



Georg Jaider in front of the Tschötsch Alm: working with local producers forms part of his concept.

—INTERVIEW

What lies along the path

Tschötsch Alm, Seiser Alm. Georg Jaider has been welcoming guests to the Puflatsch mountain plateau for the last ten years. Much of what ends up on the tables is grown down in the valley on his brother's farm, or comes from the farms that lie along the path to the mountain hut. In this interview, he discusses his biggest challenge: logistics.

In the kitchen at the Tschötsch Alm, head chef Michael uses whatever the farm and the surrounding area have to offer at the time: from eggs to homemade pasta.



Even before the Tschötsch Alm opened, you set out “exemplary cooperation between the catering industry and the agricultural sector” as the guiding principle behind your business concept. Why is that so important to you?

Because things really took off. I grew up at the Tschötscherhof farm in St. Oswald, where it was simply a matter of course to use what grew on the farm and to get whatever else we needed from the neighbours – including for the “Zu Tschötsch” inn, which forms part of the farm. I decided to continue with this principle for the huts, and to focus particularly on local produce.

What’s changed since you opened?

More and more local produce is finding its way into restaurants, partly because the number of producers has increased over the last ten to fifteen years. Most of the time, however, we’re the ones seeking out this product. It’s rare for someone to approach a restaurant of their own accord.

Your brother Andreas now runs the farm and inn, while you look after the mountain hut. Is he now your main supplier?

We get a lot of our products from him, especially the wines. The meat comes from his farm too; his animals graze on our mountain pastures. Anything else we need, we source from local butchers; processed meat products like Speck come from a farm in Kastelruth. Andreas also supplies jams, juices, fruit and vegetables, as well as the potatoes

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he doesn’t need for the inn. We’ve planted a herb garden behind the hut, and we also collect produce that grows in the local area: caraway, yarrow for kombucha, wild spinach, spruce shoots. We dry, ferment or preserve



much of it. I get quite a bit of fruit, vegetables, juices and teas from the farms along the path to my mountain hut.

Without the kitchen, this concept would probably not work. How is the team involved?

A lot of it comes down to our head chef, Michael. He works efficiently and creatively, and he sends us out to fetch something specific – such as dandelions which, once sautéed in butter, end up in the risotto. In the past, people would put a dish on the menu and then wonder where the ingredients for it would come from. In our case, the reverse is true: We work with what's available, and use that to create the menu. It takes time, and you need to get to grips with the products.

Which aspects are currently not running so smoothly?

At the moment, grain is the biggest issue for us – it's an ideal local product, since it keeps so well. But so far, we haven't been able to source the quantities we need. Last year, I bought a sack of barley from a local farmer and used it throughout the season – in orzotto, for example, or in salads. That's exactly the direction I want to head in: having local products available throughout the year. I've now agreed with two more producers that they'll grow grain, and I'll buy it from them. I'd like more of these types of cooperation.

Reliable cooperation doesn't form overnight. What does it require?

Certainty on both sides. The producers need to be sure that they can sell what they grow. Restaurateurs need to be able to rely on deliveries arriving at the agreed time. This makes shopping more of a hassle – it would be more convenient to give someone a call or to order online. But anyone who looked into it would quickly realise that a great deal of it is just a matter of organisation.

It's no short journey from local producers to the Puflatsch plateau. How do you handle the logistics?

I'm in the fortunate position of having a building at the entrance to the Seiser Alm; I have a lot of things delivered there and I bring them with me on my daily trip to the hut. I collect whatever I need from the farms along the path. The baker delivers the bread right up to the mountain pasture, and I take it the rest of the way myself.

On the other hand, you can't just pop out to get something from an Alpine hut at 2,000 metres above sea level at short notice. How do you handle that?

All in all, delivery is the aspect that causes me the most headache. With products that keep well, such as cereals, there's no issue – I buy them to keep in stock. It gets more complicated when it comes to fresh products like

fruit and vegetables that were harvested several days ago. The location of mountain huts like ours makes it difficult to source locally grown produce, because I don't always know who has what available and there's not much point in travelling long distances for small quantities. Despite this, I try to maintain the best possible contact with the producers and to order fresh produce directly from them. For me, talking to one another and dropping by are key to a trusting relationship – and that's precisely what we should be strengthening, while continuing to develop our collaboration.

Could deliveries be better organised within a larger network?

When it comes to fruit and vegetables, local produce will remain a niche market – supply will never be able to meet demand. Significant improvements could be made to the cooperation, however. I would envisage a central hub, perhaps a greengrocer's, that brings together the available produce: for example, a producer currently has fifty lovely heads of lettuce and sells them through the greengrocer, who informs the shops of the stock on offer. We at the Tschötsch Alm would then order twenty of them, and they'll be delivered along with the rest of the orders. This makes it easier for local produce to reach the mountain pastures.

What are your plans for further down the road?

As demand from the catering industry rises, so too does the supply from producers. The more you tell guests about local produce, the more they ask for it, and that in turn promotes the restaurateurs. Ideally, this will result in a well-oiled machine. Logistics remains the key factor in determining the extent to which this potential can actually be achieved.

Three things you can learn from the Tschötsch Alm

Whatever's available sets the menu. People who cook with local and seasonal ingredients sacrifice a degree of predictability, but in return, they create dishes firmly rooted in both their region and the season.

Short pathways require good organisation. By consolidating deliveries, making use of existing routes and thinking collaboratively, even small quantities can be made economically viable.

Telling stories creates demand. The more information guests know about the origins of the products, the more their interest grows. This demand, in turn, can help ensure that regional foods feature more frequently on menus.



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