

T5.2 Case study report (Code PL2B)

**Cydr Chyliczki, Ludwik Majlert's Farm and
Rysiny Farm: socially, environmentally and
economically sustainable family food
production & processing at the outskirts of
Warsaw**

**Sylwia Dołzbłasz, Krzysztof Janc, Andrzej Raczyk and
Robert Skrzypczyński.(UWR)**

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Context

The three family businesses engaged in food production and processing that will be described in this case study are located at the outskirts of Warsaw, the capital of Poland (Fig. 1). The city of Warsaw itself is inhabited by 1.8m people, while the population of the entire metropolitan area of Warsaw amounts to ca. 2.6m inhabitants.

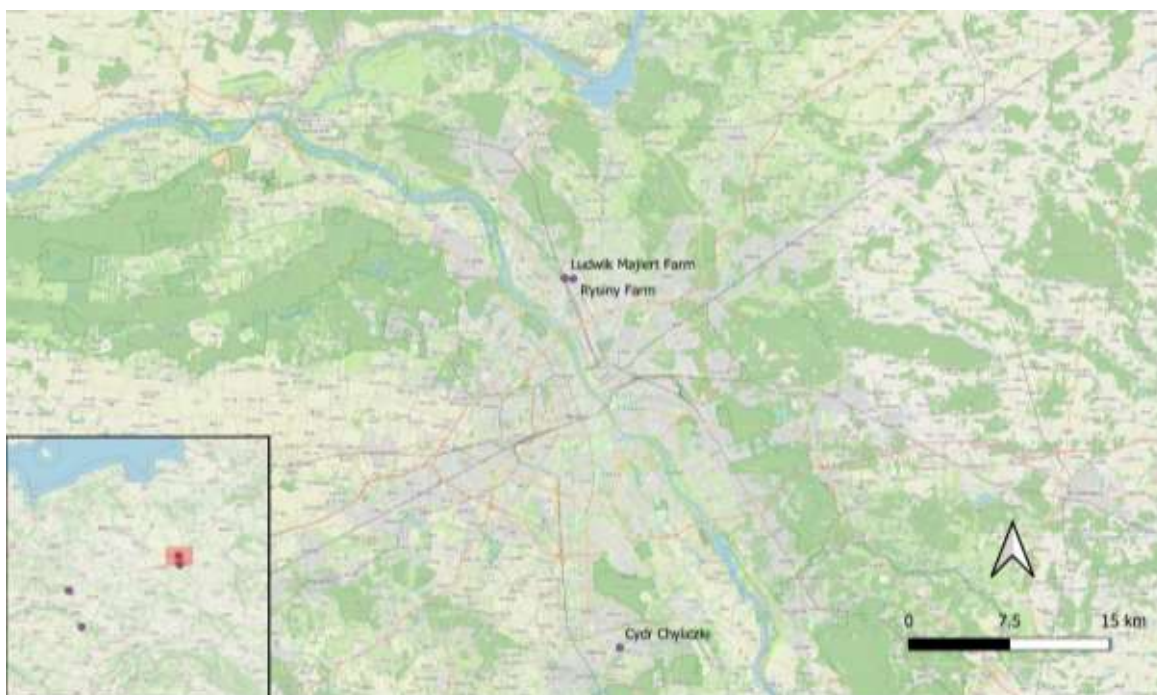


Fig. 1. Warsaw and the location of Cydr Chyliczki, Ludwik Majlert Farm and Rysiny Farm

Source: own, basemap: Open Street Map

In terms both of its population and functions, Warsaw dominates the settlement structure of Poland. Its population exceeds by far the population of the second largest city (Krakow, ca. 800 000 inhabitants). While such a distribution is not unusual in itself, Warsaw at the same time dominates the settlement structure functionally; for instance, out of 112 central offices – operating at the national level in Poland – only 19 are located in places other than Warsaw (Wałachowski, 2019). Most of other, non-public but also central, organizations or headquarters of companies are located in Warsaw too, which together with the city's role in the national transport system or its share of publication locations, can be considered as a symptom of the socio-economic domination of Warsaw over other Polish settlements



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(Zaborowski, 2019). In the context of this case study, it is important to note that Warsaw is also a place where novel, alternative ideas or approaches are more likely to emerge (although, obviously, not exclusively there). For instance, Warsaw is leading the vegan movement in Poland, and it was in fact ranked as the sixth most vegan-friendly city in the world in 2019 (Tilles, 2019). Hence, the success of the cases described here – especially Ludwik Majlert Farm and Rysiny Farm – has to be considered against this background of a city where approach to nutrition is dynamically changing, and where there is significant demand for local, healthy, organic or vegan/vegetarian food.

