



Case study: **Eko-Zakařtek, Eco-Corner**

Eko-Zakątek

Eco-Corner

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Country	Poland
Region	Greater Poland (Wielkopolskie) voivodeship
Farmer	Agnieszka & Zbigniew
Age	50 / 50
Gender	Marriage
Agrarian education / level of education	Agnieszka: higher education, Zbigniew: higher education, economics
Experience in farming	7
Farm Specialization	Organic farm, mixed production – crops
No. household members	5

Region

The Eko-Zakątek farm is situated in Chraplewo, a few kilometres from the town of Kuślin, in the western part of the Wielkopolska province. Wielkopolska has one of the highest living standards among Poland's provinces. The Kuślin community occupies an area of 106.5 km² and is predominantly agricultural. Around 75% of the land (nearly 7,980 hectares) is used for farming, while nearly 20% (2,035 hectares) is forested. The community is home to approximately 5,500 residents. The A2 motorway passes through Kuślin (connecting Warsaw and Berlin), giving the region good transport infrastructure and making it an attractive destination for both investors and tourists. For many residents and visitors, the area around Kuślin is mainly associated with its beautiful landscape and historically with Emilia Szczaniecka, a participant in national uprisings and a 19th-century social activist. Thanks to the warmth and hospitality of the local inhabitants, the area around Kuślin offers a peaceful retreat amidst stunning nature.

Summers are quite comfortable in the Kuślin community, while winters tend to be cold, snowy, and windy. Throughout the year, temperatures typically vary between -3°C and 24°C. During summer, daily maximum temperatures hover around 22°C, with daily minimums usually around 12°C. Rainfall is generally more intense between mid-May and the end of December. July experiences the most rainfall days, with an average of 57 mm. The driest period occurs in winter until about mid-May. The growth season usually lasts around 190 days annually, starting after mid-April and ending before the end of October. Agricultural production is of low to medium intensity. The farm structure is fragmented, with the majority (about 70%) being

smaller than 10 hectares. Crops mainly consist of cereals (wheat, rye, barley, triticale), root crops (potatoes, fodder and sugar beets), vegetables (carrots, parsley, celery, leeks, onions, cauliflower, cabbage, cucumbers, tomatoes), and, to a lesser extent, orchards featuring apple trees, pears, plums, sour cherries, sweet cherries, and soft fruits such as strawberries, raspberries, currants, and gooseberries.

Farm history, resources, technology and production of the farm

In October 2016, after 14 days of hard work and with the support of family and friends, Agnieszka and Zbigniew completed planting 3,500 hazelnut trees. The orchard mainly features the Catalan walnut variety, along with other varieties that serve as pollinators (Czerwony Warszawski, Barcelona, Barbakan, Giant of Halle, Cosford). Originally, the idea of planting a hazel orchard was a distant vision of combining work and hobby during retirement. However, the pandemic and changes in their working lives prompted the owners to start exploring a business plan and a new source of income from the family's existing resources.

Picture 1 – Hazelnut products

Source: Eko-Zakątek



Their vision was shaped by their dream of the so-called slow life. Additionally, the pandemic and the isolation during lockdowns prompted many of the current customers of Eko-Zakątek farm to reconsider their current work-life balance as well as the quality of the food they consume. Many of these customers rediscovered the pleasure of preparing home-cooked meals and recognised the importance of controlling the quality and origin of the ingredients used for cooking. Agnieszka and Zbigniew responded to these needs by establishing a large "greengrocer's shop" and delivering seasonal vegetables directly to customers, following the "from field to table" philosophy. Their "Health Basket" project was well received, and in the following years, the farmers systematically expanded their vegetable portfolio and began certifying their production process as organic.

Next, they began a small vegetable processing plant to increase the value of their farm production. Their reasons were twofold: (1) to reduce food waste and vegetable losses, and (2) to meet the needs of customers seeking ready-made and preserved foods made from high-quality ingredients. First, Agnieszka and Zbigniew started with vegan dishes free from artificial additives, preservatives, and flavour enhancers. It turned out that old recipes and homemade flavours were very well received. Later, the farmers also decided to establish a small butcher's shop on the farm and to produce cold cuts.

