Report on the Montenegrin Delegation to Austria:

Knowledge Exchange on the
Best Practices in Linking
Traditional Specialty Products and
Rural Tourism

25-29 June 2018

Organized in collaboration and with the support of the
Austrian Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism
INTRODUCTION

The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) and the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) are implementing the project “Promoting Sustainable Agrifood Value Chains through Linkages with Tourism” in Montenegro in collaboration with the Montenegrin Ministry of Tourism and Sustainable Development and Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, and in this context have organized a number of knowledge and best practices exchanges as part of capacity building.

From 25 to 29 June 2018, a Montenegrin delegation composed of nine producers from nine different municipalities who are keen to diversify and/or improve their practices in rural tourism along with three public authorities from the Ministries of Agriculture and Tourism, travelled to the Carinthia and Styria regions of Austria to learn from their experience in a less favoured region with a similar production and tourist profile. The delegation was selected from recommendations of stakeholders and are positioned to disseminate this experience when they return to Montenegro. Eager to support the successful integration of Montenegro into the European Union (EU), the Austrian Ministry of Sustainability and Tourism has graciously lent their expertise in organizing the most relevant site visits for Montenegrin public authorities and producers, with every detail carefully thought out to maximize the exchange of knowledge. The detailed agenda, list of participants and contacts met can be found in the annex.

The delegation was acquainted with the benefits of farmer organization and collective marketing, production and marketing techniques of traditional specialty food, commitment to identity, quality standards, flexibility guidelines, labelling, packaging, successful agritourism operations, farmstays and the marketability of culinary heritage as a tourist offer and promoting gastronomy as a destination. Montenegrin public officials from Ministries in charge of tourism and agriculture have also gained insight into the coordination of actions between agriculture and tourism and learned from the Austrian public authorities’ experiences in the EU. The following report summarizes the activities, key findings, recommendations and next steps.
DAY 1: MONDAY, 25 JUNE 2018

CHAMBER OF AGRICULTURE IN CARINTHIA

The delegation arrived to Klagenfurt and had a meeting with Director Hans Mikl of the Chamber of Agriculture in Carinthia. The Chamber of Agriculture is a public body working under regional law that acts as a modern service enterprise and provides their members with up-to-date and practical advice, information and service. The Chamber of Agriculture employs a total staff of 190 in the headquarters in Klagenfurt, in the 8 branch offices in the county towns (9 offices total) and in the Chamber’s own business enterprises. There roughly 50,000 members throughout Austria, and the membership is comprised of forest or agricultural landholders, tenants of a farm or forest holding, households involved in agriculture or forestry on a full-time basis, agricultural or forestry businesses or cooperatives and the executive staff of the aforementioned enterprises. The only requirement is that members must work with at least 1 hectare.

The support for associations and other collective enterprises was notably highlighted.

In representing the interests of those involved in agriculture and forestry, the Chamber of Agriculture carries out the following functions:

- **Lobbying**
  - Expert opinions on bills, acts of parliament, decrees, directives, standards and regulations with the aim of advocating the due position of agriculture and forestry within the ever-changing legal system;
  - Representing the interests of the agricultural and cultural authorities in economic, cultural and taxation issues as well as in matters of taxes and fees;
  - Involvement and representation of the Chamber in various committees, advisory boards and commissions at federal, provincial and local level, in order to draw attention to the interests of farmers;
  - Assistance to farming family businesses in solving their specific economic and social problems Representation of the Chamber’s members in professional matters before public offices, authorities, public bodies, associations and various institutions and organisations; and
  - Balancing of the interests between the members.

- **Advice and Training**
  - Information, advice and training for all persons involved in the field of agriculture and forestry; Organisation, advice and assistance for farming organisations and initiative groups;
  - Involvement and advice for conducting breeder and farm animal events;
  - Provision of information, preparation of position statements and expert opinions for public authorities etc. as part of administrative assistance; and
  - Information, advice and collaboration with public offices, authorities, public bodies, local government authorities, institutions, schools etc.
• Support and service
  o Performance of duties within the framework of agricultural subsidies (EU, national) and governmental administration, as a compensated function transferred from the federal and provincial governments, and the implementation of the Chamber’s own campaigns;
  o Maintain and support the Chamber’s own institutions and businesses (the Chamber’s fruit and wine center in St. Andrä, Ossiacher Tauern breeding station, Krastowitz education centre, Perkohof semen collection center); and
  o PR and trade fair events, the members’ newspaper “Kärntner Bauer” Agrarnet and press relations.