In the case of Cydr Chyliczki, the third of the family businesses at the outskirts of Warsaw described in this case study, the regional context is important too. Warsaw is located in the Mazovia region characterized by a significant presence of apple tree orchards. In particular, the Grojecki County is relevant here: this is where the apples used by Cydr Chyliczki are collected. In 2011, the apples from this county were included in the list of Protected Geographical Indication products.

Origin of the practice

Two out of the three firms – Ludwik Majlert and Rysiny Farm – have a shared history of a multigenerational farm, while Cydr Chyliczki is a new businesses set up in 2014 by a father and his daughter.

Ludwik Majlert inherited the farm from his father Jan in 1981 (the farm is today run by his family and the family of his sister). The decision to take over the farm was rather straightforward given the long tradition of farming in the family reaching back to the 19th century. In 1878, Wilhelm Meylert purchased ‘Marcelin’ an agricultural holding of 130ha where he began to produce milk (sold directly to Warsaw inhabitants) and asparagus (sold partly for export). Over the 20th century, the farm underwent numerous transformations, gradually becoming smaller and smaller, although it was continuously thriving – new crops were introduced, practices for students organized, and the farm’s products received awards at fairs. World War 2, however, left the holding completely destroyed and afterwards the majority of its area was expropriated by the new Polish government and devoted to industrial uses. Only a fraction of the original 130ha was saved and this was then further divided into two holdings passed on to two sons of the owner (these divided farms later on became the Ludwik Majlert Farm and the Rysiny Farm). In the 1970s, further blows fell on Marcelin – a newly constructed road and parallel railroad line cut the holding in two and an electrical grid pole was located in the middle of it. After all these interferences, today the Ludwik Majlert Farm and Rysiny Farm operate on, respectively, 10ha and 15ha of land.

An important period for both Ludwik Majlert and Rysiny farms was the democratic transformation period in Poland. In the 1990s, Poland became rapidly open to international food markets and large supermarket chains were quick to exploit this new frontier. Farmers such as the Majlerts saw this as an opportunity and became one of the many suppliers to the megastores popping up in and around Warsaw. The owner of the Rysiny Farm put emphasis in the interview on the role of this period in the development of the farm into what it is today. However, this was a negative role: the interviewee explained how the (lack of) human factor in the cooperation with supermarkets made him resign from cooperation with them. Large chain stores were interested only in one factor – the price of the product – and lacked

any deeper interest in the food production process, any territorial bond with its origin, or the quality of the final product. From the perspective of the interviewee, it was an automatized, dull and a rather soulless process of market exchange. The interviewee also described negative feelings associated with a lack of any bond with the final customer; trucks would just come, an indifferent driver would take the produce and ask the owner to sign some papers – and that's it. After some time spent supplying the supermarkets, the owners (the current manager and his parents) decided to try and switch to direct sales channels, which soon translated into more local embeddedness and the multi-functional character of the farm that today constitute key elements of the practice.

An important context for both Ludwik Majlert Farm and the Rysiny Farm is also the long history of the family that had been cultivating land in that location. Especially the difficult history of the Rysiny Farm was reported as an important factor in the motivation of the owner to run the farm continuously; he explains that due to the fact that his ancestors were able to persist in the face of 2 World Wars, post-War expropriation, systematic interference from urban infrastructure construction and then the exposition to market competition, then he simply sees no way other than continuing the work they had been doing. No price that developers offer for the land will (and they do offer high prices) convince the farmer to sell the farm; it is so much easier to keep the farm today and a resignation now could be regarded maybe even as an offence to the family history.

Cydr Chyliczki, established in 2014, differs from the two farms described above in that its owners are the first generation who run it. The decision to set up a family businesses around cider was motivated mainly by personal interests of the organizers – a father and a daughter – who had been engaging in home-made cider production already for a few years before establishing Cydr Chyliczki. Their background was not in farming, and so this case combines the notion of completely new entrants into farming (and food processing) with multi-generational farm management and succession.

