

SZŠ Jolly HOMESCHOOL

OUR **JOLLY FARM**

“Help us to do it ourselves.”

9. Roč. 2025/26



What do **YOUNG** people between the ages of 12 & 15 truly need from **EDUCATION?**

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE FAR MORE CAPABLE THAN WE OFTEN ASSUME. When the work is real, when it has purpose, and when we trust them, they grow in extraordinary ways.



COLLABORATION is another essential part of the experience. Students do not work in isolation, nor do they compete for grades. They learn to cooperate, discuss ideas, solve problems together, and face challenges as a community.



It is a safe place, but at the same time a very real one. Students work with their hands, grow food, create products, care for living things, and, most importantly, see the results of their efforts.



OUR GOAL

OUR GOAL IS NOT TO EDUCATE FUTURE FARMERS. FOR US, THE FARM IS SIMPLY A MEANS. A VERY POWERFUL MEANS, BUT STILL ONLY A TOOL. WHAT TRULY MATTERS TO US IS HELPING YOUNG PEOPLE DEVELOP THE CAPACITIES THEY NEED FOR A MEANINGFUL AND FULFILLING ADULT LIFE.

OUR STORY

We would like to tell you about something we have been building for several years now — a learning environment called Jolly Farm. However, we do not want to present it merely as a project or an educational model. Rather, we see it as an idea. Perhaps even as a question. What do young people between the ages of 12 and 15 truly need from education? From our experience, the answer is not more information. It is not more worksheets. And it is certainly not spending more time sitting at a desk. At this stage of life, something else seems far more important: young people want to understand real life, and they want to feel that they are capable of contributing to it in meaningful ways.

This is where our central idea comes from:
“Help us to do it ourselves.”
At Jolly Farm, we strive to take this idea seriously.

The environment here differs significantly from a traditional Montessori classroom for younger children. Instead of a space filled with didactic materials, we have moved toward something simpler, more flexible, and much closer to the real world. Because the farm itself becomes the classroom. It is a safe place, but at the same time a very real one. Students work with their hands, grow food, create products, care for living things, and, most importantly, see the results of their efforts. Not in theory. Not in simulation. But in reality. They take this experience even further by selling the products they create, often to people they have never met before. It is in these moments that they encounter something profoundly important: responsibility, the value of work, and genuine human interaction. Along the way, they naturally learn biology, economics, social studies, communication, and planning — always within the context of real life and authentic needs.



The story of Jolly Farm began with a desire to find a home for the Montessori adolescent program known as **Erdkinder – Children of the Earth**.

Then one day, an opportunity arose in Kučišdorf - a place with a unique atmosphere and tremendous potential. The school made the decision to purchase the property.

The land consisted of neglected former vineyards, overgrown with grass and shrubs, waiting to be brought back to life.



STEP BY STEP, WE BEGAN CREATING THE ENVIRONMENT THAT IS NOW KNOWN AS OUR MARINGOTKA – A PLACE WITH ITS OWN STORY, WHICH GRADUALLY BECAME THE **HEART OF THE FARM.**



✦ **IT IS NOT SIMPLY A FARM.** ✦

IT IS A PLACE WHERE YOUNG PEOPLE DISCOVER THAT **THEIR ACTIONS MATTER**, THAT THEIR WORK HAS VALUE, AND THAT THEY ARE CAPABLE OF CONTRIBUTING TO THE WORLD AROUND THEM.





ENVIRONMENT



We knew from the very beginning that we were not looking for an ordinary educational space.

We envisioned an environment where adolescents would grow food, create meaningful products, care for living things, and at the same time develop essential life skills such as collaboration, planning, responsibility, project management, and communication with professionals from the wider community.

We wanted a place where work would not be seen as an obligation, but as a natural and meaningful part of learning and personal growth.

Our search took a long time. Then one day, an opportunity arose in **Kučišdorf** - a place with a unique atmosphere and tremendous potential. The school made the decision to purchase the property.

