



Katharina Pircher of the Hotel Paradies believes the tourism industry has a responsibility to buy locally and support local businesses.

—INTERVIEW

More than what's on the plate

Bergler Acker, Tiers am Rosengarten.

Behind the barn at the Messnerhof farm, the hotel and restaurant staff are growing vegetables for their guests. Edith Rauchegger from the Messnerhof is coordinating the joint project and is president of the Tourist office Tiers, while Katharina Pircher (Hotel Paradies) has been involved from the start.



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From our farms.
For our tables.

The Bergler Acker is a community garden involving five hotels, a restaurant and an Alpine hut. Since 2024, it has been used to grow vegetables for their kitchens. What was the idea behind this, and why did you pick this location?

Katharina: The incentive came from a very specific local shortage of supplies. There are no growers in Tiers who cultivate large quantities of vegetables, and although the Tourist office had considered forging closer links with the farming community, we never found a farm that would have grown potatoes for us, for example. At a certain point, we had to handle things ourselves.

Edith: The specific incentive came from a staff outing organised by the Tourist office, when we visited a community plot in the Ahrntal valley. Even on the way home, it was clear that we wanted to bring that to Tiers

as well. So we started looking for a suitable venue and businesses that would be willing to get involved. In August 2024, we planted the first seedlings – in a field next to our new barn.

The restaurants involved in this partnership are highly diverse, ranging from traditional Alpine inns to upmarket establishments. How does that all fit together?

Edith: That's actually the exciting thing about it: every business cooks differently and needs different amounts of vegetables. To start off with, we assessed the requirements, and each business set out what it could reliably use. We developed our crop range on this basis: different types of cabbage and lettuce, beetroot, root vegetables, radishes, cucumbers, courgettes, beans, Swiss chard and potatoes.



From cabbages and potatoes to flowers: since August 2024, vegetables have been growing on the Bergler field to supply five hotels, a restaurant and an alpine hut. The project is coordinated by Edith Rauchegger.





Alex Andreis and Katharina Pircher from the Hotel Paradies are firmly committed to a style of cooking that draws on what is grown and available locally.

How is the process organised, exactly: who builds and maintains the garden? Who's harvesting? Who gets what?

Edith: At the start of each year, we decide between ourselves what to grow and prepare the beds together. Fabian, our colleague at the Messnerhof, is a real gem. He's a gardener and, as well as working on the farm, he looks after the fields. If needs be, we all

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help out. Using our Whatsapp group, Fabian keeps us informed of when the harvested vegetables are ready to pick up. He also lets us know if he needs help with harvesting, and those who are able hurry to the field. We harvest the potatoes together, since that's a lot of work. In terms of division of labour, we're pragmatic: if someone happens to have one more or less head of cabbage, it's no big deal.

Katharina: For example, we're the only two who like beans (*they both laugh*). They're grown especially for us, so we just have to do without something else.

Edith: And sometimes, we just swap roles, which works pretty smoothly. When it comes

to Swiss chard, we organise it so that each member takes it in turns to receive the entire annual harvest; you need fairly large quantities to make it worthwhile.

Projects of this kind come with a variety of challenges, they can fail due to cost, responsibilities or expectations. What was your experience?

Edith: To be honest, things have gone amazingly. We started out without any major expectations. If nothing grows, nothing grows, we told ourselves. But we were lucky with the gardener, lucky that the plot was just lying fallow and that it's so sunny. The field is too shaded for winter crops.

Katharina: Every business said from the start, "We're ready to bear the costs and responsibilities, even though we don't know what we'll get in return".

Edith: Communicating with the guests is harder. We explain in our menus what the Bergler Acker is, and we can see that our approach is getting through to people, but it means guests have a little less understanding for what happens when a vegetable runs out. There are always discussions in winter because we don't put tomatoes into the mixed salad. They're simply not in season at that time – we're standing firm on that point.

A collaborative project needs a shared principle: what else is required to ensure

that different organisations really pull together?

Edith: We make a great team. Everything is decided between ourselves, and if something goes wrong, we all take accountability for it together. We have drawn up a set of guiding principles that everyone supports, a consistent brand identity, and a logo. Lots of young people are at the forefront – that’s important. This attitude, this form of cooperation, is not something that can be taken for granted.

Katharina: There’s no sense of competition or jealousy. Tiers is a small community – mountain folk, so to speak – and as such, we need to stick together. After harvesting the potatoes together, we sit down for a snack, have a chat and catch up. It’s like a little party.

Local economic cycles only work if the goods produced are reliably taken off the production line. What responsibility does tourism hold here?

Katharina: One major point is that it’s also vital for our local baker that we buy from him. He would hardly get up every night just to bake bread rolls just for the locals. Tourism has the responsibility to buy locally, otherwise these businesses will disappear, and then we all lose out.

What you can learn from Bergler Acker

Stay open to learning new things.

It’s not a given that property owners will make private land available for a community garden. Without a willingness to let others farm on your own land, this project would not exist.

Wonky cucumbers as a sign of quality.

Fruit and vegetables grown in your own garden sometimes look different from those supplied by major wholesalers. This also requires a change in mindset in our own kitchen and a team that is willing to go along with this approach. The best way to do so is to visit the producers.

Community gardens as a meeting point.

Whilst weeding and harvesting, we chat about recipes, cooking techniques and the day-to-day challenges. This interaction is just as valuable as the vegetables themselves.



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