Currently, the farm covers 10 hectares, with 6 hectares dedicated to common hazelnut production and the remaining area used for vegetable production. The farm is well organised and managed. Their knowledge and experience gained in other professions and companies are effectively applied and greatly assist in decision-making. The farm features a degree of diversification in activities and distribution channels. It also generates electricity through installed photovoltaic panels. As stated on their farm's website, Agnieszka and Zbigniew "created Eko-Zakątek because of love...for healthy food, due to concern...for the natural environment, due to the need...to share their passion, and due to the desire...to live in harmony with nature." They believe in the fundamental importance of nature and the long-term benefits of proper and healthy nutrition based on high-quality products. Additionally, they resonate with Dr. Linus Pauling's idea that "proper nutrition is the medicine of tomorrow," confirming the significance of this approach.

Key resources, technology and the production of the farm

Farmers see its workforce (own and hired, including seasonal), unique experience and skills built over years, including organising distribution channels, a strong position in segments (vegetables and preserves, nuts, oils, meats), and technical infrastructure (kitchen, cold store, freezer, refrigerated trucks suited for food transport) as its key resources.

An important product offered by the farm is the Health Basket. It follows community supported agriculture (CSA) principles. It requires careful organisation from production to distribution. The farm uses organic methods, which include avoiding pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides. It also refrains from using artificial fertilisers, instead relying solely on natural fertilisers such as manure and straw. In autumn, farmers plan crops for the upcoming spring. Generally, the

farm grows vegetables and herbs, including various types of lettuce (butterhead, iceberg, romaine), rocket, spinach, radish, chives, dill, onion, chard, rhubarb, parsley, celery, beetroot, carrot, cucumber, tomato, garlic, zucchini, mangold, kohlrabi, green beans, leek, parsnip, black salsify, pumpkin, swede, broccoli, cauliflower, hot peppers (e.g. habanero), marjoram, nettle, and others. During the season, in harmony with nature's rhythm, plants are harvested early in the morning, prepared, packed into baskets, and swiftly delivered in a cooled truck to customers. However, this is not the end of the relationship with customers. Both long-term and new subscribers often form groups on social media, sharing recipes and methods for processing and storing produce. Vegetables not delivered are processed on the farm into products such as pickles (cabbage, cucumbers, beetroot, carrots), sourdough, dinner sauces, soups, sandwich spreads, seasoned beetroot, zucchini, peppers, red cabbage, kimchi, beans, preserves, fruit in marinades, and syrups made from lavender and elderberry, as well as fruit juices. These products are sold out of season, for example, via the farm's website.

Another important product from the farm is hazelnuts and processed hazelnut products such as roasted nuts, hazelnut paste (similar to peanut butter), hazelnut flour, and hazelnut oil (which is a very tasty ingredient for cakes, salads, and coffee). Extremely popular among customers is hazelnut paste (an alternative to traditional peanut butter). The paste is made from roasted nuts, but the exact production process is kept secret by the owners. Additionally, the farm processes other oil plants by pressing black cumin, hemp, and milk thistle oils, as well as linseed, saffron milk thistle, rapeseed, and sunflower oils. The oils are cold pressed using a traditional method that imparts a distinctive taste. The farm also provides oil seed flakes, a rich source of protein, fibre, and unsaturated fats.

The newest product in the portfolio of the Eko-Zakątek farm is "Meat-Corner." The nature of Meat-Corner is unique compared to other products offered by the farm, but it also complements them well. A distinct characteristic of the farm is that Eko-Zakątek does not breed animals. Instead, he purchases meat from recognized local farmers, while the rest of the process—such as making sausages, hams, and other products—as well as baking, steaming, or smoking, takes place on the farm. Spices and herbs used in meat processing mostly come from the farm's own fields. These products are complementary because they allow the farm to offer a broader range of products to its customers.

To develop such a business model, the farm had to invest in buildings and constructions, machines and equipment, including vehicles for transporting goods, infrastructure for storing food, as well as renewable energy sources like photovoltaic panels. Nonetheless, these complex investments were based on economic calculations, thanks to the financial competence of the owners. To offer customers even more added value, the farm is considering developing some agritourist products in the future.

The Eko-Zakątek organic farm combines traditional and organic production methods with modern solutions and tools, such as CSA organisational schemes, distribution channels, and communication with stakeholders, including modern internet platforms.