What followed was an enormous amount of work.

The land consisted of neglected former vineyards, overgrown with grass and shrubs, waiting to be brought back to life. Step by step, we began creating the environment that is now known as our **Maringotka** — a place with its own story, which gradually became the heart of the farm.

And it was here that we encountered one of our greatest surprises.

Although the setting was beautiful and perfectly matched our vision of a living prepared environment for the adolescent program, the soil itself was almost completely infertile.

What initially appeared to be a major obstacle eventually became one of our greatest lessons.

IT TAUGHT US PATIENCE. IT TAUGHT US RESPECT FOR NATURE. IT TAUGHT US TO SEARCH FOR SOLUTIONS AND TO UNDERSTAND THAT GENUINE GROWTH - WHETHER OF THE SOIL OR OF A HUMAN BEING - REQUIRES TIME, CARE AND **TRUST IN THE PROCESS.**

And that is what Jolly Farm is truly about today.

✦ SPACE WITH A SOUL ✦

Every farmer needs a home base — a place to shelter from the rain, take a break, plan the next steps, or simply spend time together with others.



More than a classroom, the Maringotka is a living example of what Montessori education can become when learning is rooted in purpose, community, and real experience. **It reminds us every day that meaningful education does not happen only within four walls.** It happens when people come together to create something that matters.



THE MARINGOTKA BECAME THE TRUE HEART OF OUR FARM.

It is the place where we gather, plan, learn, create, and connect practical life on the farm with academic learning.



„This space should not be built *for* children, but together *with them*.“



CLASSROOM



We knew from the beginning that such a space would be essential on our farm. That is why we chose an unconventional, yet beautiful solution: a mobile structure on wheels — our **Maringotka**.

We were incredibly fortunate to collaborate on this project with architect **Vladko Wagner** from *Priestor s dušou* (“Space with a Soul”). He brought not only a unique design for an ecological mobile classroom in nature, but also a powerful idea: that this space should not be built *for* children, but *together with* them.

And so the building process became a community effort involving students, parents, and teachers alike.

Together, we painted, assembled, planned, created, and gradually built a place that today we all consider our own.

It is this shared journey that gave the Maringotka its unique spirit. To this day, everyone can find a personal story within its walls — a remember painting the interior for the first time, others assembling furniture, and many recall the evenings spent planning and dreaming together.

Another important value for us was our commitment to creating the space as sustainably as possible. We are especially proud of features such as our ecological composting toilet from Sweden and the use of natural, environmentally responsible building materials throughout the project. Over time, the Maringotka became the true heart of our farm. This is where our larger farming projects are born. It is where students learn to connect work with knowledge — from environmental science, biology, engineering, and the arts to the life skills that matter most: collaboration, communication, planning, responsibility, and the ability to find solutions.

INFERTILE SOIL

The soil on our farm is far from ideal for growing crops. Unfortunately, it was only after purchasing the land that we discovered just how infertile it was.

But giving up has never been part of who we are.

Instead, we began educating ourselves about permaculture and exploring ways to bring the soil back to life. Along the way, we sought guidance from several experts, but one person in particular had a profound impact on our journey — **Mr. Jozef Fekiač**. He helped us create a long-term planting plan, carefully mapping out what to plant, where, and when, while respecting the principles of permaculture and sustainable land stewardship.

We decided to begin with **Hügelkultur beds**, a traditional raised-bed system widely used in permaculture. (We will share more about these fascinating growing systems later.)

However, as soon as we started digging our very first garden bed, we encountered yet another challenge.

The area where our Maringotkas stand today was once covered by vineyards. What remained beneath the surface was not exactly fertile farmland — it was closer to a quarry.

As a result, whenever we want to dig anything substantial, we either need to bring in an excavator or spend months removing stones from the ground, some of them as large as chairs.

What could easily have become a source of frustration gradually turned into another valuable lesson.