Actors

Each of the initiatives described in this case study is run by two families. Cydr Chyliczki is managed by a father and daughter together with a befriended family that has long traditions in apple tree orchards management. Ludwik Majlert Farm is run by the family of Ludwik Majlert and his wife together with the family of Ludwik's sister and her husband. Similarly, Rysiny Farm is managed by the families of two siblings – the successors of the family inheritance.

The difference between the practices lies in the number of family members who are actively working. Ludwik Majlert Farm is a workplace for ca. 15 persons from closer or wider family circle, some of whom help at the field, others work at the store, run the books, manage the website and social media, organize on-farm events or cooperate with restaurants or stores who do bulk purchases. Most of the family members are not trained in agriculture; many of them are students or graduates who treat the work at the farm as part-time job for the summer months and have complementary jobs in the winter months. The seasonal character of the job makes it easier to combine it with one's education or professional career. Cydr Chyliczki, in turn, is at the other side of the spectrum as it is run by more nuclear families (in comparison to the first example) and engage a few family members only. All of our interviews emphasized that the work is very demanding and requires huge seasonal effort. However, even with such levels of personal input and as much family work as in the case of Ludwik Majlert Farm, there is still a high demand for seasonal labour force, especially for the purpose of working at the field. This is even more so due to the ecological, labour-intensive type of farming with a high level of crop diversification. Ludwik Majlert Farm and Rysiny Farm are therefore almost completely dependent on the seasonal migrant workforce. Warsaw is a very large labour market but there is not much interest in working in agriculture, as there are many positions in other workplaces that are not as physically demanding. Hence, both these farms are *de facto* dependent on the seasonal migrant inflow from Ukraine. The same groups of workers come from year to year, thus creating some stability but the risk of international perturbations is considered as the most vulnerable point by the host of the Rysiny Farm: if the borders were closed now, he would not be able



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to continue at all. Correspondingly, the COVID-19 pandemic was a difficult period from this perspective, although there was still possibility of trans-border mobility – which made it possible for the farm to operate in the last season.

Activities promoted

A common denominator for each of the three initiatives is the idea of producing (and processing) high-quality products that are embedded in the local ecological and social context while providing appropriate income for the organizers. Each of the practices puts emphasis on slightly different aspects of embeddedness but all can be considered as sustainable – in some cases even post-growth – business models.

Cydr Chyliczki produces cider from traditional apple tree species cultivated in the Grojecki County. The family business focuses on high-end product sold to restaurants and shops. While this type of product is certainly not the most available for all strata of the society, its environmental embeddedness lies in the emphasis of the practice on protecting and reintroducing apple trees that foster the diversity of species in the region. Cydr Chyliczki offers more or less a dozen types of cider (and occasionally other alcoholic products) and continuously experiments with the types of apples and processes used in the production. The ciders from Cydr Chyliczki have received a number of national and international awards. Ludwik Majlert Farm is offering a wide variety of products – 30 types of crops on 10ha – that are sold directly to customers at the farm. The customers of the store are both individuals as well as restaurants or local cooperatives. While Ludwik Majlert Farm is not engaged in food processing, it does nonetheless offer processed products from befriended local businesses; this way, one can visit the farm as if it were a supermarket and purchase in one place most of the fresh products one can get in the particular part of the growing season. This is indeed the case as the farm is very popular among Warsaw residents; the queues in front of the store reach far beyond the entrance to the building and the production is reported to be very profitable.

However, Ludwik Majlert Farm also plays some social and educational functions. The farm regularly organizes so-called ‘dinners at the field’ – public events when the field is shown around and the food from the farm is eaten together. Other events at the farm are organized for kindergarten and school children for whom a tour at the farm is offered. The owners also regularly prepare and publish educational videos from the farm (<https://www.majlert.pl/iniciatywy>).



Fig. 2. One of the 'dinners at the field' at the Ludwik Majlert Farm

Image source: <https://restaurantica.pl/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/obiad-na-polu-1.jpg>

The case of the Rysiny Farm follows a similar model as Ludwik Majlert Farm, albeit with some differences. Rysiny combines the store at the farm with an on-site bistro that offers meals prepared from the farm products. Furthermore, there is also a large shop with seedlings and plants run by one of the siblings. The complementary products offered at the farm are e.g. bread, ice cream and a variety of processed products from local businesses.

