

WERKHOF

General description

Werkhof, a cooperative, combines commercial profit-oriented organic horticulture production and marketing with social purposes especially social care and education. The farms' social care started already 30 years ago in 1983 and is focused on young people facing problems on the regular labour market. Four full-time employees (social workers, horticultural experts, marketing experts, etc.) and four volunteers are working on the farm. The whole farm and farmland is leased on the long-term from the municipality of Dortmund.

Description of productive activities

The organic horticulture farm cultivates five hectares following Demeter certification. Less than one hectare is cultivated in greenhouses. About 40 kinds of vegetables, especially leafy vegetables, and seedlings are produced, processed and marketed. Direct marketing is conducted on the farm in a shop, on weekly markets in Dortmund and Unna, as well as by delivery service of vegetable boxes. About 1,000 vegetable boxes are delivered straight to the customers in and around Dortmund every week.

Social care services are mainly oriented towards young people, who face problems on the labour market. The agricultural work in production, processing and marketing helps the young people to stabilize their everyday life. The young people are working on the farm in the regular horticultural work, but also in processing, packaging and marketing the vegetables and seedlings.

Regional context – Dortmund and Metropolis Ruhr

Werkhof is located in the Northeast of the city of Dortmund, where more than 500,000 inhabitants live. Dortmund is part of "Metropolis Ruhr" which has more than five million inhabitants embracing four counties and eleven urban municipalities. The city centre of Dortmund is only about ten kilometres from suburb Grevel and Werkhof. Grevel is embedded in the city's green belt, which is part of the regional park "Emscher Landschaftspark" (ELP, Emscher Landscape Park). ELP combines 20 cities of Metropolis Ruhr by its green open spaces. Former mining activities are still visible here: old coal miner's settlements, heaps, air ducts and mining-related surface drops.

The farm is located close to highway "Autobahn A2" and very well accessible by car/trucks. Good public transportation offers fast and convenient connections from Grevel to the city centre of Dortmund and other city districts. The peri-urban area where Werkhof is located, can be characterised as a post-industrial, urban patchwork landscape including forestry, cropland, meadows, (urbanised) villages and suburbs, industrial sites, traffic and energy infrastructure, etc. The purchasing power is, compared to more Southern regions of Metropolis Ruhr, rather low accompanied by nearby social flashpoints. Soil fertility is high (ca. 80 ground points, "Bodenpunkte"); average annual temperature is about 9°C with annual rainfall of 850 - 900 mm.

Markets and marketing

Key participants:

The major key partners are the administration bodies (regional and local authorities), which refinance the work (employees) and also the social care of the young people. Furthermore, regarding horticultural production and marketing the label Demeter is another important partner. The collaboration is based on contracts and formally organised.

Key activities:

An important activity is the social work, education and formation for young people in preparation for the labour market. The production and processing of certified organic vegetables and seedlings along with direct marketing is another main activity.

Key resources:

Four full-time workers and four volunteers are working on the farm supporting the young people in their work and everyday life. Five hectares of farmland including greenhouses are cultivated organically for vegetable and seedling production. The farm equipment and machinery to run the farm business are important resources. Furthermore, the farm shop, market booths and vehicles for the delivery service are relevant resources to be named here.

Value proposition:

The value proposition of Werkhof consists of mainly three pillars: (1) providing work and support for young people facing problems, (2) certified organic vegetable/seedlings production/processing and (3) the marketing of the products. The major goal is to support the young people, but regarding the entrepreneurial business background the delivery service and other direct marketing channels are of highest importance.

Customer relations:

All customer relations are personal. The relationships between the workers and the young people are personal and individual. The direct marketing of Werkhof to the customers is also personal in all three ways of marketing (farm shop, markets, delivery service). The direct marketing is formally organised.

Market segments:

The most important customers of Werkhof are the young people involved and consumers of locally and organically produced food. Werkhof offers vegetables and seedlings for customers asking for regional and certified organic products.

Werkhof sees an even further growing demand for regionally and organically produced food. Furthermore, many customers support the farm because of its social focus. The combination of the organic and social fits together very well.

Marketing channels:

The customers of organically produced vegetables but also seedlings are mainly reached via the farm shop, markets in Dortmund and Unna, and the offered delivery service abokiste24.de. This service embraces a huge area in the east of Metropolis Ruhr and beyond. Advertisement is internet-based. Not related to the marketing of products, but regarding the education and formation of young people, the administration bodies have to be named as additional channels.

Cost categories:

The salary for four qualified full-time employees is a main cost element. All of the farmland is leased from the municipality of Dortmund. The production, processing and marketing of organic food as well as equipment and machinery required to run the farm business are also considerable costs.

Revenue sources:

The work and support for the young people is being refinanced by administration bodies. The second pillar of revenues is the marketing of certified organic vegetables and seedlings, which generates reasonable income for Werkhof.

Conclusion

The major success factor is the combination of social work with organic production, which is positively seen by many customers and neighbours. Furthermore, lobbying/political work is

essential to maintain profitable, especially on the municipality and regional level. Social work has to be re-financed by the public. Further success factors are the proximity to the city as well as the offer of fresh and diverse products.

The integration of social work and organic horticulture can simultaneously be the biggest challenge. Reduced public re-financing threatens the profitability of the farm. The organic horticulture production and marketing – especially the delivery service of vegetable boxes – is a viable market, while social work is strongly dependent on public funding. As cities and other public authorities are running out of money, this is a crucial point. Another important prerequisite to persist is the long-term leasing of the property and farmland.

The major opportunity is the growing demand for organic food, especially regional vegetables. Werkhof addresses this demand by a huge diversity of vegetables, herbs and seedlings. The combination of organic horticulture and social work for young people is both a success factor and a challenge. These kinds of organic and social farms require secure financial backgrounds, either through 100 % profitability of the farm or through financial public support.

Contact details:

Werkhof Projekt GmbH
Werzenkamp 30, 44329 Dortmund,
Rita Breker-Kremer
r.breker-kremer@werkhof-projekt.de

The URBAN GREEN TRAIN project has been funded with the support of the European Union and the Italian National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme. This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the European Union and the Italian National Agency for the Erasmus+ Programme cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

