



Seminar Field Trip, co-organized with the Thessaloniki FLAG and the Hellenic Ministry of Rural Development and Food

Thessaloniki, 20 October 2016

Participants had the opportunity to go on the ground and hear, see and taste two projects that had received support from the local FLAG during the 2007-2013 programming period. Both projects showed the impact of strengthening the local fish processing sector to increase the added value generated locally. The study visit was completed with a visit to rice a cooperative, aiming to inspire participants to consider the types of strategic partnerships that they could foster in their areas in order to help bring local products to the market in more intelligent ways.

Olympias Frozen Mussels

The first stop was at Olympias Frozen Mussels Industry, a mussel processing factory that has diversified from the fresh product. Instead of bringing fresh mussels directly to the market, the shells are boiled, vacuum packed and immediately frozen in user friendly packages ready for the retail market. The idea was born out of a combination of the innovative mindset of the Managing Director Mr Anagnostopoulos and exchanges with his Dutch equipment provider.

By generating this added value, the company can enter different national and international markets they were not able to reach with the fresh products. Moreover, thanks to the different contacts gained in new markets for mussels, the company is now also packaging blue crab and is currently in negotiations for a contract with a supermarket in the United States where there is a very important market for crab cakes. As well as demonstrating one way to add value to a local product, this project also highlights the importance of good communication with partners in the value chain, in this case the supplier of equipment and the buyers in different markets.



Mega Ostrakon – purification of mussels

Over 80% of Greece's mussels' production takes place in the Thessaloniki area and the FLAG has supported this segment of the fisheries sector in different ways. The second stop showcased the investment in purification tanks in the company Mega Ostrakon. Managing Director Mr. Megasthenis explained the importance of these tanks to maintain their current market. After a decline in the water quality of the area where his mussels farm is located, products could no longer be brought directly to

market without prior purification. Being able to invest in the water system, thanks to Axis 4, the company managed to maintain their customers - and the price of their mussels! Moreover, they managed to add new (imported) products that also need to be purified to their variety of products offered to the clients.



FLAGs learned that, depending on the local context, **basic investments** are sometimes fundamental for helping to boost businesses or allowing them to reach or retain certain markets. In this case, the purchase of the purification equipment made it possible to continue with the business and to maintain employment.

Inspiration from a rice cooperative

The fieldtrip ended with a visit to a rice cooperative and rice processor. Up to 70% of the national rice production is grown in this region and the sector therefore plays an influential role in local development.

The cooperative collects rice from its members, dries, stores and brings the product to the market, explained Mr. Kravvas, former president of the cooperation. Farmers can therefore focus on production and harvest. Moreover, the fact that the cooperative pools rice from many different producers and coordinates sales means that it can better control prices by selling when market demand is high. It also provides support to farmers who are in difficulty by supplying material such as pesticides or fertilizers. As such, it has become a price setter instead of a price taker. The increased prices that producers can fetch for their rice has had a direct impact on their quality of life and can serve as inspiration for the fisheries sector which, in some areas, lacks coordination within its primary sector.

The visit concluded with a short stop at the Axios rice mill SA. Its Manager, Mr. Tsiotskas, and the Quality Control Manager Aggelos Vasiliadis, gave participants an insiders glimpse at how rice is processed into different varieties (brown, white, boiled). The main variety produced is boiled rice as it is the most in demand by Eastern European countries, which is the biggest market for that mill's produce.

