

E-Learning Course for Good Organic Retailing Practice

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Abstract: The current paper presents results from the Erasmus+ Transnational Strategic Partnership Project titled: "Preparing for the Future – European E-Learning Training on the "Code of Good Organic Retailing Practice". The project aims are to develop a European „Code of Good Organic Retailing Practice“, and an e-learning course. This tool provides managers and staff of organic retailers with training to implement the Code's principles in daily business practice. The so called Code of good organic retail practice involves 8 principles in business and staff related to the following contexts: social aspects, involvement in the organic sector, product quality, sustainability in the shop, sustainable relationships, transparency, open communication, quality management, etc. The e-learning platform is created to cover all mentioned aspects and to help the staff and managers working in the organic retail sector to meet the coming requirements of the EU. The e-learning platform has been designed to host the e-learning course in the following languages: English, Bulgarian, Czech, French, German, Slovenian and Turkish. The curriculum involves a description of learning outcomes, according to the requirements of the EQF and the NQF.

Keywords: organic retailing, good practices, e-learning, EQF

1. Introduction

The e-learning tool developed within the project „Preparing for the future“ aims to cover all relevant aspects of ethical retail practice. This will help the shop staff and managers to meet the coming requirements of the EU and assist in introducing a comprehensive approach towards retailing ethics in daily business practice. In 2014, the EU Commission published a legal draft for a new EU regulation for organic production, proposing that organic shops will fall under the scope of the organic regulation. This could mean for shops to be responsible for assurance of their organic products assortment's authenticity and the traceability of that products all through the organic production chain. That's why, in this sector, the idea of ethical principles for business becomes more relevant and activities in this area are increasing. Based on all mentioned above the partnership project established seven principles in business and staff contexts: social responsibility, involvement in business chain, sustainable pricing and relationships, transparency, open communication, harmonized business chain system and quality management.

2. Methodology

The methodology of the development of e-Learning Course follows several consecutive steps. The first step is the revision and update of the European approach of a "Code of Good Organic Retailing Practice" and its principles, which has

been developed within a former partnership project on Leonardo da Vinci Program. In the second step, the curricula, learning materials and contents for training are designed in English language covering the following criteria in form of 8 separate modules: Social Aspects, Open Communication, Involvement in the Organic Sector, Product Quality, Sustainability in the Shop, Sustainable Relationships, Transparency, Open Communication, and Quality Management. Work on developing the content of the modules is shared among the partners. The University of Agribusiness and Rural Development elaborated Module 2 - Involvement in the Organic Sector. The next important step is partners' common analysis on the elaborated training materials and contents. Suggestions for the learning units of the eLearning course with reference to the national context and experiences are provided by the partners, and the overall European view, as well. Learning outcomes are defined according to the requirements of the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

3. Project Partners and Target Groups

The partnership consists of institutions (in VET and higher education, NGOs, etc.) with experience and competences in different areas of organic sector in a wide geographical scope. Institute Equalita from Germany, as coordinating institution of the general project management takes the overall coordination and financial management. The other partners are as follows: Zivy Venkov – Czech Republic, Ecozept – France, Bionext – the Netherlands, KGGK – Germany, Hamburg

University of Applied Sciences (HUAS) – Germany, Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University – Turkey, Institute for sustainable development (ISD) – Slovenia, University of Agribusiness and Rural Development (UARD) – Bulgaria. All the partners ensure the implementation of the Code of good organic practices and training offers in daily practice in their countries.

The target groups who can benefit from the outcomes and results involve people in the organic and conventional food sector. They can find training offers for a higher quality of skills, knowledge and competences of the retail staff as well as an improved ethical image of the whole business sector. These groups include: representatives, managers and staff in organic and non-organic retail sector, institutions of adult education, higher education institutions, teachers/trainers, instructors and consultants, decision-makers in public administration, human resource managers, etc.

4. Results and Discussion

E-Learning Contents – Description of The Main E-Learning Course Modules

The current chapter presents a brief review of the modules developed by the partners. The final contents was approved after an extended discussion among the authors of the respective modules. The English version is designed according to the common principles of the EU. Each partner institution will adapt the contents according to their national specificity. Learning outcomes are defined according to the requirements of the European Qualification Framework (EQF).

a) Module 1 – Social aspects

The goal of this module is to provide learners with knowledge and skills about economic sustainability on shop level. Learners should be able to assess themselves whether they are suitable as a health food store owner. They should learn about the key success factors for start-ups in the organic retail sector. Learners should be able to set up a business plan and to prevent self-exploitation. The module is divided into two units:

Unit 1 - Economic sustainability: provides learners with knowledge and skills about economic sustainability. Learners should be able to assess themselves whether they are suitable as a health food store owner. They should learn about the key success factors for start-ups in the organic retail

sector. Learners should be able to set up a business plan and to prevent self-exploitation.

