



# **GRDA**

## **FEEDBACK STATEMENT**

### **CAP STRATEGIC PLAN 2023 - 2027**

### **PUBLIC CONSULTATION DOCUMENT**

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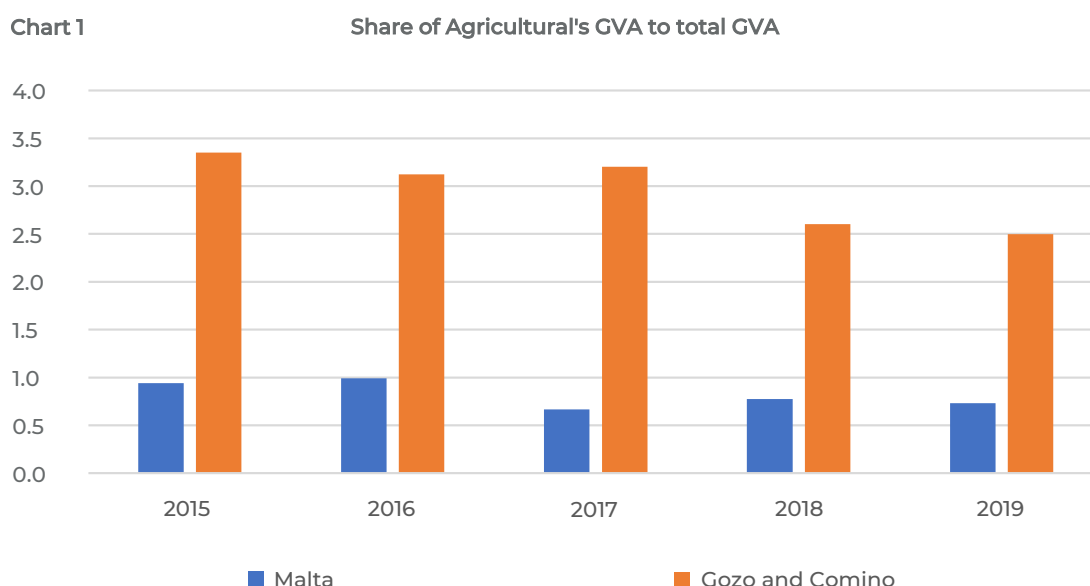
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## Introduction

Gozo has a more rural dimension than mainland Malta and consequently agriculture activity in Gozo is more intense than that in Malta. As a result, agriculture production in Gozo generates a proportionately higher contribution to the island's economy when compared to that of Malta (see Chart 1). Employment in agriculture is also more robust in Gozo vis-a-vis that of Malta. In fact, over the 2010-2019 period the average share of agricultural employment to total employment in Gozo was equivalent to 5.6% while that in Malta this was only 1.3%<sup>1</sup>.



## Funding programmes, including specific funding for Gozo

The agricultural sector in Malta is beset by a number of constraints which warrant appropriate policy intervention. Hence the Gozo Regional Development Authority (GRDA) fully supports the scale of funding proposed under this strategy, which both Maltese and Gozitan farmers will benefit from. The main funding sources as highlighted within the strategy are the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Moreover, other funding commitments will also be used.

Additionally, the GRDA welcomes the Government's commitment to earmark 10% of funds under Cohesion and Agricultural funds for Gozo. These funds will be used to partly address the present and future needs of the Gozitan agricultural sector. The support of the

<sup>1</sup> Source - National Statistics Office - [https://nso.gov.mt/en/News\\_Releases/View\\_by\\_Unit/Unit\\_02/Regional\\_and\\_Geospatial\\_Statistics/Pages/Regional-Gross-Domestic-Product.aspx](https://nso.gov.mt/en/News_Releases/View_by_Unit/Unit_02/Regional_and_Geospatial_Statistics/Pages/Regional-Gross-Domestic-Product.aspx)

GRDA on this regard has already been highlighted in the Authority's Feedback on EU Funds 2021 – 2027<sup>2</sup>.

There are nine specific objectives, under three general objectives, which Maltese and Gozitan farmers are able to target with the provided funding mechanisms.

## Focusing on Gozo and its needs

The main role of the GRDA is that of a regulatory and consultative body. In other words, the aim of the Authority is to address socio-economic development gaps. This is done through the development and streamlining of regional policies and by overseeing their implementation through the adoption of modern project management tools. As a result, any funding opportunities, that Gozo can benefit from, are of great interest to the GRDA, since this will positively affect the socio-economic development, as well as the surrounding environment in a sustainable manner.

## Targeting Gozo's needs within the agriculture sector

As highlighted within the specific objectives within the CAP Strategic Plan 2023 – 2027 document, there are three general objectives and nine specific objectives, which are beneficial for the farmers, other stakeholders, consumers and the surrounding environment. This is consistent with the vision of the GRDA which considers rural development as a key priority area<sup>3</sup>.

What follows are GRDA's main points/reactions to the specific objectives within the CAP Strategic Plan 2023 - 2027, and how these fit into the specific measures with regards to Gozo as highlighted in the Regional Development Strategy for Gozo 2021 – 2030.

