



VET4FOOD

VET Training for Food Sustainability



Article written by Adam Mouaddine, *Diesis Network*.

The global food industry faces significant challenges in terms of sustainability, with detrimental impacts on both the **environment** and **job market**. In response, a sustainable food system and VET education innovation can provide high-quality green jobs and foster the creation of new professional and entrepreneur profiles.

Regarding the environmental challenge, the situation is pretty clear: about **a third** of the world's greenhouse gas emissions comes from **food systems**, according to a report by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC). The current food model has also a detrimental effect on **people's health**, resulting in over 50% of adults in Europe being overweight.

As a response, the European Commission presented the '**farm to fork**' strategy in May 2020 highlighting that a resource-efficient Europe needs to '*find new ways to reduce inputs, minimize waste, improve management of resource stocks, change consumption patterns, optimize production processes, management and business methods, and improve logistics*'.

Over the past decade, and particularly since the global economic crisis, an increasing number of social economy organisations have focused on **food**. Food banks are a classic example of recovering food from donors to redistribute it to civil society organisations supporting the most deprived. They play a double role, both **helping the poor to access food and reducing food waste**. These experiences of food recycling combine several different roles, since upcycling can be considered to be an ecological action as well as a tool to build social cohesion and an opportunity to develop community awareness of food challenges.

More recently, various other examples of social enterprises involved in upcycling waste

food have been emerging. ***Rubies in the Rubble*** is a social enterprise in the UK, whose goal is to come up with solutions to its twin concerns of food waste and finding employment opportunities for women who have fallen on hard times and need a helping hand to rebuild their lives.

This social enterprise gives a second life to food that is wasted but yet edible. It works with UK farmers, sourcing fresh fruit and vegetables from their surplus produce, which it transforms into a range of relishes.

Another good example of social enterprise working in the food sustainability field is ***Maramao***, an Italian agricultural social cooperative born in 2016 focusing on cultivating vegetables according to organic farming techniques on private land leased cheaply or free of charge. The cooperative, other than promoting the cultivation of organic food, promotes social integration through the involvement of asylum seekers and people under the international protection of SPRAR (System for the Protection of Asylum Seekers and Refugees) through job placement and training opportunities. Finally, ***Maramao*** is committed to recovering abandoned rural areas, promoting local products and revitalizing local territories and communities.

Although the food industry has the greatest effects on the environment, also the tourism industry has a big impact. For this reason, enterprises like ***Biovilla***'s started to spread all over Europe and beyond. ***Biovilla*** is an eco-tourism unit that provides a holistic experience, enabling customers to access sustainable products and services at fair and reasonable prices. The concept behind their lodging offer is enabling people to experience a different kind of tourism in nature combined with information about the area, bioconstruction, and the efficiency of energy resources. ***Biovilla*** has also a goal in terms of learning, since it offers a wide range of training sessions in sustainability, transition, and personal development. Moreover, the cooperative produces, distributes, and sells organic products.

Finally, ***Obshtestven Klub Furna Community Bakery Club Gabrovo*** is a public bakery preparing bread daily for sale to the local community. The flour used is obtained from a particular variety of wheat called Limez, which has unique nutritional properties and permits the revival of the traditions of artisan bread, as a high quality and healthy food. This social enterprise focuses on recruiting and training young people coming up out of the local institution as well as organizing the community kneading of bread and therapeutic work with disadvantaged people, especially with children deprived of parental care. Moreover, the ***Community Bakery Club*** assist local voluntary initiatives by providing space for free use of the oven and donates bread to various charity events and institutions.

In conclusion, the global food industry must confront its **sustainability challenges** through **innovative approaches** and a commitment to **environmental responsibility**. By adopting sustainable food systems, investing in vocational education and training, and supporting social enterprises, the industry can create a positive impact on the environment, generate high-quality green jobs, and cultivate a new generation of professionals and entrepreneurs committed to building a sustainable future.