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Green Baskets for healthy community

The Social agricultural cooperative Home Garden was established through the initiative “Social and Economic Inclusion of Roma Through Organic Food Production” (implemented by Autonomous centre – ACT, Čakovec) that seeks to empower the Roma people and communities from Međimurje County (Croatian region with the highest percentage of Roma people in total population) facilitating their social, cultural and economic repositioning through creation of advanced and attractive green businesses. Through organic family farming and social cooperative management trainings, 20 participants from Roma community (representing more than 100 family members) were inspired and empowered to become a part of solution rather than a part of the problem through their own green business start-ups and becoming proactive shapers of their economic future. An established social agricultural cooperative “Domači vrt” (Home Garden) enables today production of high quality organic fresh and processed foods, which is further distributed in local community through Green Basket System, delivering fresh, locally grown organic food to the customer doorstep on weekly basis.

Many cooperatives throughout the world apply progressive principles of sustainability, democracy, equity, solidarity and responsibility for the local community providing fair treatment and equal opportunities for all employees and cooperative members. By engaging Roma in the advanced eco-social enterprises, public perception and acceptance of the Roma people in the local community is slowly but surely changing.

The cooperative also aims to develop consumer awareness about the importance of healthy locally grown organic food, thus providing sufficient market share and hence the sustainability of the eco-social enterprise. Through its active public engagement and advocacy, the initiative raises awareness on the difficulties Roma people face in their struggle against prejudices and discrimination.

Međimurje is traditionally an agricultural area, with small farms that produce fruits, vegetables and cereals for the local market. But organic farming has not yet been fully accepted by Međimurje producers, and only a small number of farms apply organic farming. However, growing demand for healthy food in the market and raised awareness on the importance of not only a balanced food intake, but also environmentally and socially responsible agriculture, provides a strong and sustainable market for the newly established eco-social cooperative. Social co-operative is established with 4 Roma (with 20+households members) and 4 local organic farmers as founders. The cooperative is established to grow fruits, vegetables and cereals and processed products, as well as products from cultivated or wild medicinal herbs, in organic way, offering them through Green Basket system to young urban



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families interested in fresh, seasonal and healthy food of local origin from organic farming.

The cooperative is now planning to inspire as many other local farmers to produce organic foods, in order to strengthen the market position of producers, as well as to achieve economy of scale and improve sufficient local supply of organic foods, while simultaneously working on the integration of vulnerable groups. Cooperation of minority groups and local producers will further develop mutual acceptance and thus facilitate diminishing the otherwise strong segregation among local population. More importantly, Social agricultural cooperative Homemade Garde gives a practical example of a successful social innovation model of socio-economic integration and inclusion of Roma people that may be equally applied to other sensitive or minority groups in this or other local communities.