Also within the Chamber, the well-executed promotional and marketing agritourism initiative “Urlaub am Bauernhof” or “Farm Holidays” was introduced and discussed. For more than 25 years, Urlaub am Bauernhof is an association of 2,350 agritourism providers that markets quality controlled, authentic farmstays throughout Austria. The association is active as "ambassadors of the rural world" and support the foothold of rural tourism alongside agriculture. They offer online booking, catalogues, newsletters and a system of quality assurance for consumers, and branded marketing materials, technical support for agritourism providers—all carried out in a sleek, professional and informative way. They offer many types of holidays to fit many visitor profiles, including those geared towards food and wine, holidays with children, couple holidays and active holidays.

In Montenegro, this body does not exist autonomously. This type of unified association to represent agritourism is not currently present in Montenegro. Within the Montenegrin Chamber of Economy, there is a Board representing the interests of agriculture, but neither of this scale or influence, nor the capacity to educate or widely disseminate relevant information at the local level.

The delegation asked questions about government support, and technical support and advice was highlighted in the presentation in addition to EU measures.

THE “ACTION PLAN” ACTIVITY

Finishing up the first day, the Montenegrin producers were introduced to the “action plan” activity. Each participant is tasked with taking notes throughout the visits, discussing what they have seen, receiving feedback and returning to their respective municipalities to transmit what they have learned. Follow up will be to discuss the draft plan through facilitated meetings with other households, and eventually finalizing the plan and implementing realistic changes.

The delegates were kindly reminded to remember three things while on this experience:

1) What is transferable and what is not;
2) Individual versus collective action; and
3) Public and private interaction, not just monetary support.
NOCKFLEISCH – PRODUCERS’ ASSOCIATION

The delegation met with Mr Heinz Mayer, director of Kärntner Biosphärenparkfonds Nockberge. Nestled within the Biosphere natural preserve and with EU hygiene requirements as the impetus, eight meat farmers in Nockberge joined forces thirteen years ago and began to process their products together to put them on the market under the common brand “Nockfleisch”. Today with fourteen members and the additional cooperation of eleven livestock farms, the association has become one of the most important meat producers in Carinthia. They now own a slaughterhouse, a production line for a range of meat products, and two retail shops that also sell the local traditional products from an additional seven local farmers whose production concerns bread, eggs, poultry, marmalade and juices.

Most of the products are sold regionally, either in their shops or in the gastronomic specialty stores. They promote harmony with the nature in their production and use a lot of herbs grown in the surrounding mountains, and the cattle they breed lives outdoors and grazes in the mountains during the summer months which gives the meat a special taste. The traditional know-how, production and place-specific character of the product is very much like the meats under geographical indication (GI) protection in Montenegro, or those identified with GI potential. Unlike Austria, Montenegro does provide for this specific protection. In this visit, delegates were also introduced to the quality marketing schemes in Austria. Nationally and regionally there are several campaigns such as GenussRegion, AMA-Gastrosiegel, Schule am bauernhof (made on the farm), Made in Styria (as we will soon discover) and Steiermark, all leaving an imprint of quality on the product without confusing the consumer.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: MONTENEGRO

- The producers were commenting how Montenegro national parks have two municipalities where grazing is forbidden, a hindrance to the livelihoods of the households living in the vicinity.
- A similar initiative to Nockfleisch concerning a dairy center was also envisaged for the Plav municipality, yet the local government eventually did not approve the building, and they still have no dairy center. These are both constraints, but forward thinking alternatives that can work within the context should be sought.
- The producers do feel that such level of cooperation is entirely possible in Montenegro, especially with beef prosciutto and stelja producers. One participant, Vucko Pesic, has already created a silage collective for livestock farmers with larger productions.
**BIOSPHERE NATURAL RESERVE**

The tour and presentation within the Biosphere Natural Reserve placed an emphasis on promoting local heritage within a symbiotic relationship with the preservation of nature and culture. Recognized by UNESCO in 2012, the Carinthian National Park and Biosphere Reserve is a concrete example of preservation and promotion of natural and cultural diversity as well as sustainable development. Agriculture and forestry are key economic activities in the area and they have shaped the landscape and the inhabitants. The Nockberge are already a tourist destination, and the fields of action relating to sustainable development puts a strong emphasis on cooperations and the support of other local actors to creating synergies and added-values. The park is holistically managed to fulfill three key roles: developing, communicating and organizing. Besides furthering existing traditions and structures, there is an importance on the development of innovative approaches that will lead to a more sustainable society.