Unit 2 - Social sustainability: introduces learners in tools of human resource management, leadership and employee participation in an organic shop.

b) Module 2 - Involvement in Organic Sector

Module 2 provides knowledge on the following issues:

- Structures, policies and benefits of organic umbrella organizations, national, regional and local networks of organic retailers, functioning of cooperation organisations in organic retail.
- Regional structure of organic farming sector.
- EU and national policies on organic agriculture and trade, tools for NGOs' initiatives, IFOAM initiatives, activities, communication, tools for local marketing and PR activities in organic retail, implementing organic farming projects, funding, project management, etc.

c) Module 3 - Product Quality

The main goal of this module is to provide the learners with knowledge about: Quality principles, product quality, product quality characteristics; Objective and subjective methods and their principles used in evaluation of product quality characteristics basic statistical quality control techniques; Quality and quality assurance techniques and systems and food legislation; Basic structure of process control systems, Goals of control, etc.

d) Module 4 - Sustainability in The Shop

The goal of this module is to learn what sustainability in the shop means. Participants can learn that sustainability has more than one dimension. With practical examples and stories, we show how shop owners and staff can integrate many actions into daily practice.

The module is divided into 3 units: 1/ HEALTH: Healthy food, healthy lifestyle and hygiene; 2/ ECOLOGY: Sustainable energy, prevention of waste and food waste; 3/ FAIRNESS: Playing an active role in being a good neighbor and employer.

The Learning outcomes cover the following aspects:

- The relation between health and organic food, between health and lifestyle and the different ways in which you can contribute to consumer health and employee health in the shop;
- The importance of reduction of energy and waste and use of renewable resources;
- Fairness in the relationship with your neighborhood and employers.

e) Module 5 - Sustainable Relationship

Module 5 covers aspects on sustainable relationship within the following units:

Unit 1 - Relations with suppliers: The aim of this module is to make participants aware of the importance of good, lasting relationships with suppliers and learn how to establish and maintain them. The goal is to present ways of selecting suppliers according to their own ethical standards, and to present the negotiating process and the importance of good solid contractual relations, personal relationships and permanent dialogue.

Unit 2 - Relations with customers: After completion of this module, the participants are aware of the importance of regular customers for the success of the business. The goal of this topic is to give participants the knowledge how to reach the potential customers and also how to keep them, with certain soft skills, with building the confidence and with various tools of marketing communication. The goal is that participants identify the topic of sustainability as a unique market opportunity and that they know how to encourage customers to sustainable behaviour.

Unit 3 - Relations with employees: The goal is to present quality employment policy, which is focused on contracts for full-time for an indefinite period and present to them all aspects that contribute to satisfaction and motivation for employees and to long-term employment and loyalty. The goal is also to ensure that participants are aware of the importance of continuous education and training of employees for the success of the shop and to encourage them to sustainable behaviour.

f) Module 6 - Transparency

The goal of this module is to provide you with recommendations on how to improve transparency at all levels of your activity. The module also delivers advices on how to

communicate on your involvement and good practices. The module is divided in two units:

Unit 1. Transparency on products

Unit 2. Transparency on the company's identity and practices

After finishing this module the learners will have learnt:

- How to make information on organic products characteristics/specificities clear and available for customers;
- How to ensure transparency on supply chains: what's behind the product;
- How to make information on the company and its practices available;
- How to organize clear process to integrate consumers' feedback;
- How to maintain transparency in business relationships.

g) Module 7 - Open Communication

The goal of this module is to provide shop managers and team members with knowledge and skills to ensure the concept of open communication is implemented in the workplace in order to achieve full transparency and active involvement of all stakeholders. The module is divided in three units:

Unit 1. Company structure and its policies - To provide learners with knowledge and skills in order to be able to describe important information on company structure and its policies, and prepare work place descriptions.

Unit 2. Open communication – how to build trust - To introduce learners to the concept of Open communication and how to achieve it in the workplace through building of trust.

Unit 3. Open communication tools - To help learners use open communication tools in order to provide stakeholders with information on organisation's goals, targets, strategies and policies and share values and visions of the organisation.

h) Module 8 - Quality Management

The Module is divided into three units:

Unit 1. What is Quality Management all about?

Unit 2. Principles of Quality Management

Unit 3. Quality Management in Organic Trade

After finishing this module the trainees will get knowledge on:

- Why it is so important to think about quality.
- What are the benefits of Quality Management Principles.
- What a Quality Handbook looks like.

The training materials are adapted and prepared for the e-learning format and the content is transferred into a comprehensive e-learning platform which is based on CMS Moodle. The process includes training and instructing of the partners, designing of the materials for the e-learning course content, development of design concept; and the transfer of materials to the learning platform. Another important task is the integration of currently available tools of CMS Moodle and the use of interactive elements and instruments like audio tracks, video and internet films, web-links, chats, assessments, working groups etc.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can declare that the presented e-learning course will help managers and staff of organic food retailers to improve their knowledge and competences in sustainability issues, active environmental protection, social competence and customer orientation. Acquiring these skills and competences will ensure that the principles of organic farming will be extended up to the last piece of the supply chain – that is the retail sector, which is today excluded from the EU organic regulation. And it will support that additionally ethical and sustainable principles become part of daily practice and can be included in the communication strategy of the organic business.

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