



## Oulu region “Bioeconomy Leader Tour” information and advisory project for rural enterprises and villages

### COUNTRY

Finland

### PROJECT PROMOTER

ProAgria Oulu and Oulun Maa- ja kotitalousnaiset

### FUNDING

RDP and municipal funding, EUR 180 000

### RDP MEASURES

- M01 - Knowledge transfer and information activities
- M19 - Leader

### DURATION

2016 – 2019

### CONTRIBUTION TO

- Generating environmental benefits
- Mitigating climate change
- Creating value through improved production methods or processing technology
- Creating value through increased cooperation among value chain actors

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### WEBSITE

<https://www.proagriaoulu.fi/fi/biotalousleader/>

### KEYWORDS

Rural enterprises, co-operation, knowledge transfer, local economy, adding value

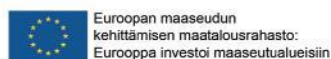
Oulu region “Bioeconomy Leader Tour” organised communication, information and advisory activities targeting rural entrepreneurs, people interested in entrepreneurship and all village-level actors linked to the regional bioeconomy in the Oulu Leader region (Ii, Kempele, Muhos, Pudasjärvi, Utajärvi and Oulu rural regions, excluding Oulu urban centre). The information was tailored to the specific characteristics of the Oulu Leader region and the real needs and interests of the region’s rural enterprises.



The project developed the understanding of what bioeconomy could mean in this particular region and what concrete opportunities it offers for the territory. The project helped rural enterprises and villages to discover opportunities to increase collaboration around new bio-based business models, products and services.

## RESULTS

- ✓ Increased general awareness of opportunities in bioeconomy and the principles of environmental sustainability in the use and re-use of local natural resources.
- ✓ 117 information events reached 2124 participants and communication through media reached an even larger audience.
- ✓ 55 small rural enterprises started initiatives to develop their businesses via bioeconomy-related activities.
- ✓ 19 enterprises received advice on investments or financing.
- ✓ 17 enterprises started planning investments – 10 have already applied for financing.
- ✓ 5 new enterprises have been established, 5 more are being launched.
- ✓ Increased cooperation between entrepreneurs and villages in the region; new collaboration models have been promoted.



## Context

The Oulu Leader region is characterized by vast rural areas surrounding the densest urban concentration of the province, the city of Oulu. This setting favors the development of short urban-rural linkages for food distribution and provision of nature based services. The dynamic villages of the region also present an opportunity to implement village level business and circular economy models. Interest towards rural biogas production has also grown thanks to recently started biofuel production for transport in Oulu.

## Results

The objective of the project was information transfer, and it included over hundred information events that reached over 2000 people. During the project, new investments and newly launched enterprises linked to bioeconomy have emerged within the project region, and more keep emerging. 55 small rural enterprises started to develop their business activity on bioeconomy related activities and most of them have sought further advise on the topic. Two new farm level biorefineries for biogas and bio-based products have been built, in addition 3 are being planned and dozens of farms are showing interest. In the rural area, the use of natural harvest plants and related activities have been promoted in various events with information tailored to existing entrepreneurs' needs. In some villages, alternative protein production with insects has been launched. All these developments are resulting of overall increased awareness on opportunities of the bioeconomy, to which the Oulu Bioeconomy Tour Leader project has for its part contributed.

## Activities

The project was managed and implemented by ProAgria Oulu and Oulu Rural Women's Advisory Organisation. ProAgria's regional branches provide expert services and know-how to develop competitiveness in agriculture and rural businesses. ProAgria provides advisory and development services to members and customers bringing added value, quality, competitiveness and productivity to their operations. Rural Women's Advisory Organisation is a nationwide expert organisation in food and nutrition, landscape and environmental management and planning, entrepreneurship, and collective activities. Its regional centres operate in collaboration with the ProAgria Centres.

The project activities included interactive information events, needs surveys for regional actors and villages interested in new cooperation models, articles and

communications in the internet, social media and other medias (<https://www.proagriaoulu.fi/fi/biotalousleader/>; <https://www.facebook.com/biotalousleader/>); and documentation of successful bioeconomy initiatives (<https://www.proagriaoulu.fi/fi/esimerkkikohteita/>). The content of the information activities was tailored to the region's specificities and covered village bioeconomy models; rural tourism, leisure and well-being services; branding rural landscapes; collaboration models for rural enterprises; circular economy; biogas; forest bioeconomy; natural harvesting products; local food; and digitalization.



## Environmental sustainability

The Oulu Region Bioeconomy Leader Tour focused on the sustainable use of renewable natural resources, aiming at optimizing resource efficiency with highest possible added value of products and services. The project underlined the principles of sustainable development to guarantee continuity of economic activities and preserving the diverse environmental values and immaterial benefits.

The activities emphasized ecosystem services – such as carbon sequestration, clean water and leisure opportunities of natural environments – as part of the bioeconomy. Promoting local production and supply chains was central in the approach, with the objective of reducing transport and related emissions and promoting circularity.

## Lessons learnt

The whole project was built to promote the sustainable use of local resources. Promoting local products, made with local raw materials and processed using local renewable energy and local collaboration models were the key building blocks of the project's approach. The objective was also to promote local high value addition of raw materials. Examples include how to establish certified organic collection areas of wild herbs and berries; and local processing of non-wood forest products (NWFPP) by using local energy sources to run the drying equipment. The project increased its impact through close collaboration with other regional projects and regional entrepreneurs.