The reserve region comprises an array of stakeholders including NGOs, clubs and individuals, and together they look for ways to bring added-value to the region. An example is the cooperative maintenance of authenticity—each wooden fence throughout the reserve is built and installed in the traditional way—adding authentic value to the tourist visit.

**Sigi’s Organic Fish Farm and Restaurant**

The delegation met with the owner-operator Mr Siegfried “Sigi” Gruber. Sigi started in 1995 with 4 pond fish farm 1300 m above sea-level within the National Park as a hobby. Today it remains the highest altitude fish farm in Austria. In 2008 he built 13 ponds and an building where he smoked the fish and started preparing food for customers. From that point, he made his hobby a business and the restaurant steadily grew so he increased the size piece by piece to match the demand. All the fish he produces, he sells in the restaurant of typical Carinthian cuisine -from pond to plate-or as fresh fish directly at the farm. Cold mountain water, maximum 17 degrees in the summer, flows through his ponds, so he grows only Salvelinus (char). The high quality fish needs 3 years to grow before it is ready for the market. The fish is sold at farmgate for 30EUR/kg whole or 20EUR/kg filet.
THE TOWN OF MURAU AND ITS BREWERY

Before completing the second day, the delegation traveled to Murau. The town of Murau is characterized by good air and water quality, has the highest forest percent in Austria, and has been brewing beer since 1495. Since 1910, the brewery Murau is a cooperative company, which produces CO2 neutral beers since 2014 and is one of the first breweries in Europe to use 100% renewable energy. With an annual beer output of around 280,000 hectolitres, the ecologically-minded company has been producing its beer 100-percent with heat from the biomass cogeneration plant operated by Murau Municipal Utilities. The Murau brewery feels obliged to the region to preserve what is so valuable, because regional products are now more important than organically produced goods with higher carbon kilometers.

The delegation met with Barbara Zirn and she gave a tour and brief presentation. The tour demonstrated how quality begins with the spring water from their own well and is also dependent on the characteristic raw materials such as 6 varieties of grain, including the ancient Einkorn variety, that is the fruit of successful cooperation with over 300 local farmers. The commitment to quality and regional production is also reflected in their awards, which includes the DLG Gold Medals, the European Beer Star and three gold medals at the World Beer Awards. After these site visits, the delegation is definitely aware of a trend—cooperation, place-based and traditional production combined with traditional know-how are indeed quite marketable.

Following the brewery, the group had an informal discussion with Tamara Schelanda, the director of the local Murau tourism board. In the Murau region alone, the sleepy rural towns had over 1 million overnights last year. When asked what was the secret of Murau tourism’s success, the answer was simple: Be Authentic. They promote sustainable tourism overall, but especially slow tourism for city dwellers craving a rural experience. One very useful tool was to invite bloggers. They have done so much to raise awareness about ecotourism, and consequent visits, based on their experiences. The tourism board and all promotions are funded by an accommodation tax of 1.50 EUR per adult per night, of which they receive 60%. There are also no income taxes for rural household with less than 10 beds and the registration process is relatively simple.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: MONTENEGRO

- IT WAS WELL-NOTED ABOUT THE SIGNAGE AND AUTHENTIC DETAILS OF THE BIOSPHERE. THE ROAD TOLL OF 3EUR WAS DEDICATED TO SUSTAIN THE PRESERVE.
- AQUACULTURE IS A DIFFICULT ACTIVITY TO BEGIN IN MONTENEGRO AS THE STANDARDS ARE TOO COMPLICATED. MONTENEGRO REQUIRES CONCRETE PONDS AND THAT MAKE THE INITIAL INVESTMENT VERY EXPENSIVE, AND THE CHARACTERISTICS ARE LOST.
DAY 3: WEDNESDAY, 27 JUNE 2018

