1. Issues faced:

Modern tourists seek local, authentic and sustainable experiences; when talking about gastronomy, they appreciate locally grown ingredients and local recipes. But to fulfil their needs and to build our competitive advantage on locally grown food, showcasing our awareness of the importance of local sourcing, creation of local jobs, reduction of carbon footprint and minimization of environmental pressures, we had to increase the percentage of locally sourced food in Ljubljana hotels and restaurants. Although there are many farmers and producers in the vicinity of Ljubljana, a study in our preliminary Green Supply Chains project has shown that hotels and restaurants faced too many obstacles when purchasing stock directly from suppliers (amongst obstacles we find high prices, high transport costs, low quantities, administration etc.). Therefore Ljubljana Tourism (as a DMO) started organizing face-to-face meetings, called the Locally Grown Food Exchange, between suppliers (farmers, producers) and buyers (hotels, restaurants). The aim of the Exchange was to get to know the offer, meet each other in person and - ideally - sign contract agreements.

2. Methods / steps / tools used:

In order to set up the Locally Grown Food Exchange and to attract buyers and suppliers to the event, we worked together with several institutions. Besides us at the Ljubljana Tourism who were in charge of communication with tourism stakeholders (hotels, restaurants) we collaborated with:

- the Department for Environmental Protection of the City of Ljubljana that liaised with the local farmers and advised them on suitable presentations
- the Regional Development Agency of Ljubljana Urban Region (RRA LUR) which handled the event management and communicated with educational institutions (schools, day-care centres)
- the Agricultural and Forestry Regional Institute with excellent knowledge in the field of agriculture and trends, and
- the Ekometer Institute that specializes in regional and rural development.

Each of the partners was responsible for one of the target groups (ie. farmers and producers; hotels and restaurants; schools and day-care centres). To ensure their presence, we not only sent them invitations but also called them directly on the phone. To get the participants to better know each other, we engaged a professional event moderator who conducted a series of short interviews on the spot. After the event, a joint catalogue with information about all
participants, including their offer (suppliers) or their needs (buyers), was issued and sent via email.

3. Specific/ measurable results, benefits and recognitions (e.g. awards):

The first Locally Grown Food Exchange was organized in February 2018. It attracted 39 producers and 9 tourism businesses. Additionally we also invited representatives of local schools and day-care centres to use this opportunity to increase the percentage of locally sourced ingredients in their facilities. Catalogue with all contacts and descriptions was sent to all participants to facilitate cooperation. In November 2018, the second Locally Grown Food Exchange took place. This time over 60 stakeholders, out of which 14 were tourism businesses, met to exchange contacts and start a long-term cooperation. We do not have exact information on number of contracts that were signed but we have heard back from some participants that collaborations had started. The project has won us the Premik naprej 2018 award which is given by the Faculty of Administration to the most progressive and innovative project in the public sector. Due to the very positive feedback from the participants and the professional public, we will aim to continue organizing such events regularly, at least twice a year.

4. Lessons learned:

At the first Exchange, the number of suppliers strongly exceeded the number of buyers. That is why we worked even harder to attract more buyers to the second event, and we succeeded to establish the 1:1 ratio. We also realized that we had to know in advance what producers were offering, in order to assure a varied assortment of ingredients and products. Since we believe that the project needs constant upgrading, we launched a new initiative in November 2018. On monthly basis, the Department for Environmental Protection of the City of Ljubljana will identify seasonal ingredients and indicate farmers who can supply them, a renowned author of cookbooks Valentina Smej Novak will prepare typical recipes from these ingredients, and Ljubljana Tourism will distribute the recipes to Ljubljana hotels and restaurants, thereby encouraging them to purchase the ingredients from the list of producers and offer healthy, locally sourced, seasonal dishes to their guests.

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