BRINGING SOIL BACK TO LIFE

When we bought the land, we expected a farm. Instead, we found rocky, lifeless soil. Through permaculture, Hügelkultur beds, and lots of patience, **we are slowly bringing the land back to life.**



Every Stone Tells a Story



Bringing Soil Back to Life

Digging a single garden bed often means removing stones as large as chairs. Every obstacle has become part of our learning journey, teaching perseverance, teamwork, and **respect for nature.**



We decided to begin with Hügelkultur beds, a traditional raised-bed system widely used in permaculture.

Building a farm, much like building a meaningful educational environment, often **requires patience, persistence, and a willingness to work** with what you have rather than what you wish you had.

And so, stone by stone, bed by bed, and season by season, we continue transforming the land — learning alongside it every step of the way.



BUILDING OUR FIRST WATER SOURCES

From the very beginning, we knew that water would determine whether our farm could thrive.



First, we installed two 1,000-litre rainwater tanks to collect rainwater from the roofs of our buildings.



As the farm expanded, we realized we would need to store more water. **We therefore installed a 6,000 - litre underground storage tank** to increase our capacity for collecting rainwater.



LACK OF WATER

Our first step was simple but important. We installed two 1,000-litre rainwater tanks to collect rainwater from the roofs of our buildings. One of these tanks was connected to a 25-metre hose and a small outdoor tap, allowing us to water the first two garden beds. It was a modest system, but **it gave us the opportunity to start growing and, more importantly, to learn.**

As the farm expanded, we realized we would need to store more water. We therefore installed a 6,000-litre underground storage tank to increase our capacity for collecting rainwater. At that stage, however, the tank was not yet connected to an irrigation system, so it remained unused while we searched for the best long-term solution.

Although these first water sources were an important beginning, they soon reached their limits. The low water pressure allowed us to irrigate only two garden beds, and during dry periods the rainwater tanks emptied quickly. Meanwhile, the underground storage tank remained disconnected, leaving much of its potential untapped.

As climate conditions became increasingly unpredictable, we realized that rainwater alone would not be enough to sustain the growing farm.

If we wanted to create a resilient and productive learning environment, we needed a reliable source of water throughout the entire growing season.

That realization led us to our next major step—drilling a well.



WELL

The story of our well became a powerful reminder of why it is so important to talk with young people about climate change, global warming, and **the growing scarcity of natural resources**.

When we first began building the farm, our goal was to operate as sustainably as possible and rely primarily on harvested rainwater.

We believed that this approach reflected the kind of respectful relationship with nature that we wanted to cultivate, both on the farm and in our educational philosophy.

However, local regulations required us to secure our own source of utility water. The reason was straightforward: in an environment where children learn and crops are grown, it was not considered sufficient to depend solely on rainwater collection.

Our original plan seemed quite simple. We expected to find water at a depth of approximately five to ten metres.

Reality, however, surprised us. To reach a reliable water source, we ultimately had to drill down to a depth of **eighty metres**. This experience became a profound lesson for all of us. We realized that many of the issues often discussed only theoretically in geography or environmental science classrooms are unfolding right here around us. Water scarcity is no longer a challenge limited to distant regions or a concern for future generations. It is becoming a reality that we can already observe and experience in our own environment.



WELL

For this reason, topics such as water management, soil health, climate change, and sustainability have become a natural part of learning on our farm. Students do not simply study these concepts through textbooks or presentations. They experience them firsthand.

They see how much effort is required to secure a reliable water supply. They witness how quickly soil can dry out during periods of heat and drought. They observe how weather patterns influence plant growth, harvests, and the wider ecosystem around them.

Through these authentic experiences, they begin to understand something truly important: Natural resources cannot be taken for granted.

Caring for our planet is not merely an environmental issue - it is a question of responsibility toward future generations.

Perhaps this is one of the most valuable lessons the farm can offer. When young people connect directly with the land, they develop a deeper understanding of the challenges our world faces and a stronger sense of their own ability to contribute to meaningful solutions.

