



Fresh from the raised bed: head chef Thomas chopping herbs, which are then used right away in the kitchen.

—INTERVIEW

Deeply-rooted partnerships

Hotel Vigilerhof, Seis am Schlern.

The Marmsoler family runs their business in accordance with one clear principle: local responsibility. Junior manager Sophia Marmsoler explains how this principle has grown into a vibrant network of partnerships, and just how much of a difference the kitchen makes.


From our farms.
For our tables.

For you, partnerships with the surrounding farms form part of everyday life. Has this awareness of local economic cycles always been there, or is this a new trend driven by the younger generation?

It's more about our roots, which continue to grow. My mother grew up on a farm, while my father comes from a family of butchers. My brother Florian and I grew up with this deep connection to farming; for us, it was totally normal to spend time in the barns of our relatives and neighbours. That shapes our understanding of a product and our appreciation of the work that goes into it. Our parents showed us by example that running a hotel also entails social responsibility: we want to help make sure that farmers can make a living from what they have built up with such passion and dedication.

Local partnerships often arise from personal trust. How did you get in contact with the farms that supply your products?

It generally happens in a very direct, neighbourly way. For example, our lamb comes from the farm run by my partner Thomas, who is both a farmer and the head chef at the Vigilerhof. We often get our vegetables from his neighbour; berries, pork and apple juice come from other local farms. Some of these collaborations take place on a regular basis, whilst others happen spontaneously. If our neighbour slaughters a cow, we're happy to take it. Producers often pop round to the hotel in person to offer what they have. We're always keen to try whatever's in season.

That sounds like a logistical challenge. How much organisational effort goes into managing all this?

It's actually pretty easy to handle. As our hotel is located right on the main road, most producers deliver their goods directly to us. Of course, it means that we have to do more administration, but we remain true to our principles: for us, quality and origin are more



Sophia Marmsoler places great emphasis on close partnerships with local farms, which is also reflected in the dishes served at the Hotel Vigilerhof.





important than the convenience of having everything on one consolidated invoice from a major supplier.

—We're always keen to try whatever the season has to offer.

Your partner Thomas also works as head chef at the Vigilerhof. How does the kitchen respond to products that may have only been announced the day before?

In our kitchen, flexibility is the most important ingredient. Thomas is highly creative. For him, responding spontaneously to what is on offer is not an issue, but an enriching experience. Depending on the quantity of the product, you can make light creams or special side dishes. Even if the menu has already been planned, it is almost always possible to replace one item with a fresh, locally sourced product.

A farmer and a chef all in one: how does this dual role affect his work in the kitchen?

It makes things a lot easier – Thomas is a real gem. He shares our point of view because that's how he grew up. My father passed on his knowledge of meat processing to him – we make use of every part of the animal.

How does this principle affect the rest of the business?

We're working to reduce waste in all areas, including, of course, food. Whatever's left over goes to our miniature pigs. We also remind our hotel guests that we aim to make the most of everything and throw away as little as possible.

It is an art to raise guests' awareness of sustainability without coming across as preachy. How do you strike a balance between raising awareness and letting them enjoy their holiday?

It is not always easy to get our stance across. But since we started to communicate our efforts – which have now been awarded certification – more actively, people are becoming more aware of them. We use leaflets and display stands at the breakfast buffet, but our staff are probably our most important resource. On company outings, you get to meet the producers in person, enabling you to share the stories behind the products. We noticed that as soon as a product takes shape, demand increases. When we explain that the apple juice in the cocktail comes from a farm in the neighbouring village, people order it more often.

You bring sustainability to life. Which format do guests especially appreciate?

Our weekly kitchen party is a real highlight. The guests join Thomas in the kitchen and

watch him at work as he talks them through what he's doing. In this relaxed atmosphere, discovering where the food comes from becomes an experience in itself. My brother, who works at our second hotel in St. Valentin in Kastelruth, and I are also thinking of developing culinary experiences that allow guests to visit our partner farms and get to know the people there.

What would it take to make local supply chains between the agricultural sector and the food and restaurant industry work even more effectively?

There needs to be a deeper understanding of one another on both sides. Fundamentally, I think it's important that we all recognise just how much we benefit from the landscape conservation carried out by farmers. Specifically, clear communication from producers helps us in the food and restaurant industry: What's currently available? Which product is coming next? For us as a business, reliable partnerships are important. If we can plan together what quantities of which products are needed, then both sides stand to benefit. When communication works well, everyone benefits.

Three things you can learn from the Vigilerhof

Give everything a second chance.

Bread which is a few days old is toasted, seasoned and served as a snack in the sauna area: This is how food is processed in a meaningful way.

Bring employees on board.

A company outing to the cheese dairy, a visit to a farm, a product presentation at the breakfast buffet. If you know what's being served, you can also tell the guests.

Clear communication. Explaining to guests why certain decisions have been made – for example, that toiletries are only provided on request for reasons of sustainability – helps them to understand and reduces the number of queries or complaints.



Behind each of these portraits is the **alma** network. The food that ends up on plates in the Seiser Alm region of the Dolomites doesn't happen by chance - it's the result of a close collaboration between farmers and restaurateurs. They discuss quantities, adjust logistics, and decide together what can be grown and how it makes its way from the farm to the table. This creates a local economic cycle in which supply and demand come together - underpinned by trust and reliability.

alma is neither a label nor a campaign, but a network that makes this collaboration visible: specific and closely tied to the daily lives of the people who work and do business here.

—seiseralm.it/alma