Farm Maridiana

1. Introduction

The farm of about 28 hectares is located in the surroundings of Umbertide in the Province of Perugia, Region Umbria, an important agricultural area along the last part of upper Tiber Valley. Gianni Berna, the founder of Maridiana Alpaca, retired as a professional of cooperation projects in non-developed countries with a degree in economics and background in business management, travelled to Umbria, where the roots of his family are and was attracted to the beauty of an abandoned area of pastures with a group of farmhouses and rural buildings, a granary, a tobacco oven, and sheds. The aim of the project is to combine tradition and innovation starting with breeding traditional animals, sheep, and horses, but also introducing alpaca to produce natural fibers for home designed clothes.

2. Promoter profile

First Name
Gianni

Last Name
Berna

Birth Year
1941

Gender
Male

Education

University degree in economics

3. Farm Profile

Address
Frazione Niccone, 173, 06019 Molino Vitelli, Umbertide PG

Country
Italy

Farm area in hectar
28.00

Date of establishment of the farm
1997

Date since when the promoter owns/rents the farm
Wed, 01/01/1997 - 12:00

NUMBER OF WORKERS	**FAMILY MEMBERS**	**EXTERNAL WORKERS**
Full time	1	2
Part time	0	0

Farm description

The farm consists of 28 ha; 9 ha wood and the rest is arable land, mostly pasture and 200 olive trees. The property is located on a scenic hill area at risk of abandonment. After retirement, the farm promoter decided to restore a traditional farmhouse with alpaca breeding. The idea was to promote an initiative in the area classified as disadvantaged, with the aim to tackle widespread unemployment and land abandonment. The large farmhouse could become farm center with laboratories and agritourism, while the alpaca breeding, granted by European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund (EAGGF), was planned to produce alpaca wool clothes, since the business promoter had a large experience in rural development cooperation with the education background in economics. The landscape is a traditional Umbria hill area with forest, pastures, a few cultivations and olive groves, and scattered rural buildings. Alpaca breeding is the main farm activity with the use of the wool for self-designed and hand-knitted clothes in outsourcing, while two farmhouses with 12 beds totally are dedicated to agritourism.

Website and social network links
www.alpaca.it
Facebook
YouTube

4. Multifunctional/sustainable farming and European Agricultural Landscapes (EAL)

Multifunctional & sustainable farming Key Words
Direct sales
Tourism and recreation related to EAL
Traditional buildings

Free Text

Tobacco is the traditional cultivation of the valley, while on the neighboring alluvial hills, wheat, olive trees, and vines that all together characterizes the rural landscape. Above the cultivations, the open fields and pastures are largely abandoned, as well as farmhouses endangered to disappear as a local rural heritage. In the last few years, some farmhouses have been restored to second homes and for agritourism, but a large part of the territory is still not cultivated and maintained. Sustainable agriculture and rural landscape preservation are the keywords for this family farm, particularly engaged in maintaining and valorizing the traditional Umbrian hill landscape in a disadvantaged area, but developing an innovative idea based on natural wool clothes production and direct selling. Since 1997, restoring abandoned traditional farmhouses started the Maridiana farm planning project, with its main idea to breed alpaca for wool and accommodate tourists. The project was granted under EAGGF and soon became a well-known and popular in the media (newspapers, magazines, TV and web). The carried out activity has a positive impact on the preservation of the biodiversity in the area, thanks to the sustainable management of the whole land surface of 28 ha, and on restoration, maintenance, and care of the old traditional rural buildings. The

use of textile fibres with traditional processing is aimed to maintain handicraft techniques and abilities, and also to provide work and know-how in the area by organizing workshops on a request for learners on hand-spinning, felting, natural dyeing, and weaving. The first objective of this kind of multifunctional agriculture is to promote employment and development of short production chains respectful to the traditional techniques with the use of natural fibres instead of modern industrial fashion in rural areas, in order to avoid abandoning rural countryside and villages, and also combining agriculture with handicraft and tourism. Another challenge is to educate the public to a conscious consumption, to the choice of sustainable products, and to be more respectful of the environment and people's work. Schools are sometimes hosted at farm, for the natural environment and presence of alpaca are very stimulating for a pleasant and educational visit. The main difficulties encountered are often linked to the lack of infrastructure to support the company and the increasing disappearance of services for communities in the rural disadvantaged areas.