The Rysiny Farm is not only a farm with a store, but also a meeting place: the open-air bistro, where occasionally events such as concerts are organized, creates good conditions for not only buying fresh products, but also staying for a bit longer. The idea of the owners is to foster social activities at the farm: for instance, some tables are especially set up in a way that encourages conversation between visitors. The organization of events takes this approach one step further – the farm becomes a community centre rather than only a place of food production and sales. This is enabled by providing a variety of products (integration of the supply chain), having a bistro next to the farm, arranging the space in an appropriate way and, finally, keeping the prices low – so that the place is not being gentrified in spite of huge demand. According to the host, this strategy works very well indeed. There are

frequent visitors, new bonds are established, and people often stay longer than only for shopping.

When compared to cooperating with supermarkets – as described earlier – this business model is considered much more beneficial and satisfactory by the owners. The hosts are present at the farm and so can take part in the social aspect of food distribution. In this case, food is not only a commodity, but also a way to forge social connections, feel the presence of a community around it (who, for instance, exchange recipes on site) and feel a territorial identity – a connection to the land which one cultivates. Seeing that people are happy with the food they buy, that they come back regularly: this aspect is very important for the owners. For this reason, the prices at the store or in the bistro are kept low enough to enable local residents to come regularly, but also to provide sufficient income for the business. As the hosts explain, the demand is so huge that they sometimes feel overwhelmed – especially on Saturdays when the place becomes much too crowded. A natural reaction would be to raise the prices and thus limit the demand; however, the goal of the practice is not to earn as much as possible but rather to create a place for the local community. Hence the prices are kept low and the owners are not thinking about the expansion: while there are a few small agricultural plots left here and there, the idea behind the practice is that there is a threshold beyond which the business loses its key characteristics that made it so successful in the first place. Therefore, this type of approach can be considered as a post-growth business model: instead of endless growth, there is sufficiency; instead of financial profits only, there are social and ecological profits too; instead of raising the prices as much as one could, there is accessibility and social responsibility; instead of selling the land to developers and purchasing more land elsewhere, there is attachment to the land that cannot be translated into money. We believe that such models should be studied and promoted more broadly, as they provide a possible avenue for escaping the growth dogma that dominates contemporary societies. This case suggests a number of factors that led to the adoption of such model: in this case it seems to be a combination of family history, disenchantment with corporate food supply chains, personal traits and a potential generated by the proximity of a city in which local food paradigm is gaining traction.

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Fig. 3. Bistro at the Rysiny Farm

Image source: <https://cdn.natemat.pl/869d743541658fab0ee943846df909fa,800,450,1,0.jpg>

Synergies and networking

The effect of synergies and networking can be observed in each of the three cases. In the case of Cydr Chyliczki, its effect in this context is spurring the interest of local farmers in unconventional (today) apple tree species that were traditionally cultivated in the Grojecki county and the entire Mazovia region. Interestingly, one factor behind the rising popularity of this approach was also the Russian embargo on Polish apples imposed in 2014. At that point, new local or domestic demand for apples had to be found, and this is one of the reasons behind the rising popularity of cider that made it possible for the Cydr Chyliczki to achieve its success. Since the production of Cydr Chyliczki is based on local, traditionally-cultivated apple trees, this generates a local demand for such products (some of which is met by purchasing apples from regional orchards). Furthermore, the effect of networking can be observed at the other side of the supply chain: it is mostly Polish restaurants and stores that offer Cydr Chyliczki and thus complete the circle of domestic production, processing and sale.



Fig. 4. Traditional species of apple trees in the Grojecki county

Image source: <https://www.cydrchyliczki.pl>



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The synergy and networking effects of Ludwik Majlert Farm and Rysiny Farm result, firstly, from their cooperation with other farms and food processors who complement the sales of the products in the on-farm stores. Secondly, given the orientation on local markets and direct sale channels, the operation of these two farms is an important node of local food in Warsaw's restaurants and cooperatives which build their offer on the basis of local food. Yet another symptom of local embeddedness is the emphasis of the Rysiny Farm's host on cooperation with local artisans when any construction work is done at the farm. For instance, the building where the bistro is located today, was renovated in cooperation with local craftsmen and with the use of recycled materials (wooden elements from a destroyed building, metal scrap etc.). While the impact of such an approach is mostly local – unsurprisingly, since the practice is active at the local scale – the rule of thumb adopted by the hosts is worth replicating elsewhere.