Due to the smallness of Gozo, food security and diversity within the agriculture sector is vital. Food produced must be of high quality, safe and nutritious, this further encourages the Maltese and Gozitan population to buy local. Measure 7.2, outlined in the Consultation Document on Regional Development Strategy for Gozo 2021 – 2030 focuses on the local food quality produce assurance and traceability systems. In order to upkeep with the required standards and to offer the best possible product, which competes with foreign imported products, it is important to focus on research, technology and digitalisation. Similarly, Measure 7.3, focuses on the reintroduction of Gozitan food and

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<sup>2</sup> This is available on: <https://grda.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/EU-Funds-GRDA-Document.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> For more information see the Regional Development Strategy for Gozo 2021 - 2030 available from: [https://grda.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GRDA\\_Gozo-Strategy-Report\\_VH\\_WEB\\_OP2.pdf](https://grda.mt/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/GRDA_Gozo-Strategy-Report_VH_WEB_OP2.pdf)

species to cultivate and breed indigenous food and species. This measure will aim to further boost demand from local consumers to purchase local produce. In addition, Measure 7.7 addresses healthy foods, research and innovation for value added products. The main focus of such measure is for food and produce to have minimal processing and the most efficient harvest management.

Furthermore, agricultural products, especially local products such as the Gozo cheeselets must be marketed and presented in a better way. This will further encourage consumers to buy local and hence local farmers can sell more and in turn generate more profits. Measure 7.1 within the Regional Development Strategy for Gozo 2021 – 2030, suggests the setting up of a Gozo foodscapes market, where Gozitan food is showcased. This will serve as an attraction for locals as well as tourists. Another, measure which aims to enhance local demand for locally produced foods is through an awareness and educational campaign as suggested in Measure 7.4. This could be carried out through various channels in order to reach maximum audiences and boost locals to buy local.

Farmers are key players in protecting the surrounding natural environment and enhancing rural areas. The effects of climate change and biodiversity loss are negatively impacting the natural environment, and as a result are also directly impacting the farmers. As a result, farmers must be made aware of the measures to mitigate and adapt to climate change, as well as measures on how to boost biodiversity. In the Consultation document this issue features under Measure 7.12. The latter focuses on a Natura 2000 terrestrial sites action programme to safeguard and render more sustainable the Natura 2000 sites, through which farmers can assist. Furthermore, Measure 7.13 aims at afforestation programmes, using mainly endemic trees. Trees reduce atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub>, assist in actions against desertification and soil erosion. Additionally, trees play an important role in sustaining endemic flora and fauna and wildlife habitat.

Both Maltese and Gozitan farmers are already aware of the limited resources they have, such as limited agricultural land, shortage of water and soil erosion. Hence using these resources sustainably is key, especially when considering the small size of Gozo. Measure 7.6 aims to tackle water resource constraints through the distribution network of new water to Gozitan farmers. This measure suggests an educational campaign to further encourage farmers to make use of new water, hence not putting further pressures on the limited aquifers. Similarly, Measure 7.10, targets the rehabilitation of valleys and restoration of wells, so that farmers make maximum use of rain water.

Unfortunately, the farming sector is not attracting the younger generation. Like the Maltese youths, Gozitan youths are exploring various other sectors which offer higher financial returns. Measure 7.8 deals with revitalising Gozo's rural community through a youth farmers toolbox, where a set of policy measures should be designed to encourage youths to look at farming as a rewarding profession by also tapping into various funding schemes. Also, agricultural land is limited and it has become relatively expensive to purchase. Furthermore, there may be issues with land ownership. Measure 7.5 within the Regional Development Strategy for Gozo 2021 – 2030 aims to consolidate land parcels to render Gozo's rural economy more efficient, by carrying out a survey to check how land parcel fragmentation is

affecting different sectors. It is vital that an element of business starts to be incorporated with farming, in order encourage young farmers to uptake this sector. Also, efforts should be targeted towards increasing female participation in this sector as the data suggest that presently this ratio is relatively low.

Improving food waste management, antimicrobial resistance and animal welfare are topics which farmers need to further address, in order to provide the best products to consumers and further increase their profits.

A crucial point to highlight is that farmers must share their knowledge, best practices and new innovations with other farmers and experts in the sector. This will be of mutual benefit for farmers, consumers and others involved. This is also targeted in Measure 7.9 where a farmer advisory programme partnership is being suggested. This is to be created by either a recast of existing partnership organisations or by the setting up of a new rural Gozo partnership organisation. This will provide Gozitan farmers with technical, scientific and entrepreneurship advice. Following the feedback and suggestions received during the consultation process, the final Regional Development strategy will include additional measures which will aim to boost the agricultural sector.

## Conclusion

The agricultural sector was and will remain crucial for our islands. Despite, the challenges it is facing, our islands must make sure that this sector is well-sustained due to the various benefits it provides, as well as the livelihoods it supports. The GRDA fully endorses the CAP Strategic Plan, which plan enables farmers and stakeholders to tap into funding programmes in order to achieve the above stated goals. The GRDA also agrees that the necessary assistance will be given to farmers and interested stakeholders in the area, so as to make use of these funding programmes.



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