Reasons for Integrating into the Short Food Supply Chain

The initial farm focus was on hazelnut production, but it served as a supplementary economic activity that complemented the household members' non-agricultural pursuits. However, due to external circumstances, Agnieszka and Zbigniew decided to develop their SFSC. Their reasons included: 1) the chance to obtain higher prices for their products and potentially greater revenue and income, 2) diversifying their sources of income, 3) creating additional employment opportunities for family members, 4) eliminating intermediaries between the farm and customers to increase profit margins, and 5) establishing direct contact with consumers to understand their needs better and build relationships. In the early years of Eko-Zakątek farm's involvement in SFSC, these core principles (or strategic directions) helped establish and grow the farm's operations. Currently, Eko-Zakątek continues to strengthen its activities within the short food supply chain.

Value propositions and key activities and

Eko-Zakątek operates a unique business model that offers a distinct value proposition for consumers by providing a diverse range of traditional, organic, and high-added-value food products, moving beyond a simple transactional exchange of goods. This value proposition sets Eko-Zakątek apart from products in long food supply chains, as well as from many products offered by farms that employ a short food supply chain strategy. It includes key products and activities such as the 'Health Basket', an oil factory, a pantry with preserves made from their own raw materials, and the production of cold cuts and meats, each contributing specifically to the overall offering. A more detailed description of each product is below.

Health Basket targets people who care about their daily diet and the diet of their loved ones. The typical customer is someone who values the quality and origin of their food. For 23 weeks (from May to October), once a week, the farm systematically delivers a basket full of seasonal vegetables that come only from Eko-Zakątek farm. The vegetables are picked in the morning, packed in wicker baskets, and delivered to customers' tables the same day. This process eliminates irregular and random orders, as well as intermediaries. Plastic packaging has been completely eliminated. Health Basket is a concept of running a seasonal kitchen at home, preparing food in harmony with nature's rhythm using fresh vegetables available at that time of year. The owners believe that following nature's rhythm offers certain forms of nourishment and may be linked to health benefits. Customers can choose a regular basket covering 23 deliveries during the year (every week from May to October) or a smaller basket, which is half the size of the regular one.

Picture 2 – Health Basket 1

Source: Eko-Zakątek



Oil manufacture (also called Oil corner) is based on own cold-pressing method, that Agnieszka and Zbigniew are constantly developing. Using this cold-pressing process, seeds aren't heated before pressing. The pressed oil always has a temperature below 39°C. The raw material is pressed a single time, and only the extracted oil is bottled, with no additives or preservatives included. Agnieszka and Zbigniew consider this the healthiest and most natural way of obtaining healthy oils that enrich the diet. In this cold-press process, oils are extracted from hazelnuts, sunflowers, flax, rapeseed, camelina, milk thistle, and black cumin. Besides these oils, the farm offers other products connected with hazelnuts e.g. roasted hazelnuts or hazelnuts pasta.

Picture 3 – Health Basket 2

Source: Eko-Zakątek



Picture 4 – Eko- Zakątek Pantry 1

Source: Eko-Zakątek



Eko-Zakątek Pantry celebrates long-standing tradition when every home had a pantry full of supplies, homemade preserves and delicacies from products that were collected and processed during the season. A visit to the Eko-Zakątek Pantry is a sentimental journey to grandma's house, who always had something healthy, tasty and that brought a smile to child face. Each ingredient comes from the farm and farmers guarantee for the quality.

In Meat-Corner the farm buys unprocessed meat from local and trusted farmers. The farm processes its meat on-site, using its own facilities and homegrown spices. Meat products are produced without added nitrites or preservatives and are smoked using alder and cherry wood, which imparts a distinct aroma. Thanks to these old family recipes, the farm shop can offer really unique smoked meat products.

Besides specific products, the Eko-Zakątek also creates value for its customers by providing services like a unique opportunity to purchase the subscription for deliveries of organic seasonal vegetables coming directly and exclusively from the farm, picked a few hours before delivery, and therefore very fresh.

