

Meeting with Windy K. Moe from the Eastern Norway Research Institute

Windy is a mountain farmer as well as the person in charge of communication for the Eastern Norway Research Institute, one of Euromontana's members. In this interview, we will learn more about how she uses social media to sell her raspberries.



Euromontana: To start with, can you describe the kind of farm you are working on?

Windy K. Moe: Our farm is a family farm that has been in business for several hundred years. The only thing my husband's ancestors saved during a big fire in 1780 was a leather-bound bible dated from 1625, but archaeological findings show that farmers were living here already 3,000 years ago.

The main farm and fields are located at 330 meters above sea level, 15 km north of Lillehammer, in the Gudbrandsdalen area of Norway. There are also two small summer farms 800 meters and 1,000 meters high. Production has traditionally been forestry and cattle.

Since 2014, we also have a small raspberry production of one acre (2,000 plants) on the sunny side of the hill. We produce sun-ripened raspberries for our local/regional market. Ideally, they are consumed the day they are picked, without traveling too much. We focus on direct sale at the farm, in the local shops and on the menu of regional restaurants.



In these latitudes, the production season lasts 5-6 weeks during summer, in which **we have to pick and sell 8,000 kilos of raspberries**. During high season, we have six employees, but the rest of the year, we manage everything by ourselves.

E: How did you discover that social media could help you sell your products?

WM: Summer of 2014 was a really hot one according to Norwegian standards and our very first crop came fast and concentrated in only a few weeks.

We had a distribution plan with supermarkets in the area, but we quickly realised we needed to find more sales channels. We opened a pop-up drive in a shop beside our field, created a Facebook page and ... it just started rolling. We use Facebook frequently for marketing, but customers can also order on Messenger and Facebook.

During the past summer, the Finnish concept of REKO (*Rejäl konsumtion* in Swedish, translated as "Sincere consumption") came to the city of Lillehammer and a new market opened for us.

E: How does it work?

WM: It's basically an online local food market, facilitated in a closed Facebook group. **Volunteers run the group**. They decide of the date (usually **once a week, during 30min**) and place for the hand out (**an easily accessible parking lot**).

Farmers can advertise their products for free and consumers order directly from producers by placing their orders in the comment field below

the farmer's advertisement. **The transaction and payment are made on the spot, and without fees.**

Rules are simple: **producers are obliged to follow the local regulations and laws** on taxes and food safety and can be expelled from the group if they violate this. **Customers can be expelled if they don't show up to pick up their delivery.**

E: What are the benefits for you as a producer?

WM: Since our raspberry season is short, hectic and intense, all sales channels are welcome. The REKO-system of ordering in the comments field on Facebook allows us to know beforehand how much we will sell in one day and thus **avoids any waste.**

The distribution only takes half an hour on the parking lot, we don't have to stand on a market all day and that's really **stress reducing.**

The REKO system is relatively new in Norway but customers are genuinely interested in good and local food. As producers, **we can stick to the prices we need to ask to make our production profitable** (no hassling manager in between us and the customer) and there're no fees for participating. Our own farm shop also benefits from REKO, as satisfied REKO customers pass by to buy more.



The **biggest benefit of Facebook is that it's free**, we have a small marketing budget that we only use if we really want to target a specific group, but usually the organic reach of posts is enough. And **being visible at social media often generates visibility in traditional media.**

E: Did you need to acquire any communication skills to start selling on social media?

WM: You don't need many skills, but **it might be smart to set some simple rules in order to stay true to yourself, your product and your farm.** For example: we don't discuss politics on our social media account, we do not use our children for marketing purpose, keep a light tone, always answer on comments and messages – but put the smart phone away during dinner.

And... make pictures and videos. People want to see where the food they buy comes from- **that's the whole point of not having middlemen!**

« Anyone can do it. But you must see social media as an integrated part of your job. I mean, as a farmer you already are your own technician, carpenter, veterinarian, biologist, accountant, manager, salesperson and if you want to reach your customers nowadays, I believe you can't do without social media. »

E: And to finish ... What could be the challenges to replicate this good practice in other mountain areas?

WM: Challenges for a well-functioning REKO system in mountain areas might be **distances.** How far are producers and consumers willing to drive to deliver or pick up orders? For us it's only 20 minutes, but I know about farmers who set conditions for a minimum sale because of their long travel time.

Another factor is **finding dedicated volunteers** who start up and administrate the group. Especially in the beginning, the group is dependent on getting known and on attracting customers and producers as members.

For more information:

YouTube video "What is REKO?" (in English): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeAEpHCQvOc&feature=youtu.be>