DENGG ORGANIC DAIRY

Dengg is a family farm with 30 dairy cows. The delegation met with the son Maximilian, a 4th generation farmer. They produce a premium priced organic milk. To do this, they feed the cows only with hay and the cows have to be outside in the fresh air for 180 days/year minimum, and at least 120 days they have to be on grazing land. 60% of the produced milk is sold to a dairy, which sells it under the brand “Zuruck zum Ursprung” (“Back to the roots”) in the supermarket chain Hofer. The other 40% the family sells to Maximilian, and then he makes different cheese varieties and also organic fruit yogurts. We discussed the processing, EU hygiene requirements and the importance of labelling and smart packaging. The farm also has a small shop which is open every Friday where they sell their products and those of their neighbors.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT: MONTENEGRO

- THE CHEESE PRODUCERS WERE ESPECIALLY INTERESTED IN THE ON-FARM SMALL PROCESSING FACILITY AND THE PACKAGING OF THE CHEESE AND YOGURT, AS WELL AS THE COLD CHAIN (OR ABSENCE OF) WAS DISCUSSED.
- A QUESTION WAS RAISED ABOUT SUPPORT MEASURES, AND MONTENEGRO ALSO OFFERS SUPPORT WITHIN THE AGROBUDGET TO YOUNG FARMERS.
- SOME PRODUCERS WERE NOT SO CONVINCED, WITH THE BELIEF THAT THERE IS NO MARKET FOR ORGANIC MILK, NO PRICE INCENTIVE TO FEED THE COWS THIS WAY, WHILE OTHERS WERE CONVINCED THAT IT EFFECTS QUALITY AND CHARACTERISTICS OF CHEESE.

OBERSTEIRISCHE MOLKEREI (OM)

OM is a Styrian dairy in Knittelfeld, owned by a cooperative consisting of 1550 milk farmers, which started in 1930. The group was welcomed by the cooperative president Jakob Karner and the director Friedrich Tiroch. OM employs 180 persons and also operate a warehouse with agricultural goods, so that their members can buy all they need for their production at a better lower price. They have a social and environmentally responsible philosophy that better materials produce a better cheese. Animal welfare and the health of dairy cows have a direct influence on the quality of the
milk. Healthy cows that graze on the grass of the mountain areas for as long as possible provide high-quality, nutritious milk. The farmers make sure that the cows have enough run-off and can eat enough grasses and spicy herbs. It is thanks to the small scale and local nature of the farms that the farmers can take care of every single one of their dairy cows. With sustainable soil management, healthy animals and the utmost care, they create the basis for first-class milk quality. OM processes this milk into high-quality products, thus ensuring a sustainable value-added cycle. They have specialized in producing different cheese varieties, especially hard mountain cheese. They export 60% of their production, especially to Germany, though the past four years have been difficult period at the creamery as the price of milk increased 28%. To showcase their company and products, they built OM Milk Experience World – a tourist destination where the production is explained, from the cow to the packaging, and the products can be tasted and bought. The producers were able to see the various packaging and labelling options for the many types of cheese, and there were some ideas to bring back to Montenegro.

**Obst Partner Steiermark GmbH (OPST)**

The group met with OPST Director Martin Pfeiffer for a tour of the plant and presentation. OPST is a producer organization of apple growers in Styria with around 600 members, who produce around 65% of apples in Austria. On average they produce around 130,000 tons of apple, from which around 60% is exported in around 30 countries. They sell also pears, and plums. In two last year they had problems with hail and frost, and that has lowered the production. The organization was founded in 1994, in the anticipation of Austria’s accession to the EU in 1995.

In St. Ruprecht/Raab, there was an existing sorting and packing plant with a refrigerated warehouse. During the financial crisis the existing company went bankrupt, and there was the danger for the local farmers to lose their main buyer. The farmers organized themselves and bought the company from the bank. The producer organization continues to develop. In the future the entire process from apple harvest to sales will be in the hands of the farmers. Cost reduction will be one of the advantages because there is no middleman. The produce finds its way directly from the producers to the sales, which in turn will benefit the apple farmers who will see an increase in their profits.

