

PROTEIN2FOOD has set the ambitious goals to **increase Europe's agro-biodiversity** and protein production by 25% by introducing promising high-quality crops and legumes and improving breeding techniques and crop management. An important aspect of this goal is social innovation and education. While social innovation has been an element across the entire value-chain, the project has focussed on establishing a new market for **quinoa in Romania**. Through education of farmers and strong collaborations with the food chain sector, the project has enabled a breakthrough of local economic and social value.

Main Achievements

Social innovation describes the creation of new ideas that simultaneously meet social needs and creates new social relationships and collaborations. PROTEIN2FOOD has facilitated social innovation in **Romania** by introducing the required competencies and knowledge to start cultivation and production of quinoa in the country for the first time. **Quinoa** was chosen for its suitability to Romania's terrain and its ability to adapt to climate change and withstand droughts and increased soil salinity.

Using a wide network in the country and in Europe, PROTEIN2FOOD initially identified around **60 relevant food chain actors** (farmers, agricultural companies, consulting companies) in Romania and included them in a network with the aim of establishing a value chain for quinoa. PROTEIN2FOOD organised **seminars, meetings** and **training programmes** for the network. **Materials, guidelines** and **manuals** on the **quinoa growing techniques** and **innovative production processes** were also developed. Furthermore, trainings were also offered to unemployed and disadvantaged farmers. Four seminars were organised, covering the following themes:

- 1) *Introduction to the PROTEIN2FOOD project.*
- 2) *Quinoa cultivation: characteristics and techniques.*
- 3) *Growing quinoa: the potential of using natural enemies and chemical compounds in quinoa for biological control of insect pests.*
- 4) *The life cycle of quinoa and market expectations.*

Ten Romanian farmers were involved in pilot cultivation studies and received specialised consultancy on quinoa cultivation and management. The network developed into solid partnerships, which were made explicit in a **Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)**, that describes the rights and duties of all the parties involved and the terms of references for their business agreements. The MoU has helped to establish business networks and partnership between farmers, food producers and consumers. This work presents a successful showcase of how a project can help initiate social innovation and can be an inspiration for introducing plant-protein ingredients and foods to other regions in Europe and beyond.

"Romanian farmers have acknowledged that local quinoa cultivation is both economically and environmentally sustainable."



Image 1. Training course with local farmers



Image 2. Pilot field with quinoa in Romania



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Impacts

Social innovation

PROTEIN2FOOD has helped spark social innovation in Romania by introducing quinoa, new cropping systems and innovative production processes to the country. This has increased the amount of cultivated land for quinoa by 15,7 ha, increased the employment rate through new opportunities for farmers and helped to guarantee a fair return on production. The Romanian farmers have been given the opportunity to acquire specific knowledge and competences on the cultivation, management and processing of quinoa. Through the MoU this will be transferred to other EU countries, Peru and Uganda and is a successful showcase of social innovation, which can be inspiration at the EU level.

Opening the door to a new future

Through its activities, PROTEIN2FOOD has observed a change in the perspectives of the Romanian farmers. They have moved from a place of strong scepticism towards acknowledging quinoa as a means for added economic value as well as environmental benefits of increased agro-biodiversity and climate change resilient crops. In the longer term, it is hoped that these 'first movers' or initial farmers and stakeholders will help to evolve the knowledge and competencies of quinoa cultivation and processing in Romania, in order to multiply the social and economic benefits to larger communities and regions.

Bringing Romanian produced quinoa on the market

Following the seminars and trainings of relevant stakeholders, PROTEIN2FOOD has helped introduce a

commercialised quinoa product to the Romanian market and developed an origin recognised brand (local, bounded to a certain territory) within a network of specialised shops. The planned marketing activities of this product has helped promote the brand and allowed for a 20% increase of income. PROTEIN2FOOD has also participated in various Romanian events (EIT Food programme; EIT Food Demo Day) for start-ups to learn about new business opportunities, that have arisen within quinoa cultivation and processing, to help quinoa flourish in Romania.

Recommendations

- **Continuous support** is required for the farmers during the implementation of new high-protein, high-quality protein crops, such as quinoa. The initial scepticism can be overcome by trainings and support provided by projects and networks such as PROTEIN2FOOD. Local forces and technical support are vital and should be presented by an expert association.
- The **Memorandum of Understanding**, learnings and training materials developed by PROTEIN2FOOD can be used to inspire the introduction of new protein crops and legumes to other European countries and internationally, helping to highlight the prospect of new business opportunities to relevant food chain actors.
- A **regional economic funding and policy schemes** for realistic sustainable initiatives, such as cultivation of quinoa in Romania is needed to introduce social, economically and environmentally sustainable food systems.

References

PROTEIN2FOOD (2017). **Deliverable 6.4 – Seminars and training courses for farmers.**

For more information visit: <https://www.protein2food.eu>



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