



Raising Employability of Women
through entrepreneurial Activities
fostering Rural Development

CASE STUDY

MANUELA HERRERA VALERO
Oleocosméticos

INTRODUCTION

Olea Cosmetics is a company formed by four business women, located in Pegalajar in the Natural Park of Sierra Mágina, which is dedicated to the production and sale of soaps and natural cosmetics derived from organic extra virgin olive oil and essential oils from medicinal plants.

It is an enterprise that arises from the will of a group of women to develop an opportunity for self-employment, for which they had the support of the LEADER programs of the rural development policies.

Pegalajar is located within the Sierra Mágina Natural Park, an olive-growing area of tradition, and this group of women decided to promote the benefits of oil beyond its culinary use. In the tradition of our villages, olive oil was used as a protective and healing element for the skin.

This group of women rescued and put in value the tradition of the elaboration of the soaps in the houses of the villages, using the olive oil as a base ingredient, and they elevate it to the category of high quality product with the use of organic extra virgin oil elaborated in a handmade way, but following the quality and hygiene protocols that their multiple certifications require, as well as the demanding market to which they are directed.

1. PERSONAL DATA

 **Name:** Manuela Herrera Valero

 **Age range:** 46 +

 **Education:** The members have compulsory general education and have acquired specific professional training related to the production of cosmetics, creams and soaps. Training that they have personally financed in specialized centers in different parts of Spain.

 **Occupation:** Business managers, entrepreneurs, farmers and housewives.



2. FARM PROFILE

 **Address:**
Calvario street, 28. 23110 Pegalajar (Jaén).

 **Farm Area in ha:** -

 **Date since when the female entrepreneur owns/rents the farm:** 2001.

N° of workers on the farms:

	FULL TIME	PART-TIME/SEASONAL	WOMEN
Family members			
Other than family members	1	3	4

 **Farm description:** Three of the four partners are linked to their own family farms, each one individually, so they have a professional connection with olive oil.

However, the oil they use does not come from their family farms, they have decided to use the best organic product from Parque de Sierra Mágina. That is why they buy their oil from Trujal from Cambil, a certified transformation cooperative that produces high quality organic olive oil. The facilities are adapted to the demanding requirements defined in the protocols of the Ministry of Health for the production of cosmetic and pharmaceutical products, as well as for the fulfillment of the requirements demanded by the brands and certifications to which they belong (Natural Park of Andalusia and European Charter for Sustainable Tourism), which guarantee a quality product that respects the environment.

To this end, they have different spaces, laboratories and clean rooms for the production of their products and creams, in which they guarantee to maintain their products in the best conditions of production and conservation.

 **Website and social networks accounts:** www.oleacosmeticos.com

3. MULTIFUNCTIONALITY / RURAL CULTURAL HERITAGE

In its product portfolio we can only find handmade and totally natural products belonging to its four ranges: Personal Hygiene, Body Creams, Massage Oils, Colognes and Perfumes. These products are sold through the web and by direct sale in their facilities. They make gift packs and baskets with an assortment of their products, which they adapt to the needs and likes of their customers.

In addition to this main activity, Olea Cosmetics develops oil tourism and training activities. It belongs to the network that makes up Oleo Tour Jaén, a label created by the Diputación of Jaén, a network in which tourists can learn, inform themselves and enjoy all those culinary and cultural aspects related to the production and use of olive oil.

Olea Cosmetics offers new experiences to those who visit its headquarters, where many buses of foreign tourists, elderly people and children go. There, visitors receive information and participate in workshops where they make their own soaps which they take home. These days are exceptional for the dissemination of their products and to learn about the benefits of olive oil, and how it impacts on health, culture, society and economy of the region.

Soap production is an activity that has historically been carried out by women in the houses of the

villages in our rural environment, where they recycled the used oils for the production of natural soap. These techniques were transmitted from mothers to daughters, until our days. These soaps are recognized for their skin care characteristics and their respect for the environment because they do not have chemical residues, in addition to being a traditional way of reusing and recycling used household oils.



You must have the capacity and willingness to learn and assume that things can be done differently.

It is necessary to find the market where the differential attributes of the product can be more valued and transformed into real value for the company.



4. CONSIDERATIONS, TRAINING / COMPETENCES INVOLVED

General considerations:

Olea Cosmetics originally emerged as an association of 7 women from Pegalajar, who decided to produce cosmetic products based on Olive Oil. The strong financing necessary to produce, as well as the need to be able to bill their sales, led them to set up as a limited company, since this legal structure was the simplest in case of liquidating the company.