This unique combination of control and marketing provide cooperation possibilities with other players on the market in Austria and abroad. Currently the structure of the company is being reorganized to optimize the production processes and so secure and expand the market access for the apple farmers. Following the consumer demand, they are focused on ecological production and for that formed a separate company, “Von Herzen Biobauern Österreich”, and are the biggest organic apple company in Austria and plan to increase production of organic products.
Kober Agritourism

Like a lot of farmers in Styria, Franz and Rosemarie Kober are apple growers. They have two houses in the middle of their 11 hectare apple orchard: one for the family and one for renting. A part of the production they sell to OPST, but a part of it they process on the farm: apple juice, apple wine, liqueur and marmalade. Around ten years ago they invested in building an additional house for renting. The accommodations are very rustic and traditional. One apartment is rented for the whole year, and two they rent via “Urlaub am Bauernhof”.

They were very happy to talk about their experience – how good it was they invested in a more expensive but better website, bigger apartments for a better comfort on rainy days, how the guests appreciate the quiet and enjoy the nature, how they have a book of activities and necessary information every visitor should know if staying in their apartment, a common get-together-room for all guests - a place where they can meet, play games, cook, and taste their products. In this room/tasting area, the guests can buy their products, but also their neighbors’ products like homemade pasta, marmalade, pumpkin seed oil and handicrafts. A lot of participants from Montenegro saw or heard ideas they said they could implement on their farms.

Food for Thought: Montenegro

- The packaging and labelling of cheese was discussed, and many producers took pictures of and even brought home samples of packaging from OM World.
- At the fruit processing plant, the scale was rather large, but the producers and public authorities saw the added-value of organic production and smart packaging/marketing. Montenegro and the EU offer support that favors organic production, and this could be capitalized on even in the smaller context of the producers.
- Kober Agritourism was the spark for a lot of discussions on small things they could add to their activities immediately. The marketing of each others’ products, a binder in the common area for guests to see each others’ offerings and tasting areas were all ideas that could easily and inexpensively be implemented.
DAY 4: THURSDAY, 28 JUNE 2018

VULCANO

Vulcano is a meat manufacturer based in Auersbach and is a unique producer of delicious meat products. Because of volcanic landscapes in East Styria the region was named Vulcano, which is also used as a brand for the products made in the region. In 2000 Franz Habel decided to produce a high quality ham, as he believed that agriculture started to change too much and the trend to produce food for as little money as possible, without thinking about the life and welfare of the animals, was wrong and unsustainable. His idea was to focus on the welfare of the animals, respect their life, to give them enough space to grow and be fed with selected top quality cereals (25% local corn and 75% local wheat/rye) and the feeding period itself lasts longer than usual. In the pen, the pigs have showers for cooling down in the summer, and sometimes he plays classical music for them. The interaction with the animals and the way they are treated and live is also key for a very successful product. The animals are slaughtered in winter and the curing begins at 0-3 degrees Celsius. The special taste of the meat products derives in part from the particularly long meat maturing period at higher spring and summer temperatures, completely in sync with the seasons. The time and approach to welfare pays off—the eight month aged prosciutto fetches 38 EUR per kilogram on site. Because of that they already have received a lot of international rewards. In Auersbach they built a visitors center with barn and pens, presentation rooms with films outlining their vision, insight to the production, a bar where you can taste the product and a shop for products from the Vulcano region—not only their prosciutto, ham and sausages. Some weekends during the peak tourism season, they see upwards of 10,000 visitors.

ZOTTER

One of the more inspirational visits was to Zotter. Not only has he developed a state of the art tourist attraction based on local production of chocolate, but the producers were keen to hear the background story of his activity. Highly sustainable practices, social and environmentally friendly production, innovative packaging and labelling, organic farming and a creative approach to marketing were discussed. The founder, Josef Zotter, was bankrupt at the start of his activity, but his passion, patience and small successes eventually led to the position he is in now, as a producer of one of the finest chocolates in the world. One of the producers was so moved by his story, “Never give up, and always have a vision”
that she wrote a quotation he made and asked him to sign it, as a constant reminder that all things are possible.

