

Our journey into the hemp business

During the last weeks of August we were visiting a wonderful Obelisk hemp farm in Latvia's Latgale region. The farm is owned by a wonderful family that became our friends and taught us a craft of hemp culture.



How did we end up there?

During the COVID pandemic we realised that we wish to move from a big city to the countryside. We decided that our jobs would be fine to move them from offices to remote locations, but eventually plan to rely only on what we manage to grow and create in our household. We had a little experience of rural life and sustainable living, but decided that we should expand our knowledge to be well prepared for most of the challenges.

Who are we?

Maya and Artem- we are just married multinational couple. Artem is a videographer and photographer. I am a public health specialist. We are both interested in rural development and starting our own agricultural business. My parents own land and a house making their profits from selling vegetables, goat milk and goat cheese. Artem owns a small house and a square of land as well.

As was mentioned earlier, we were always interested in having our own household and making our living by providing products that we grow on our own. We were looking for the opportunity to learn from young farmers that have started their business on their own. The aim was to understand the financial and social aspects of rural development and apply the gained knowledge and experience on our own projects.

What did we do?

The traineeship lasted two weeks from august **15** to august **29**. Our hosts, a very friendly multicultural family, provided us a lot of knowledge we lacked and shared their experience on rural development.



On the 1st week of our stay at the Obelisk hemp farm we got familiar with the hemp business and the history of hemp culture in Latvia. Deборе and Andris, the farm owners, provided us a better understanding on how to start an agricultural business, maintain a farm and apply for governmental assistance. They gave us a tour around their household, the hemp museum, and

the hemp shop. We were shown the hemp fields, saw the hemp products and learned how they were made.



During 2 week of our stay we were mostly engaged in the hemp-related activities-making hempcrete and hemp paper. Learning how to make hemp oil. Helping the host to pack orders and making videos and pictures. We also took part in a local fair selling hemp-made products to locals, learning the skill of selling and buying and presenting the products. We also took part in the hemp museum tours, meeting the arriving guests. Artem assisted in making videos and photos.



What did we learn?

Thanks to this project we learned how to start an agricultural business, more inspiration on our future projects. We also got a better understanding on what are necessary subjects of proper

rural development and how to maintain work-life balance. I think it is very important. The people we met were able to have a small profitable business and happy relationship with their spouses and children.

Who did we meet?

We met many young adults that have already started their own agricultural business and built their households. I have asked them the similar questions :

“Why you became interested in rural development”

“What was your journey into rural living and agricultural business”

“How do you see future in the development of rural regions and what could be people contribution to it”

Janis and Inguna- the couple of young farmers we were visiting during our internship.

“I was a city boy and my wife is a local here. When we met and started our family we lived in a city at first, but then we decided that our children needed more space to live and explore, so we started looking for abandoned houses and land. It was not very easy but our efforts were fulfilled. We bought a house and purchased this land “showing around”. The land was not perfect at first, as you can see, we managed to renovate our house, to set up a garden and a pond, but a lot of work needs to be done.

We mostly work on our own with a bit of assistance from volunteers. We experiment a lot :growing mushrooms, chicks , selling eggs on the local market, making paper, growing berries like -blueberries and cranberries and many more. We see our future in developing non-formal education for kids, maybe some tours for locals and tourists and many more. “

Debore and Andris- were our main local actors that we asked a lot about their decision to move to a farm, starting their hemp business and living a life in the rural surroundings.

“After our experience of living in different countries we decided that we would like to move to a place where we could raise our kids and start our own business. We found a place to start over our hemp business. It wasn’t easy at the start. Not a one day work. Little by little we gained experience in gardening and harvesting hemp. We created our own marketing strategy, set up production and found clients. We never planned to go big, we just want to be a small family business, get connected to people through our work and make our surroundings a better place. “

What did we learn?

What we learned from our hosts and their colleagues and our new friends, is that you should not be afraid to experiment and try something that might be new for the industry but might be good for you and become profitable. We received quite a lot of information on how to apply for governmental support as well and how it works in the European Union.

We learned how one day a modern farmer looks like, how to apply modern technologies, like instagram to make it work for the farmer's benefits.

How shall we implement gained knowledge?

First of all we shall apply our new experience on our own business plan writing and setting up projects that we might be interested in.

Secondly, we will do the real estate market research to find a better place to start a business.

Thirdly, we shall set up a marketing strategy for our future products and plan the marketing activities for them.

We are not quite sure that we will be working with the hemp, like our hosts. But, we shall definitely apply the learned strategy to grow our own products.