Initially they had to face a large financing of more than 400k Euros, which forced them to look for different sources of financing. They had EU funds from the LEADER program, but additionally they needed private third-party financing through banks.

They wanted to lead the creation of the company without the support of their husbands, but the local bank did not want to grant a loan to a group of women. Although they looked for another bank to work with, the legal limitations forced their husbands to participate in the

constitution of the loans.

From the bureaucratic point of view they have encountered great difficulties due to the need for sanitary registration, certifications and audits. When living in a province with little industrial tradition and less in the cosmetic sector, they had to go to Madrid to get advice and know firsthand all the regulatory and bureaucratic requirements that they had to fulfill. If it were not for the support of some public servants who help to them, it would have been impossible to develop the project.

Although they acquired knowledge through some courses from the EU, to specialize and obtain more professional training, they had to move to other regions of Spain with more tradition in the production of cosmetic products.

After a complex beginning due to the financing needs, they began to function quite successfully, coinciding with the years before the 2008 crisis. But from that date on, sales began to slow down. Nowadays, they consider it necessary to develop their commercial activity beyond the web, direct sales and word of mouth. This is one of the most important challenges for their near future.

Although they were pioneers in the sector in Jaén, other companies have taken advantage; these new competitors have been more commercially aggressive, so it is difficult for them to enter some distribution channels while maintaining Olea Cosméticos high standards of quality. This evolution has made them restructure their purchases policies, before the crisis they kept larger stocks, now it is produced according to demand, which allows more cost control and the possibility of adapting manufacturing to the needs of customers. They have also taken extreme measures in the control of payments, now they only give commercial credit to regular customers, since they have learned from past experiences.

Being four rural women allows support each other in many areas of their personal and business life. Their cooperation has allowed them to rely on the financing of the project, it has given them personal support during difficult times, it allows them time flexibility to meet their family and personal obligations, it allows them to cover wide opening hours, and it allows them to share their successes.

From the point of view of the potential market, a natural, ecological, handmade product, with recognized benefits and certifications, has more impact and recognition in the national market than in the regional market, where all these natural aspects and handicrafts linked to tradition and cultural heritage are more valued.

 **Training/Competences (Knowledge, Skills, Attitudes) especially relevant for the process:**
As rural women, they consider that they have great assets for entrepreneurship and the development of a productive or economic activity. They highlight their ability to adapt themselves, as entrepreneur they must be prepared for everything during the development of the project. Similarly, they must be able to adapt to customer needs and changes in demand.

As women they are characterized by their strong will to do things, they are able to perform

many tasks at the same time, fulfilling their personal and family obligations.

Women are considered with the ability to generate many ideas, perform many tasks, reinvent and redefine approaches, and generate many designs. Always open to learning, they propose a different way of approaching challenges, knowing that there is no single way to solve problems. The management of detail is very important, everything counts, the female hand impacts the way of presenting things what is very important to satisfy the perception of customers.

From the training point of view, although they have completed technical training, they consider that the problem is in training in management tools. There are entities that manage the subsidies, auditors that certify quality or certifications, but there is not advice and follow-up in the business management area. You can know how to produce, manufacture, manage resources, but nobody teaches you how to sell and output the final products. It is important that advice and subsequent monitoring to ensure the viability of any project.

Among the competencies that can be highlighted, first of all you must believe in the project and have confidence in your approach. You have to be consistent and invest a lot of time and effort without getting anything in return. That is why it is important to have permanent motivation and enthusiasm.

It is important to have an entrepreneurial spirit, most of Olea Cosméticos members have had a relationship with family businesses, and that is essential for entrepreneurship. The ability to adapt is essential; there will be good and bad days, but you must always be willing to learn, and if there is something you do not know how to do, there are many ways to learn.

SWOT analysis:

STRENGTHS

S

Natural and handmade product.
Cooperation between women.
Without indebtedness.
Adaptability.
Institutional support.
Facilities and equipment.
Experience.

WEAKNESSES

W

Commercial area.
Isolated location.
Lack of commercial profile.

OPPORTUNITIES

O

New commercial channels.
International Certifications.
Institutional support.
Agrotourism.
Growing consumer awareness.
Market niches.

THREATS

T

New entrants.
Lack of relief.
High competition in the cosmetic sector.
Handmade product is more expensive to produce.
Lack of product valuation in local market.

PARTNERS



Association Générale
des Producteurs de
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Biotehniški center Naklo
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