And in a time when sustainability is often discussed in abstract terms, there is something powerful about learning these lessons with your hands in the soil and your eyes on the horizon.



STRAWBERRY HARVEST



Among the very first crops we chose to grow on our farm were strawberries. They proved to be a practical choice, as they can tolerate relatively dry conditions and produce their harvest in June, while students are still actively participating in farm life before the end of the school year. Although we have never sold fresh strawberries directly, they have inspired many of our student-led projects and products. **Over the years, we have baked strawberry cakes for Christmas markets, made miniature frozen strawberry popsicles to celebrate Children's Day, and cooked homemade jams that were sold to families within our school community.**

These experiences offered students much more than a harvest. They learned how a simple crop can be transformed into products with real value, while developing skills in planning, production, marketing, and entrepreneurship.

Looking ahead, we hope that as our soil continues to improve and our strawberry plants mature, future harvests will be abundant enough to allow us to sell fresh strawberries and strawberry products at local markets. **It would be another meaningful opportunity for students to experience the full journey from cultivation to customer — and to see the tangible results of their work.**



PUMPKIN HARVEST

One of our greatest farming successes came during the pumpkin season of 2023. That year, we harvested around fifteen magnificent pumpkins, some of them as large as cooking pots. For a farm still in the early stages of development, it felt like a remarkable achievement.

Even more exciting was the fact that we managed to sell every single pumpkin at a community event, giving our students the opportunity to experience the satisfaction of bringing a product from the field all the way to a customer.

Since then, however, we have not enjoyed such abundant harvests. One of the main reasons has been the increasingly dry conditions that affect both our farm and agriculture more broadly. Each year reminds us how closely our work depends on nature and how important it is to learn resilience, adaptation, and sustainable growing practices.

**Yet farming has taught us another valuable lesson:
every season offers a new beginning.**

And so, each spring, we start again with optimism and determination. We continue improving our soil, learning from our experiences, and experimenting with new approaches. This year, we are once again planting a new generation of strong, healthy pumpkins, hopeful that they will thrive and perhaps even surpass the success of our memorable harvest in 2023.

Whether the crop is plentiful or modest, every season brings opportunities to learn, grow, and appreciate the partnership between people and the land.



FLOWERS HARVEST

Our most successful farm products have been our **cut flowers**, which thrive exceptionally well in the conditions of our farm.