Advice/Recommendation

The combination of agritourism, alpaca breeding for use of textile fibers, and commercialization of self-designed clothes have to be planned as a whole sustainable farm planning, maintaining pasture natural biodiversity, and taking care of rural traditional building. This way the visitors and guests are aware and can enjoy the rural Umbrian landscape. Marketing and promotion via website and social networks have contributed to increase the number of foreign customers visiting the farm and buying alpaca clothes without changing the business strategy based on low impact strategy, traditional handicraft, and rural landscape preservation.

5. Considerations, skills/competences involved and queries/questions

General considerations

Training has its starting point in a sustainable agriculture approach aiming to tackle land abandonment, soil erosion, natural and human capital impoverishment. This concept is very important as it is not just based on technical agricultural issues and land exploitation, but also on the vision enabling present and future generations to live and work in disadvantaged areas. This non-food farm management was originally based also on sheep wool and not renovated since then for the wolf attacks in the recent past together with horse riding based tourism, only the focus is now put on alpaca breeding and manufacturing clothes with agritourism as a main farm assets. The only farm food product is extra-virgin olive oil, but all other food products offered to the guests are gathered from a network of producer members, "Spesa in Campagna" ("Shopping in Countryside"), trade mark managed by the Italian Farmers' Confederation (CIA Agricoltori italiani), ensuring genuine farm ingredients and specialties for the customers. This guarantee pertaining of a cooperation of farmers' in the network is also a part of the Maridiana Alpaca farm vision for a sustainable agriculture and rural landscape preservation. Because of this vision focused on the local traditional heritage

in terms of farming, landscape, and handicraft as historical and sustainable community values, training and competences include a large range of professional specialties (farm workers, business manager, restaurant chef, and wool cloth hand-makers) supported by farmers' association services and external professionals (agronomists and veterinarians, accountancy, administrative and planning services, etc.). The farm staff members sometimes participate on farm markets and exhibitions as well as in training courses to update and deepen some specific competences, and also to give short courses for schools and small groups.

Strengths	**Weaknesses**
• Traditional self-designed and produced alpaca wool clothes in a niche-market sector with a very few competitors. • High quality traditional clothes representing the vision and the territory. • Multifunctional farm with low foot print combining traditional landscape, agritourism, and self-made handicraft products.	• Lack of infrastructures and services in a disadvantaged area. • Difficulty to find seasonal farm workers when needed and people skilled on traditional felting, dyeing, and weaving of alpaca wool.
Opportunities	**Threats**
• Increasing market demands of traditional handicraft cloths. • Networking with farm genuine food producers. • The combination of agritourism with landscape alpaca breeding and self-made cloth.	• Competition on the market of low-quality wool and other fibre blend imitating the traditional hand-made cloths. • Lack of services with consequent emigration of young people.

Keywords

EAL Keywords
Meadow
Pasture

Farming Key words
Alpaca

~~Livestock~~
~~Processing~~

Main Training/Skills/Competences

The company knowledge is based on product innovations of alpaca breeding and wool as a main product, and also of tradition recovery of handcrafted cloths from natural fibres. This company asset is combined with agritourism by providing accommodation and services in restored traditional farmhouses and rural buildings (barn, tobacco oven and sheds). The hill landscape dominating the valley below with vines, olive groves, and cereals is a key factor for the identity of the company and preferences of customers. The main farm food product offered to customers is extra-virgin olive oil, but all other food offered to guests come from other farms included in the network "Spesa in Campagna" ~~www.laspesaincampagna.it~~

Multifunctional & sustainable farming Key Words
~~Direct sales~~
~~Tourism and recreation related to EAL~~
~~Traditional buildings~~

Queries/Questions

- Do you know similar innovative approaches based on traditionally processed handcrafted cloths from natural fibers?

- Which maintenance approaches shall be provided to rural landscapes where agritourism is combined with traditional farmhouses? How can the valorization of cultural heritage (e.g.: landscape and traditional buildings) add value to the farming activity? Could this opportunity be applied also in your context?

- Do you think that the establishment of a network of farmers selling and marketing together local, high quality products, may help the promotion of such products and the viability of small farms?

- Do you think that an approach like “Spesa in Campagna” could be replicable in your area?

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