

Case Study

SONNENTOR

How the Organic Pioneer from Austria is making
Sustainability the Economic Foundation of its Success



SONNENTOR Kräuterhandels GmbH

How the Organic Pioneer from Austria is Making Sustainability the Economic Foundation of Its Success

Sustainability sits at the core of SONNENTOR's business. For almost 40 years, the Austrian organic pioneer has been operating according to the principles of the Economy for the Common Good. Between 2023 and 2025 alone, the company invested around five million euros in measures that strengthen its resilience whilst also contributing to the common good. These investments are also paying off financially.

Climate Change and Energy Costs are Putting Food Manufacturers Under Pressure

Food manufacturers such as SONNENTOR are facing a wide range of challenges. The production of raw materials is threatened as climate change impacts growing regions for herbs and spices. Crop failures, fluctuating quality and volatile prices are compounded by a reliance on global supply chains. At the same time, production depends on a stable energy supply. However, geopolitical developments and fluctuating energy markets can cause energy costs to rise significantly within a very short space of time. Together, these challenging conditions are forcing companies like SONNENTOR to explore how they can contribute meaningfully to the common good while securing their long-term economic future.

“Our aim is to achieve zero fossil fuel emissions at our production sites from 2030 onwards. This will require many well-thought-out steps and ongoing adjustments.”

Florian Krautzer, Head of CSR at SONNENTOR



SONNENTOR Profile

Headquarters: Sprögnitz, Austria

Employees: ~ 600 worldwide

Turnover: approx. € 90 million

Founded: 1988

Sales: > 60 % per cent are exported

Core offering: organic herbs, spices, teas and coffee

Resilience Through Sustainable Business Practices

The answer lies not in a single project, but in a system of coordinated measures. This case study presents two approaches: direct partnerships within the supply chain strengthen the resilience of the raw materials supply, whilst investments in energy self-sufficiency stabilise energy costs. SONNENTOR set the course early on, before costs arising from crises materialised.



5 Millionen

Between 2023 and 2025 alone, SONNENTOR invested five million in sustainability measures that strengthened its resilience and promoted the common good.

The Role of Sustainability Reporting

SONNENTOR has been reporting on its business activities within the framework of the Economy for the Common Good since 2011. The Economy for the Common Good report serves as a tool to make sustainability in practice measurable and to communicate it externally. Since 2017, the company has also been systematically recording its own greenhouse gas emissions. This data serves primarily as an internal management tool, enabling the company to make comparisons of the trends over the years. This highlights both progress and areas for improvement and thus supports strategic decision-making. Notably, this data and the experience of working with it proved decisive in securing a green loan for expanding the site in the Czech Republic.

The Collaboration with Cleopa and Agness Ayo in Tanzania

SONNENTOR relies on direct trade to reduce the risks associated with anonymous middlemen and volatile supply chains. To this end, the company offers stable prices even when harvest volumes, quality, and market prices fluctuate.

66 % of raw materials are directly sourced from farms, cooperatives or their representatives.

75 % of supply relationships have been in place for at least three years.

The partnership with Cleopa and Agness Ayo in Tanzania for pepper, cloves, and cinnamon demonstrates how this approach works in practice.

Together with their team, they coordinate more than 600 smallholder families living widely scattered across the Usambara Mountains.

Cleopa and Agness address a key economic challenge: they consolidate small harvests and ensure quality, processing, and transport for SONNENTOR. At the same time, they generate income, create jobs, and develop infrastructure in a remote rural region.

Mutual visits to Tanzania and Sprögnitz foster understanding and trust on both sides, securing the long-term partnership.



Agness Ayo with her daughter Jan visiting SONNENTOR in Sprögnitz

When Sustainability Lowers the Interest Rate



SONNENTOR takes a long-term approach to infrastructure planning: buildings and facilities should be durable, reflect the company's values and reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

Photovoltaic for greater energy independence

40% of electricity demand in Austria,
28% in the Czech Republic
and over 80% in Romania

is generated by the solar PV systems, with the remainder purchased as green electricity. Wood chips, together with production waste such as herb stalks and dust, supply the sites with heat. A CO₂ pressure compressor has reduced gas purchases by 49%.

Green loan of over 6.8 million euros

The new Solis production hall in Čejkovice, Czech Republic, demonstrates how this holistic approach pays off. For the new building, SONNENTOR secured a green loan of 6.8 million euros at an interest rate around 0.5 percentage points lower than that of a conventional loan. A prerequisite was that the primary energy demand, as verified in accordance with the EU Taxonomy, had to be more than 10% below the national threshold for nearly zero-energy buildings (which means an energy demand close to zero).

The carbon footprint remained constant at the Čejkovice site, despite an expansion of the floor area by around 3,000 square metres, thanks to the ground-water heat pumps and a larger solar panel system.

“We were the first medium-sized company in the Czech Republic to receive this green loan. And we’d do it again in a heartbeat.”

Tereza Hemzová, CSR-Manager
SONNENTOR Czech Republic



Challenges & Investments

SONNENTOR continuously reinvests in its own business to tackle sustainability challenges. Between 2023 and 2025, this amounted to around 5 million euros across all production sites.

Operational Challenges:

- Detailed CO₂ calculations are labour-intensive, and as the company grows, the assessment thresholds are constantly shifting. This necessitates repeated recalculations, a painstaking and time-consuming process.
- External dependencies, such as the availability of charging infrastructure during the transition to electric lorries or the pace of technological developments, are risks and uncertainties that must be weighed up when making investments.
- Climate change is altering growing conditions so rapidly at a regional level that planning and farm management are becoming increasingly challenging. In some places, there is no long-term outlook for agriculture. SONNENTOR aims to provide this as a reliable, long-term partner.



Why Was It Worth It?

SONNENTOR's consistent focus on greater sustainability and the common good is yielding measurable results.

- In 2025, emissions in Sprögnitz were 22% lower than the previous year, whilst in Čejkovice the carbon footprint remained constant despite expansion.
- The high level of self-sufficiency in energy ensures a secure supply and predictable costs.
- Thanks to the green loan, SONNENTOR achieved an interest rate advantage of 0.5% p.a.; further efficiency gains result from increased production capacity and energy savings.
- Long-standing partnerships ensure supply, quality, and traceability, keeping prices as stable as possible even when harvests fluctuate, and building resilience in times of crisis.
- This approach also ensures long-term economic prospects for the region.

Conclusion

SONNENTOR demonstrates that economic success and sustainable practices can be combined, enabling a company to remain successful in the long term. The company aims to show that this path is possible and that business practices focused on the common good can secure a better future. Sustainability reporting forms the cornerstone of this. It serves as a management tool and enables well-informed investment decisions. SONNENTOR calls on policymakers to provide fair and forward-looking framework conditions, as well as planning certainty through clear requirements and their long-term stability.



A tour of the new Solis production hall in Čejkovice, the Czech Republic