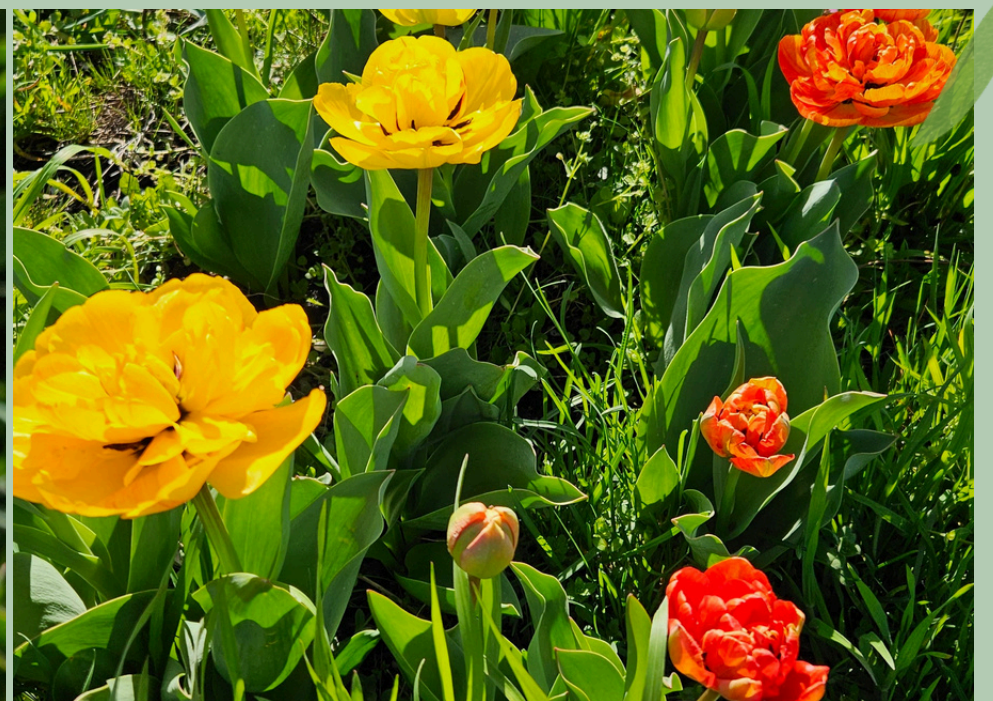
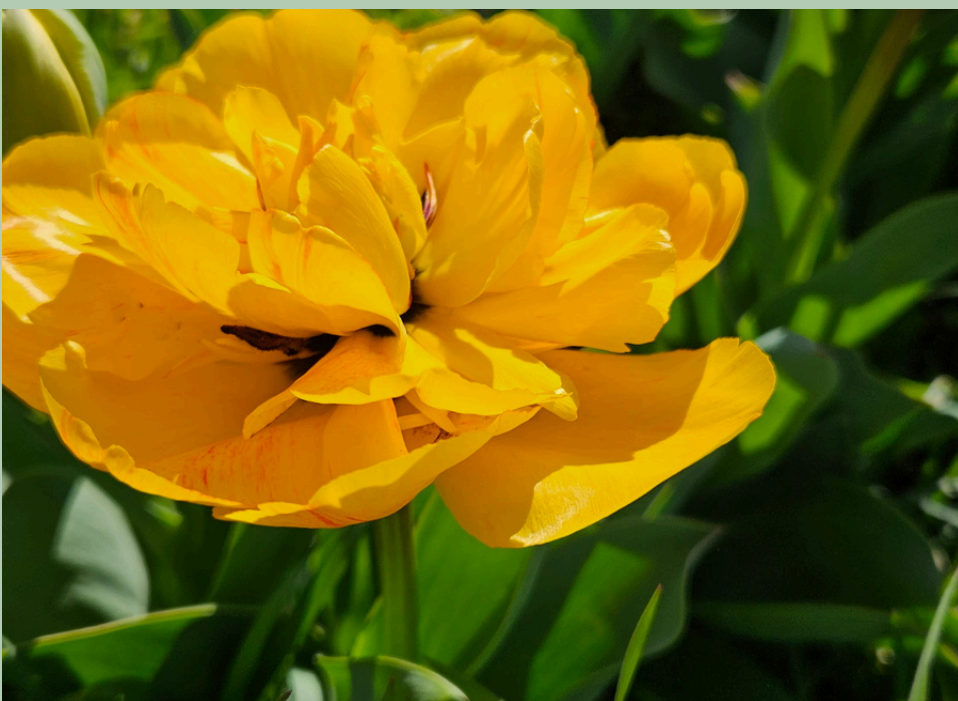
Following the advice of a permaculture expert, we planted strawberries alongside flowering bulbs. This companion planting approach helps maintain soil fertility, as the plants support one another and contribute to a healthier growing environment. It is a simple example of how **working with nature often produces better results than working against it**.

Flowers have become our greatest success story, particularly when it comes to sales. Their beauty, variety, and long flowering season have made them especially popular within our community.

In the beginning, our customers were primarily parents from our school community. Over time, however, our customer base gradually expanded. We began selling flowers to friends, neighbours, and eventually to people we had never met before. For us, this development represents much more than increased sales. One of the core goals of the Erdkinder program is to help adolescents engage with the wider world beyond the school community. When students grow something with care and dedication, present it to others, and see that strangers are willing to purchase it, they experience something powerful: they realise that their work has value beyond the classroom.

