

Newsletter #2

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STARAMAKI straw as a bio-based answer to diversify rural regions in Greece

In Greece, where drinking cold coffee with a straw is very popular, it is estimated that around 1 billion of plastic straws end up in garbage every year. A plastic straw takes many years to break up while often it does not completely disintegrate.

Concerned on the environmental impact of the plastic straw use and based on the opportunities and urgency set by EU policies to ban single-use plastics, a group of friends from the northern Greek city of Kilkis came up with a business project. The Kilkis region is the largest producer of wheat in Greece. The objective of the business project is to produce a bio-based, completely biodegradable straw, STARAMAKI, to replace plastic equivalents, and to support local economy and society.

STARAMAKI is a portmanteau word combining the Greek word straw

“kalamaki” with the Greek word from wheat “stari”, as the new biobased straw is made from wheat stems. Wheat is the main crop in the Kilkis region and exhibits water-resistance properties. Staramaki is made from the stalk left over after wheat grains are harvested. The straw does not require a lot of processing. The wheat stem simply requires cutting and sterilization. The straws are being washed to remove bacteria, fertilizer and chemical residues and then dried in trays. The product is 100% biodegradable and gluten-free. Similar bio-based products already exist in USA and China. All wheat and rye stalks come from Kilkis and are sourced by the producers themselves. The project is run by a social enterprise consisting of the volunteers association Omnes, which is active in refugees hosting since 2016. Omnes collaborates with the Agricultural Cooperation of Kilkis and other professional stakeholders of

the Kilkis city, such as the Chamber of commerce.

Based on circular economy business model STARAMAKI is not only sold, but also traded with coffee residue, which is being mixed with the remaining wheat straw in order to produce bio pellets and briquettes for heating???. The aim of this exchange is to engage the local society in waste reduction, and to change people's mindsets about what is actually waste. All profits gained from the production of staramaki and of the biomass will be used in order to support a new model of social housing for vulnerable social groups.

Many rural regions in Greece suffer from low value wheat monoculture, unemployment and brain drain. The concept of STARAMAKI is based on the needs and strengths of the Kilkis region. The project leaders aspire for STARAMAKI to set an example for other regions in Greece to develop similar bioeconomy solutions based on local characteristics in order to cover local needs in economy and society.

