

LOOV Organic – an extension of Estonian foragers to exotic export markets



LOOV Organic was founded in Estonia in 2008 by two schoolmates who had discovered their initial calling in the world of logistics, but craved to create something meaningful for themselves. The organic foodstuff sector was still in its early stages and yet had a very futuristic vibe to it. Thus the idea that led to the birth of the leading Estonian exporter of freeze-dried wild berries and related products was born.

The first steps in the organic food business were somewhat similar to the stories of so many IT-startups – two guys started tinkering on something in their home kitchens, but instead of creating the next Microsoft or Apple, they came up with something far more delicious, namely a wild blueberry-blackcurrant flavoured non-alcoholic mulled wine, which has since become the staple of every legendary Christmas market held annually on the Old Town Square of Tallinn.

Complete traceability

While the initial focus was on the domestic market, the real push came from exports, which became the company's sole priority and today forms 95% of LOOV Organic's turnover. LOOV's organic products come from a variety of producers and are marketed under one umbrella brand across the globe. LOOV's team creates the recipes, procures the wild berries from local farmers

and then outsources the production process from others, collaborating with scientific research institutes and small producers across Estonia.

LOOV Organic's export manager Liis Kalvik explains that the underlying concept behind the company's strategy is to operate with a minimal ecological footprint, which is crucial for preserving the natural tastes and rich vitamins in their products. "Our goal is to demonstrate that forests can yield far greater riches than just timber," says Kalvik. All products under the LOOV Organic umbrella are certified organic, which calls for complete traceability throughout the entire value chain.

"We have detailed information about where the wild berries were picked, by whom and when – this has created a super-secret database of the best berry-picking locations in the Nordic region, as these spots are usually passed down from generation to generation and kept hidden from the public," smiles Kalvik. Organic certification poses certain conditions on the wild berry locations as well, as they need to be a good distance away from human settlements, roads and potential sources of pollution.

Superfood qualities

The wild blueberries and other forest berries in the Nordic region can be considered to possess real superfood qualities, as the harsh climatic conditions require the shrubs to be particularly virile and full of energy in order to survive the cold winters and the almost perpetual sunlight in the summer season. "Scientific analyses have confirmed that the wild berries collected in northern Europe have considerably higher levels of antioxidants than in the south," points out Kalvik.

The berries are handpicked by local farmers and the crop yields can vary greatly year from year, depending on the weather conditions and the quality of the soil. The berries are then individually frozen at -35° and freeze-dried for 24 hours at below 45 degrees Celsius to keep the raw quality. While the process takes longer



than usual, the result is a far more natural tasting product that only has 6% of humidity. "This preserved raw quality allows us to offer the same richness in vitamins in freeze-dried berries in the middle of the winter as you would have with freshly picked wild berries in the summer," Kalvik is proud.

Innovation at LOOV Organic doesn't stop at the preservation of vitamins and nutrients in the freeze-dried berries. A selection of wild berries is sent to the Polli research centre to be cold-pressed into juice. As no enzymes are used during the production process for enhancing extraction, the organic wild blueberry juice is full of natural vitamins and enzymes. The solid remains of the berries - the pomace - is also used up entirely for making powder to be consumed as an additive in porridges, yoghurts and even honey. As a result, the entire process is completely free of residual waste. Besides powders and juices made from wild blueberries, blackcurrants and sea-buckthorn, LOOV Organic also dabbles with mushroom powder, chaga and most recently with organic buckwheat grown by local farmers.

Export extension

Nearly 95% of these products are exported, effectively establishing LOOV Organic as an export extension for Estonian foragers and small organic producers. The main export markets at the moment include the US, Canada, the UK, Germany, Italy, Spain, Slovenia, Czechia, South Korea, Australia and China. This has been made possible by the advent of global e-commerce, where nearly anything can travel great distances across borders. "Our products are ideal for shipping, as they don't weigh a lot and the transportation costs can be absorbed in the final tally," stresses Kalvik, adding that exciting visuals and an interesting narrative contribute towards success on foreign markets.

In Germany, LOOV Organic has achieved considerable success amongst the fanbase of Anthony William's Medical Medium, who consider wild blueberries to be the most valuable superfood in the world. Another serendipitous discovery was related to the health benefits of wild cranberry powder for treating urinary tract infections besides humans also in animals, as discovered by notable veterinarians.

Estonia has already made a name for itself on the global organic food market, as information about the excellent quality of air and groundwater in the country has spread far and beyond. The products from this Nordic country are known for their premium quality and innovation.



Kalvik believes that Estonians make for desirable business partners, as promises are kept and quality is consistently maintained. "We always aim to offer the best customer service experience to our partners and are focused on speedy solutions in case of challenges. And constantly testing our products at local and international food laboratories contributes towards customer confidence as well," says Kalvik.

Organic food is taking the world by storm. Estonia is persistently becoming a force to be reckoned with on this market and LOOV Organic forms a prominent pillar of this foundation.