural surroundings. This immediate gratification provides an extra incentive to continue developing sustainable practices. Working closely with the community and witnessing the benefits their businesses bring to neighbours and family members strengthens their commitment, pushing them to innovate and enhance their practices further.

- **Environmental Responsibility:** Concerns over climate change and natural resource degradation are major motivators for rural entrepreneurs, who strive to implement practices that reduce environmental impact. Examples include organic farming and renewable energy use. Rural entrepreneurs also focus on local ecosystem conservation and efficient natural resource use, leading to a preference for sustainable practices that minimise chemical use and promote biodiversity.
- **Positive Social Impact:** Rural entrepreneurs are often motivated by the desire to improve their communities' quality of life by providing dignified jobs, education, and improved services. Cooperatives and community businesses often serve as effective models for achieving this impact. Additionally, these entrepreneurs strive for social inclusion, ensuring the benefits of their activities reach all



community members, including the most vulnerable. Creating community infrastructure, such as educational and healthcare centres, and participating in community projects are examples of how rural entrepreneurs work to foster positive social impact.

- **Innovation and Creativity:** Sustainable entrepreneurship demands innovative solutions. The challenges of rural settings, such as a lack of infrastructure or limited market access, often inspire entrepreneurs to develop new products or services that are not only economically viable but also environmentally friendly and beneficial to local communities. Innovation in the rural context also involves adapting technologies to meet specific community needs, such as designing efficient irrigation systems or creating products that sustainably harness local resources. These entrepreneurs excel in turning challenges into opportunities, using creativity to devise unique solutions that drive both economic and social development without compromising sustainability.
- Ultimately, the motivation for sustainable entrepreneurship is rooted in a profound desire **to be agents of change within their communities**. Rural social economy entrepreneurs aim not only for economic gain but also for positive transformation of their surroundings through practices that protect the environment and improve the quality of life for those around them. A personal connection to their location and commitment to the people in their lives strengthen their determination to overcome obstacles and continue innovating sustainably.

## 1.12 Summary

This module is designed to train rural entrepreneurs in creating innovative and sustainable businesses, leveraging local resources and contributing to the economic, social, and environmental development of rural areas. Through this module, the goal is to provide a solid foundation of knowledge and practical tools that enable social economy entrepreneurs to face the specific challenges of their communities, maximising the use of available resources and fostering resilience in rural settings. The main contents include:

The module underscores the importance of social economy entrepreneurship in rural areas as a comprehensive solution to socio-economic challenges. Combining sustainability, innovation, and technology can drive the development of rural communities, address depopulation, and enhance the quality of life of their inhabitants. Business models developed in this context should be economically viable and socially and environmentally responsible, contributing to the welfare of current and future generations. Collaboration among entrepreneurs, institutions, and the community is key to achieving inclusive and sustainable development. By fostering cooperation and knowledge exchange, a conducive ecosystem for innovation and resilience is created

within the rural landscape, enabling these communities to thrive and adapt to future changes.

### 1.13 Success stories

Business sustainability has emerged as a key concept in rural development, focusing on balancing economic growth, environmental protection, and social well-being. The integration of sustainable practices in rural enterprises not only helps maintain a balance among these three pillars but also ensures the resilience of rural communities in the face of socio-economic and environmental challenges. Furthermore, the emphasis on sustainability contributes to the conservation of natural resources, which are essential for the ongoing development of these areas.

Successful experiences in social-economy rural enterprises stand out not only for their financial viability but also for the positive impact they have on local communities and ecosystems. These success stories demonstrate how innovation and collaboration can lead to business models that are not only profitable but also create shared value and foster community development, largely due to their ability to incorporate practices that respect the natural environment and improve the quality of life within communities.

This section delves into specific success cases, providing inspiration and tools for current and future entrepreneurs. These enterprises must balance economic needs with natural resource conservation and the strengthening of the social fabric. Additionally, it is crucial for these ventures to have clear strategies for community participation and resource management to ensure long-term sustainability. Innovation and the use of appropriate technologies also play an important role, enabling entrepreneurs to optimise processes and reduce environmental impact.

Likewise, sustainable rural enterprises need to generate a sense of belonging and motivation within local communities, ensuring that economic benefits are distributed equitably and that decisions are made in a participative manner. This community integration is key to ensuring not only the project's viability but also its resilience to economic or environmental changes. Below are three emblematic cases of rural enterprises in Europe that have achieved this balance:

#### **d. Case 1: Mondragón Corporation (Spain)**

The Mondragón Corporation, one of the world's largest cooperative groups, began as a small project in the Basque Country and has expanded internationally. What makes Mondragón unique is its approach to cooperative management, where employees are partners in the company, fostering equity and democratic participation in decision-making. However, the full participation of workers is mainly limited to employees in the Basque Country, as many of Mondragón's international employees are not cooperative members and do not have access to the benefits of shared ownership. This situation has



drawn criticism for creating a disparity between local and international workers, who do not partake in cooperative governance nor enjoy the same social benefits.