Specific Way the Farm Engages in the Short Food Supply Chain. Customer segments, channels and customer relationships

The Eko-Zakątek farm has evolved over its relatively short existence and in implementing its short food supply chain strategy. The farm started with hazelnuts, but developed a range of vegetables and preserves later. Now, the farm's portfolio includes a large range of products, including even decorative and occasional products, e.g. as events / holiday gifts. Agnieszka and Zbigniew sell their products using many different short food supply chain channels. The idea is to always use such a type of short chain that is well-adapted suits individual customers and products the best. The main channels are:

- basket sales system,
- fairs,
- events and festivals,
- market and bazaar,
- their own retail store,
- online sales,
- direct sales from the farm.

Picture 5 – Eko-Zakątek Pantry 2

Source: Eko-Zakątek



Figure 1 - Business Model Canvas
Source: Eko-Zakątek

Key Partners	Key Activities	Value Propositions	Customer Relationships	Customer Segments
Zielony Targ Association A group of clients – Health Basket recipients Country Targ – a cyclical market in the Tarnowo Podgórne commune – co-founded and organized by Eko-Zakątek	Health Basket – subscription deliveries of organic vegetables Vegetable processing and sale of finished products, Hazelnut cultivation and production of derivative products, Cold-pressed oils	Eko-Zakątek operates a unique business model that provides a distinct value proposition for the consumer by offering a diverse portfolio of traditional, organic and high-value added food products and moving beyond a simple transactional exchange of goods.	Close direct contact with customers, who are both recipients of the baskets and other customers, including those acquired by word of mouth; Mutual trust and long-term relationships are important – some customers have been buying the basket for years; Very active communication via the website, Facebook, Instagram;	Consumers preferring a healthy diet and lifestyle, who regularly take care of the quality and origin of food: 50%; Customers who are struggling with illness or trying to recover from illness, are in the process of convalescence: 30%; Seekers of new flavors and unique products – they can be called “foodies”: 20%.
	Key Resources		Channels	
	Own workforce (marriage and hired workers, including seasonal workers), Unique experience and competences gathered over the years, including the way of organizing distribution channels, Strong position in its segments, Technical infrastructure,		Market, bazaar (weekly rhythm all year round): 60%; Delivery system / baskets (time limit May-October of a given year): 30%; Fairs, festivals, occasional, periodic events: 5%; Direct sales from the farm (deliberate action to optimize working time on the farm): 2%; Own shop: 2%; Online sales: 1%.	
Cost Structure			Revenue Streams	
Fixed asset costs – machinery, equipment, specialist buildings (e.g. cold stores), delivery vehicles: 60%; Labour costs: 15%; Fuel and energy: 8%; Planting, seedlings, seeds: 5%; Fees for access to fairs and bazaars, including online ones: 2%.			Health Basket sales: 45%; Nut and related products sales: 25%; Vegetable, fruit and oil products sales from the farm: 20%; Meat sales: 5%; Subsidies: 5%.	

The interaction between farmers and customers is an important activity. The farmers are in close contact with the buyers of Health baskets (systematic email contact and communication in the social media group). Farmers regularly meet with other customers (especially the long-term ones) during the food markets or food events.

Picture 6 – Eko-Zakątek Pantry

Source: Eko-Zakątek

Picture 6 – Eko-Zakątek Pantry 3

Source: : Eko-Zakątek



Agnieszka and Zbigniew acquire new customers in several ways, e.g. thanks to excellent products, the information spreads among people, and well-developed modern communication channels help reach customers almost any time and anywhere. Additionally, what helps is the farmers' attitude, beliefs, and storytelling skills. As a result of these skills, there is a high level of trust between farmers and customers, and some basket subscribers have been buying the product already for several years. Farmers are intensively using information technologies and communicate with customers, among others, through:

- webpage: <https://www.eko-zakatek.com.pl/>
- Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ekokoszykzdrowia#>
- Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/eko_zakatek/

When using a digital communication channel, it is essential to regularly publish posts and content to maintain continuous contact with customers and effectively present and explain

the value proposition. It is also worth emphasizing that the farmers often participate in various events. Those events can be small or regular ones, or of a local nature, as well as large nationwide ones, e.g., organized by the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development at the National Stadium in Warsaw. Sometimes they also participate in the International Fair in Poznań and other events organised by the National Support Centre for Agriculture. Farmers also take part in various TV programs promoting healthy eating and food products.

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