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Library service for farmers supports development
Pasvalys Marius Katiliskis Public Library, Lithuania

The library's Libr-A mobile information and business support service for farmers -

• Inspired Pasvalys municipality to include the library in their plans for local business and e-government service infrastructure development.

• Developed a web-portal that offers free advertising for farm produce - and received funding to expand the web-portal from the European Union's Rural Development Programme 2007-2013

• Attracted new library users – including 467 farmers.

• Won a national 'Libraries for Innovation' Award.

"The library's service responds to the main objective of the 2014-2020 Rural Development Regulation: to stimulate not only traditional farmers' activities in live-stock and crop production, but also in commerce. The new internet site for farmers offers the possibility to advertise agricultural produce for free and will be very useful for small farmers who have to compete with bigger producers." – Paulius Petkevicius, Pasvalys District Municipality Administration.

"The library is a mediator between rural and urban people." – Pasvalys farmer. Farmers and librarians work together to produce product marketing materials in the library's desktop publishing centre.

Pasvalys is a fertile agricultural district in northern Lithuania, on the border with Latvia. About 30% of people in the district are farmers. By far the majority are small-scale farmers, working with about 8 hectares of land; about 5% of farms are over 100 hectares in size. The Pasvalys District Municipality plans to promote sustainable rural development by modernizing farming, strengthening links between the agricultural and business sectors, increasing employment, stimulating competition and encouraging alternative environmentally-friendly and non-traditional activities.

The library recognized that, to rise to the challenges of local economic development, farmers would need accurate, reliable, easily accessible and relevant agricultural information, and opportunities to advertise their produce online. To meet these needs, the Libr-A service works through a network of 34 branch libraries equipped with high speed internet. With a grant of US$15,000 from EIFL-PLIP to cover equipment and some operational costs for one year, the library equipped a business support centre for farmers, with free internet access and desktop publishing (DTP) services. They also bought a laptop computer, projector and screen for ICT training, and a tent and generator for outdoor training and presentations at farmer's markets and fairs.

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Improving lives and livelihoods through innovative public library services

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"During harvest time on my farm, there is not time for browsing through the internet. It is great that such a website exists - we can find all the information in one place there!" - Jonas Oniunas, farmer from Gruziai village, Pasvalys District.

In less than a year, the library…

• Developed the web-portal, Pasvalys Soil (www.pasvaliodirva.lt) with 135 links to agricultural and business support agencies, articles about farming, a discussion forum and advertising space - attracting 68 advertisements for farm produce.

• Trained over 120 people, including farmers, entrepreneurs and rural librarians to use ICT. Because many farmers have smart phones but do not use them to full capacity, training included using smart phones to access the internet, send emails and to create and read QR codes (digital bar coding).

• Worked with farmers in the desktop publishing centre to design and publish 600 produce marketing leaflets and 200 product labels.

Public libraries - partners in development

Marius Katiliskis Public Library is now recognized as a key player in local economic development –

• The library's main partner, the Pasvalys District Local Action Group (DLAG), chose the library to partner in applying for funds from the European Union Rural Development Fund 2007-2013. They received a grant of US$55,700 to contribute to expansion of Libr-A and improve the web-portal.

• Pasvalys municipality contributed US$265,400 to renovate the library to accommodate the new business information centre that will serve as one stop shop for business, offering access to at least 25 municipal e-services.

• The newspaper, Darbas, provided articles for the web-portal and offered free advertising for Libr-A in its pages.

• The Pasvalys branch of the Lithuanian Farmers' Union and the Beekeepers Association 'Biciulis' mobilized members to take part.

• The Joniskelis Experimental Station (Lithuanian Research Centre for Agriculture and Forestry) provided information for the website.

The future

The municipality has agreed to fund Libr-A in 2013. The library is currently being renovated to accommodate a new business information centre that will be part of a cross-border network of public libraries. Expansion of the service - especially the web-portal - will be funded by the grant from the European Union Rural Development Programme 2007-2013.