

# Laatumarja: Southwestern Finland – The Leading Producer of Fresh Berries

Better berry production, quality, sustainability, and exports for Southwest Finland.

## EAFRD-funded projects

**Location:** Southwest Finland Region, Finland

**Programming period:** 2014–2020

**Priority:** P3 – Food chain and risk management

**Focus Area:** Agri-food chain integration & quality

**Measures:** M16 – Cooperation

**Funding:** Total budget 321 029 (EUR)

EAFRD 107 866 (EUR)

National/Regional 148 957 (EUR)

Private/own 64 206 (EUR)

**Timeframe:** 01/09/2019 – 31/08/2023

**Project promoter:** ProAgria Western Finland and the Natural Resources Institute of Finland

**Email:** [saila.karhu@luke.fi](mailto:saila.karhu@luke.fi)



© Laatumarja

## Summary

The Laatumarja project helped to enhance berry cultivation productivity in Southwestern Finland. With over 70 participating berry farms, the project results provided wider benefits for nearly 300 farms in the region. It produced valuable research data for the needs of the berry entrepreneurs, including soil analyses and testing of new berry varieties imported from different countries.

Additionally, the project explored biological crop protection in the prevention of berry plant diseases, and possibilities for tunnel farming that complied with landscape protection laws. The Cordon cut technique was tested for currants, and digital cultivation tools were introduced. The project's communication channels successfully disseminated relevant information to berry producers.

## Project results

- Production on berry farms increased, diversified, and improved, particularly for blueberries.
- Harvest season options were extended, and profitability increased. Berry quality also improved during the project.

- Export expertise expanded, including through networking.
- Tunnel design know-how improved, leading to increased use of tunnel cultivation. Strawberry and raspberry tunnel cultivation doubled in area. Blueberry cultivation also expanded.
- 1 Finnish strawberry variety progressed to commercial production, and 8 other berry varieties were identified with potential for further testing.
- 1 eco-friendly biological crop protection alternative for strawberries was confirmed.

## Key lessons and recommendations

- Networking researchers, advisors, and farmers helped introduce new sustainable berry production methods.
- New information about landscape-sensitive tunnels was key.

## Context

The Southwest Finland region aims to become one of the country's leading berry production areas due to its favourable climate.





© Laatumarja

Finnish berries are renowned for their taste, thanks to optimal summer light and temperature conditions.

Farms in Southwestern Finland are keen on berry production, as it is economically viable in smaller areas, when compared to traditional field farming. The use of tunnels has increased, allowing for higher yields from a smaller space and extending the harvest season. Tunnel growing is efficient, with berries planted at picking height, and the option for biological crop protection. However, this method has raised concerns among rural residents about landscape management. The target group of the project was all 300 berry farms in the area, as well as farms looking for new alternatives for crop rotation.

This cooperation project involved rural advisory and research organisations, ProAgria Western Finland, and the Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE). The region's berry growers were active partners, offering infrastructure for farm trials and sharing their expertise as farmers. Cooperation also took place with the Farmers' Association, Hedelmän ja Marjanviljelijäin liitto ry, and local associations. Additionally, companies such as Novarbo Oy, Lallemand Finland Oy, Verdera, Eurofins, and Kekkilä-BVB were engaged. Cooperation extended to other regional and national projects, as well as educational institutions including Livia Vocational School, the University of Helsinki, Aalto University, and Häme University of Applied Sciences.

## Objectives

- › Develop and diversify Finnish berry production in response to increased demand.
- › Promote the use of high tunnels and their sustainable landscape placement.
- › Boost blueberry cultivation in Southwestern Finland.
- › Identify suitable strawberry and raspberry varieties.
- › Explore methods for reducing chemical crop protection by using beneficial micro-organisms.
- › Spread new currant cultivation techniques for high-quality crops.
- › Facilitate collaboration among farmers for production development.

## Activities

The project included integrated work packages focused on:

- › Identifying enabling factors for improving strawberry production including soil chemistry, pathogen levels, microbiota, plant nutrient status, pest presence, and different biological disease controls. Findings were shared with nine participating farms, and an article was written in 2021.
- › Testing different strawberry and raspberry varieties (Finnish, Norwegian, German, and Canadian) including consumer tasting. Trials assessed sustainability, disease susceptibility, harvest characteristics, and berry quality. A thesis was written.
- › Appraising new production methods for exported blueberries and strawberries in terms of both cultivation and marketing. This involved demonstration farms, and a pilot of the Cordon cultivation method for currants. Dutch expertise provided advice and webinars helped share conclusions.
- › Landscape-friendly tunnel design options were also researched through expert interviews, farm monitoring, and demonstrations. A thesis, three presentations, and three articles were completed.
- › Overall, 17 events, webinars, and training courses took place, and a network formed of interested stakeholders.

## Main results

- › During the project, the production of berry farms in the area increased, diversified, and improved, particularly for blueberries.
- › Harvest season options were extended, and profitability increased. Berry quality also improved during the project.

- Higher quality and more durable production opened new opportunities for exporting fresh Finnish berries. Export expertise expanded including through networking.
- Tunnel design know-how improved, leading to increased use of tunnel cultivation. Strawberry and raspberry tunnel cultivation doubled in area (133% increase in strawberry tunnel surface, 125% in raspberries). Blueberry cultivation also expanded by 33%, with yields increasing by 64–117%. This motivated other farmers to experiment with tunnel growing.
- 1 Finnish strawberry variety selected in the project progressed to commercial production, and 4 Norwegian raspberry varieties and 4 Canadian strawberry varieties were chosen for further testing.
- The project demonstrated 1 biological crop protection method to be an eco-friendly alternative for strawberries.
- A simple consumer opinion test for berries was developed.
- The project won an award as the most effective development project in the countryside gala of Southwest Finland for March 2023.

## Key lessons and recommendations

- Combining research data, advisory support, and farmer experiences helped introduce new sustainable berry production methods.
- New information on the benefits of tunnel growing and the placement of tunnels in the landscape helped farmers to better plan tunnel designs, making it easier for locals to accept the appearance of the tunnels in the landscape.



© Laatumarja

## Quote

*"I found it important that different berry varieties were tested in Finland, as the cultivation conditions here are so different compared to other countries. There was also a lot of general discussion about how modern cultivation methods, such as seasonal high tunnels, can be adapted to valuable traditional landscapes. In Finland, the entire cultivation area has been classified as a traditional landscape of national value, so the information was needed".*

Tarja Mattila, owner of the Mattila Berry Farm

## Additional information:

Facebook:

[www.facebook.com/share/bSqtscWkrw23o7fd/](https://www.facebook.com/share/bSqtscWkrw23o7fd/)

Website:

[www.proagria.fi/hankkeet/laatumarja-lounais-suomi-tuoremarjan-karkituottajaksi](http://www.proagria.fi/hankkeet/laatumarja-lounais-suomi-tuoremarjan-karkituottajaksi)



Funded by  
the European Union