This model promotes inclusive and participatory business management, where every worker has a voice and vote, creating a sense of belonging and commitment that goes beyond a mere employment relationship.

Moreover, the cooperative has implemented sustainable practices, such as renewable energy use and responsible production, ensuring that economic growth does not compromise local resources. Mondragón has also developed circular economy initiatives that aim to reduce waste and maximise material reuse. However, not all its activities are fully aligned with environmental sustainability. In fact, the adoption of sustainable practices has been uneven and, in some cases, more market-driven than internally motivated. While these practices benefit the environment and generate new economic opportunities, sustainability has not always been a central focus in all its operations.

Over the years, Mondragón has established a network of companies across various sectors, from manufacturing to education and research, which has been essential to its expansion and diversification. This network enables the cooperative to adapt to market changes and create stable employment even in times of economic crisis. Additionally, Mondragón has invested significantly in education and vocational training, creating its own educational institutions, such as Mondragón University, which focuses on preparing new generations to face labour market challenges and foster an entrepreneurial spirit.

This model has been successful not only financially but has also generated stable employment and contributed to the region's economic and social development. The combination of equity, sustainability, and innovation has made Mondragón a global reference for how a company can grow sustainably while improving the quality of life for its workers and the community in which it operates. However, it is important to note that Mondragón faces significant challenges, such as integrating sustainability across all its operations and including international workers in cooperative ownership. These challenges show that, although Mondragón has made substantial progress, there are still areas to improve to fully achieve its sustainability and equity goals.

#### **e. Case 2: Chão do Rio Ecotourism (Portugal)**

Located in Travancinha, about 12 km from Portugal's Serra da Estrela Natural Park, Chão do Rio is an excellent example of a sustainable ecotourism project. This accommodation offers a unique experience that combines comfort with the conservation of the natural environment. Key features of this project include:

- Sustainable accommodation: Comfortable stone cottages with thatched roofs, built with respect for the surrounding environment.
- Biological swimming pool: The cottages are arranged around a biological pool that uses natural processes to keep the water clean.

- Eco-farm: The project takes place on a 19-acre farm where nature is nurtured and enjoyed, contributing to the enrichment of local biodiversity.
- Local gastronomic experiences: Breakfast is served in baskets and includes local specialities, promoting the regional economy.
- Sustainable activities: Guests are encouraged to explore trails on foot or using available bicycles, promoting non-polluting transportation.
- Environmental education: Children can participate in activities like collecting eggs in the mobile chicken coop, fostering a connection with nature from an early age.
- Local collaboration: Through local partners, food and entertainment services are provided, supporting the surrounding community.

This project shows how a small tourist accommodation can integrate sustainable practices in all aspects of its operations, from construction to daily activities, offering visitors an authentic and environmentally friendly experience. Chão do Rio not only provides a place to stay but also educates its guests on the importance of conservation and responsible tourism.

#### **f. Case 3: Fischer Farm (Austria)**

Located in Styria, Austria, Fischer Farm is an outstanding example of a small, innovative ecological farm. Run by Erika and Martin Fischer, this farm focuses on breeding Fleckvieh cattle, known for their dual-purpose milk and meat production. With a herd of 55 animals, including 27 milking cows, the farm has managed to position itself as a benchmark in organic production.

From the start, Erika and Martin chose to prioritise quality over quantity. This philosophy has earned them recognition as a "Styria Elite Herd" for the past five years. Instead of seeking excessive growth, they have worked to continually improve their practices and outcomes.

In 2000, the farm suffered a devastating fire that forced the family to rebuild their facilities in just four months. This challenge became an opportunity to modernise and adopt a more sustainable approach to production. Martin emphasises that their goal has always been to improve: "Eighteen years ago, we were clear that we didn't want to grow, but to get better."

Fischer Farm spans 51 hectares, where they grow forage to feed their animals. Their crops include maize, cereals, and alfalfa. Their goal is to produce all necessary forage to ensure the quality of the feed consumed by their cows, thus avoiding the complications associated with buying external feed.

In addition to dairy production, the farm benefits from rearing calves. The calves are raised until they are 18 months old and reach an average weight of 250 kilos at slaughter. The meat is sold directly to consumers on the farm itself, which allows them to generate additional income and maintain a direct connection with their customers.



The combination of sustainable practices, a focus on quality, and resilience in the face of adversity has allowed Fischer Farm not only to survive but to thrive in a competitive environment. This case exemplifies how a small farm can be both innovative and ecological, contributing to a more sustainable agricultural model in Europe.

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