Policies and institutional support

The policy context is considered important by the organizers of all of the three practices – although rather as a barrier than support. From the perspective of Cydr Chyliczki, legal regulations for cider producers have been a significant obstacle; had one of the family members not been trained as a lawyer, they would have had much more difficulty in setting up the businesses. Our interviewee explains that for many small, local cider producers the amount of formalities that need to be fulfilled in order to be able to produce cider is simply overwhelming. While our interviewee recognizes that the production of alcoholic beverages needs to be well controlled, it is still considered as too complicated if more small family businesses are to be set up.

For Ludwik Majert Farm and Rysiny Farm, the main obstacles came from spatial planning policies of the city of Warsaw. The farm suffered significantly from subsequent spatial transformations – the construction of a road, electrical grid poles and a railroad that cut the farm into more and more pieces since the 1970s. Furthermore, the future of the Ludwik Majlert Farm is not clear, as most of its area is devoted in the current spatial development plan to a large road transport node (while the rest of the area is planned as industrial warehouses). In this context, it can be considered rather unusual that the farmers still want to keep the farms. However, the attachment to the land and satisfaction from one's job makes the farmers indifferent to the potential financial gains from selling the land.

Impact and perspectives

The three practices around family food production and processing provide good examples of locally embedded enterprises that reach beyond the financial dimension into social and/or environmental aspects of food systems. In the case of Cydr Chyliczki, its main added value seems to be the impulse to preserve and reintroduce traditional species of apple trees in the Grojecki county, which is an important territory for apple production in Poland. The product – cider – is then sold in restaurants and stores all around Poland, thus providing a domestic offer for high-end products that can compete with otherwise imported beverages.

Ludwik Majlert Farm and Rysiny Farm, in turn, are much more local in the operation. Their most important impact is providing local, (mostly) organic food to the residents, restaurants and cooperatives active in Warsaw. In doing so, however, they introduce educational, social and cultural functions that complement the productive aspect of the farms. Our field observations and interviews confirm that these two farms are very successful – or even that their hosts see the risk of becoming too popular. This is so because the demand keeps growing but these businesses do not wish to expand. The families feel the connection with the land – the history plays a role in that – and are simply satisfied with the scale of their businesses, which allows them to keep face-to-face contact with customers and create a place important for the local community. The impact of such an approach is that local residents have access to local food, but also can learn a lot about food production, which in turn translates into better awareness of how food systems operate. Finally, the impact of the farms can be also viewed with the lens of ecosystem services they provide: 25 ha of farmland among the urbanized land is an important asset in the context of phenomena such as land sealing, urban heat island, biodiversity or air quality.

What will be the future of these practices? Cydr Chyliczki has been slowly but steadily growing since its establishment seven years ago and claims that there is still some expansion ahead of them. The future of Ludwik Majlert Farm is unclear as it depends on the administration of Warsaw who will or will not build the road transport node planned in the middle of the farm. In turn, the host of the Rysiny Farm is rather optimistic: the next generations (young adolescents today) will be able to choose the future of the farm as, in his

view, it provides so many possibilities that they will probably be interested in taking over the inheritance. Before that happens, however, the farm works just fine today and there is no need to expand it; rather, one can just enjoy it.

Reference

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Annex 1. The list of interviews

Code	Role	Date	Place
PL2B/Int.1	Ludwik Majlert Farm – practice leader 1	16.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/Int.2	Ludwik Majlert Farm – practice leader 2	17.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.3	Rysiny Farm – practice leader 1	19.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.4	Rysiny Farm – practice leader 2	20.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.5	Cydr Chyliczki – practice leader	22.05.2021	phone
PL2B/ Int.6	Ludwik Majlert Farm – customer	22.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.7	Ludwik Majlert Farm – customer	23.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.8	Ludwik Majlert Farm – customer	27.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.9	Ludwik Majlert Farm – customer	05.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.10	Rysiny Farm – customer	20.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.11	Rysiny Farm – customer	28.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.12	Rysiny Farm – customer	28.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.13	Cydr Chyliczki – restaurant owner	28.05.2021	Wroclaw
PL2B/ Int.14	Cydr Chyliczki – store owner in Wroclaw	04.05.2021	Wroclaw
PL2B/ Int.15	local NGO representative	30.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.16	local administration representative	27.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.17	local administration representative	20.05.2021	Warsaw
PL2B/ Int.18	academic expert	27.05.2021	phone
PL2B/ Int.19	academic expert	29.05.2021	phone
PL2B/ Int.20	academic expert	30.05.2021	phone

Table. 1 Interviews