**Styriabrid and the Genus Region**

Styria is one of the three provinces in which 90% of the total meat production in Austria occurs. The northern part of the province is spread over mountain ranges, where the breeding of cattle and sheep prevail. In the southern plain region, the pastures are conducive to breeding pigs and cattle. This is supported by the fact that in the southern part of the province significant quantities of corn used for animal feed are produced. Forty-six years ago, the market was highly fragmented and prices were quite volatile, and the organization was formed as a way to strengthen the position of pig producers in the region. Styriabrid is now a full service producer organization comprised of 20 producer “rings” throughout the province, totaling over 1200 pig production enterprises. Mr Hans Peter Baeck, Director of Styriabrid, presented the organization to the delegation at their headquarters in St Veit am Vogau. The tasks of the organization through 5 committees are carried out through the producer rings. The committees are as follows:

- Piglet Committee
- Combined Works and Classification Committee
- Breeding Committee
- Committee on Feed and Equipment
- Public Relations and Brand Programs Committee

Styriabrid facilitates market exchange through a highly detailed and transparent invoice system, sells supplies, feed and equipment, and offers construction, veterinary, nutrition and animal welfare advice. They also provide members a real-time market information system through sms messages and an app.

The delegation was also introduced to the requirements of the quality schemes under GenussRegion in which the pig producers farm more sustainably through a more fair distribution of added value, while receiving a price premium (average of .03 EUR/kg) for selling their pigs with these certifications.

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<td>- AMA quality label (highest award for quality controlled production)</td>
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<td>- Southeast Styrian Woazschwein</td>
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<td>- SUS program (traceability)</td>
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<td>- Absolutely Styrian</td>
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<td>- Steirerglück</td>
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Genussregal

Genussregal is an impressive hybrid of an exhibition of traditional products from Styria and a shop where you can taste almost everything before buying. There are 2,500 products made in Styria from 250 producers in a retail area of 1,700 m². Visitors and customers can also learn about how these typical products are produced—for example, to sell one liter of pumpkin seed oil you need about 40 pumpkins. They see how the different tastes of honey are formed, how important are bees for the agriculture and to life on earth, and information about indigenous varieties of fruits and vegetables, but also ancient breeds of animals.

The project started from the initiative of wine producers, specifically Erich and Walter Polz, who needed a depot store near the highway to efficiently facilitate access for the delivery trucks, rather than traveling around the Styrian hills collecting wines from the farms. They realized that many other producers had this problem, so they decided to not only sell Styrian wine, but also other traditional Styrian products. With support from the government totaling 4 million EUR, the Genussregal shop was constructed. Today the owners are 28 shareholders, who are all also producers. Part of the Genussregal is also a small restaurant and a wine bar, where only local products and dishes are prepared for guests. Many tourists come to experience the guided visit and purchase the traditional products.

Food for Thought: Montenegro

- Organization is essential.
- The quality schemes are something that the producers can adhere to, and with Styriabrid they were able to see the immediate added-value to their production. Montenegro is at an advantage because of the geographical indication scheme, something that offers protection in addition to marketing advantage.
- A transparent system of accounts receivable and accounts payable can be the first step in overcoming the trust issues, along with decision making power in the hands of the group or an elected few, rather than an individual.
- At Vulcano, a high level of animal welfare and regional branding commands a premium. The producers also saw the collective marketing of food products to tourists. A retail outlet like Genussregal would be ideal to sell local food products and promote local gastronomy, though on a smaller scale.
INFORMAL DISCUSSION WITH MINISTRY OFFICIALS; MILENA KOTLICA (MoA), NIKOLA ILIC ANDANKA KUJOVIC (MoT)

Several key issues were discussed between public authorities and producers. The main points of discussion were the importance of associations—but the legal bases in Montenegro are difficult to navigate and access and the producers are wary of the benefits in the Montenegrin context. They also voiced frustration at the technical service provision and general support at the municipal level and the lack of information—or incomplete information.

5 municipalities out of 23 are well-organized in processing registrations and inspections for agritourism, and there is a policy inconsistency whereas rural households pay a registration fee of 150EUR at the municipal level, yet the bigger hospitality players in the coastal towns pay only 5 EUR to be registered at the Ministerial level. There was also the request to repeal the tax on rural households under 10 beds.

