

Gourmet product development in Nature Park Kaunergrat

The Nature Park Kaunergrat is located in the western part of Tyrol, a well-developed tourist region. Therefore, it has a good market for regional specialities/souvenirs right on its doorstep (2 million overnight stays in the Nature Park communities, 8 million overnight stays in the wider region (district Landeck)). This Nature Park is home to a very rare dry grassland, with rare plants and insects.

The Nature Park Kaunergrat currently offers most products of all Nature Parks. The Nature Park sells the Nature Park Specialities in a shop in its information centre and via a webshop. However, the management of the Nature Park was unhappy with the product range: Although they offered 200 different products, most of them were Schnapps, which is not suitable for hikers and families with children, and handicraft products, which were hard to sell. As products made from forest plants were traditionally processed and used in the region, increasing the product range to wild forest products (wfps) was just a natural development.

Within the StarTree project from March 2015 to April 2016, a new product line was developed in a series of workshops of the Management of the Nature Park together with the regional producers. At Christmas 2015, the following new products were first presented at various Christmas markets of the region:

- Bilberry and small cranberry jam
- Herbal salt in a spice mill
- Blackthorn tea
- Blackthorn vinegar
- Traditional flatbread made from old varieties of cereal crops (“Schüttelbrot”)
- Spruce tip honey
- Pralines filled with Swiss pine schnaps

Having been an outside observer within the frame of StarTree, the question arose as to which steps of the product development process were relatively easy and unproblematic as well as which impediments occurred.

Product and organisational development in the Nature Park Kaunergrat

How can farmers and small enterprises develop new products easily? The producers involved in the product development are farms with direct merchandising and many years of experience, some producers even have more than one professional training (e.g. one producer is a professional confectioner). They have been in direct contact with the consumers for many years and they have already tried out many new recipes; several recipes are also based on traditional, old ones which were given a new guise.

Most of these producers have collaborated with the Nature Park since 2002. The Nature Park supported the producers who preserve the cultural landscape by assisting them with the marketing, e.g. selling gift packages. In 2012, a platform for the Nature Park and its partner businesses was founded, covering two areas: farms with direct merchandising and hotels. At the same time, criteria for the products sold as Nature Park Specialities were established. Moreover, the Nature Park inaugurated the Nature Park House which hosts an information centre, an exhibition, a restaurant and a shop. This Nature Park shop showcases the products that are also sold directly on the farms (there’s an interactive map on the Nature Park website and at the hotels).

It turned out that the actual development of the products, the testing of the recipes, was no problem at all for the producers (farmers and small enterprises); on the contrary, they mastered this step in an excellent way. The only thing that had to be organised for them was a suitable and attractive design/label for the products. In the future, the challenge lies in providing sufficient amounts of the products because they are already in demand in the shop and in hotels. At the moment, the producers harvest what they can of the basic products, e.g. cowberries, and when they have used them all, they just stop producing. In other words, they do not adjust supply to meet demand, e.g. by buying more basic products or cooperating with other producers. Therefore, the Nature Park has considered organising the production of the products. In the future, the Nature Park shall hold the rights to the recipes of the newly created products and will employ people to collect the basic

products (e.g. cowberries) upon consultation with the landowners and preserve them by freezing. One or more farmers will then process the frozen fruit according to the recipe and present them in seasonal packaging, as needed (e.g. in November for the Christmas markets, for high season in winter for the hotels, and throughout the whole year for the webshop). This way, it should be possible to guarantee that there are sufficient products with consistent quality and packaging to meet demand. Essentially, the idea is to create a “Nature Park Manufacture” and this project represented the first steps towards its realisation.