DAY 5: FRIDAY 29 JUNE 2018

DISCUSSION TOWARDS ACTION

On the bus while returning to Ljubljana, we had an informal discussion on the action plans which led to a small cooperation established between producers concerning packaged food sales and tasting spaces and the overall joint marketing of products, starting from the rural households and their tourists. Through the feedback, we came to the conclusion to focus on authentic products that can be tasted and easily stored and sold, i.e. cured meats, ajvar, rakija, teas, herbs, juices. The GI producers were happy to be a part of this initiative. The producers also had the idea of something they could start right away—for a guestbook and the display of a binder-type organizer, in the rustic way of the Kober household, filled with pages promoting neighbors households and also those providers in different municipalities. Each household would have one binder as an initial foray into “Things to do, food to eat and places to stay in rural Montenegro”.

It also was discussed that a big obstacle to cooperation is the lack of trust. They need to change the way of thinking, to show the other households that transparency is possible—much like the invoices and payment system shown at Styriabrid. For the producers in the katuns, the marketing problem is the lack of producers, lack of refrigerated storage and limited days at the local market. By cooperating with other nearby producers, even 1 or 2, this obstacle can begin to be overcome.
RECOMMENDATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

“We cannot do it alone”
-Gordana Dulovic, cheese producer and farmstay provider

The tour was highly appreciated by the delegation, and gave them some ideas to ponder for their own context. From the discussions held, the following recommendations can be considered for the FAO-EBRD project implementation:

- Encourage associations and clusters as a way to benefit from economies of scale, networking and support, marketing and services, access to finance, support measures and IPARD funding. Not only will producers benefit from the cooperation between each other, but also the strength gathered by the associations linked with each other can be effective as a way to leverage the role of government and even offer services to fill a vacuum—providing something that the government cannot. Associations may also benefit from linking with well-managed existing organizations, or even collaborating with them and learning from their experiences. Different levels of organization, be it at the local, municipal or national level, can offer many kinds of complementary services and ease the dissemination of information on policies, products and services—addressing an oft-heard complaint by producers concerning lack of information. The role of the pilot planned for the identified key destinations for agritourism and gastronomy (the municipalities of Bijelo Polje, Kolasin, Mojkovac, Pljevlja and Zabljak) will encourage organization.

- The Ministries of Agriculture and Tourism should evaluate the National Parks Department as part of the strategy on Rural Tourism, to fully understand what practices are unsustainable and what would be a future-oriented and complementary approach. The roles of the municipalities to be supportive, and the need for the understanding of the challenging context of rural tourism, sustainable development and demanded level of authenticity that does not fall under the “one size fits most” tourist profile or legislative requirements of mass tourism. The rural conference organized by the project in May 2019 will serve as a forum for discussion and eventual recommendations to support this special context of rural tourism.

- A customer-oriented, Montenegrin owned agritourism network as part of the rural tourism strategy. This platform should support the diversification of farms by enabling the easy marketing of the authentic Montenegrin rural tourism experience under one brand. The national workshop planned for November 2018 will include a discussion on a dedicated platform.

- Promotion of traditional food and geographical indications through on-farm sales, food and beverage establishments and retail points of sale as a part rural tourism strategy, through guidebooks, decals, informational pamphlets on the various national and regional brands, with easy guidelines for households and traditional food producers to become a part of the various national and regional brands. The project will publish an FAO-EBRD developed “Inventory on Traditional Food Products with GI Potential” as well as a local gastronomy brand and related promotional material for the northern region that differentiates the products being sold at food and beverage establishments in the northern region. Local Montenegrin products and GI meat products will be promoted at Slow Food Terra Madre in addition to the Budva Tourism Fair in March 2019. Later in 2019, a gastro fair and familiarization tour for journalists and bloggers will
also contribute to raising awareness of traditional local products and the gastronomic value of GI protection to Montenegrin food heritage.

- Define and have consistent legal bases and application procedures across municipal and national government levels for rural households and farm holdings wanting to diversify. This could also be partly achieved by centralizing the registration of rural tourism households at the ministerial level. This facet will be covered in the gap review, along with other obstructions and coordination issues.
- Follow up on action plans through facilitated discussions in northern Montenegro. A first meeting for all members will take place in August 2018.