These interactions build confidence, communication skills, responsibility, and an understanding of how meaningful products and services connect people within a community.

Today, every bouquet we sell represents not only a successful harvest but also another step in our students' journey toward independence, entrepreneurship, and real-world experience.



IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Water is one of the most important resources on any farm. For many years, we did not have a well on our farm. Instead, we relied on two 1,000-litre tanks that collected rainwater.



One of these tanks was connected to a 25-metre hose that supplied a simple outdoor tap. While this system allowed us to water a small part of the farm, it had significant limitations. We could effectively irrigate only two garden beds, and the water pressure was very low.

Although we also had a 6,000-litre underground storage tank, it was not yet integrated into the irrigation system and therefore remained unused.

As our farm grew, it became clear that we needed a more reliable and efficient solution.





IRRIGATION SYSTEM

Thanks to a grant from E.ON Foundation and Nadácia E.SK, we were able to design and install a comprehensive irrigation system. **This project became one of the most important infrastructure investments in the farm's development.** The system combines several sustainable technologies. Solar photovoltaic panels provide electricity for the pumps and support the general operation of the farm. Rainwater collected in the 6,000-litre underground tank is supplemented with water from our well, creating a more resilient and dependable water supply.

Water is then distributed throughout the farm through a network of taps and automatically controlled irrigation valves. Every garden bed now has access to irrigation, allowing us to care for our crops much more effectively than before. We chose an automated irrigation system for a practical reason: we are not present on the farm every day. Automation allows us to maintain consistent watering even when students and teachers are not on site, helping to protect crops during hot and dry periods.

One challenge we encountered was the depth of our well. Because the well is exceptionally deep, it is not practical to pump water directly from the well to the garden beds. Instead, water is first collected and stored before being distributed through the irrigation system.

This experience taught us an important lesson about farming: When planning any agricultural project, water should be one of the first things you consider. Irrigation infrastructure is not inexpensive, but it has a direct impact on the health of your crops and ultimately on your harvest.

Whether through rainwater harvesting, a well, or a combination of both, a reliable water source is essential. In many ways, the success of a farm depends not only on the quality of the soil, but also on how thoughtfully water is managed.



OUR CHALLENGES

One of the greatest challenges on our farm has been water scarcity. From the very beginning, the combination of drought conditions and poor, infertile soil forced us to think differently. It taught us to look for sustainable solutions and to appreciate the true value of every drop of water.

This challenge became the inspiration for a project we called **Water is Life**.

Together with our ninth-grade students and professionals from the field, we began developing an environmentally friendly irrigation system powered by solar energy. The project became a wonderful example of how real-life challenges can connect science, technology, sustainability, and education in a meaningful way. **What makes this story particularly special is that the entire irrigation system was designed by one of our students, Matúš, as part of his final ninth-grade project.**



From the earliest stages of planning to the technical design and practical implementation, Matúš learned to think like a true engineer and project designer. He had to consider the farm's needs, environmental constraints, available resources, and long-term sustainability. Throughout the process, he was not simply completing a school assignment—he was solving a real problem that affected an entire community. **The result was far more than an irrigation system.**

OUR CHALLENGES



The project demonstrated what can happen when young people are given authentic responsibility and the opportunity to apply their learning to meaningful challenges. **It showed that adolescents are capable of creating practical, functional solutions with a genuine impact on the world around them.**

For us, this is what education is truly about. It is not simply about acquiring knowledge. It is about using knowledge to understand the world, solve problems, and contribute something meaningful to others. **When learning becomes connected to real life, it gains purpose. And when young people experience that purpose for themselves, education becomes something much more powerful than preparation for the future - it becomes a way of actively shaping it.**



WHAT WE LEARNED

Dear Readers,

Every meaningful project comes with its share of challenges, and our irrigation system was certainly no exception. Looking back, many of the most valuable lessons came not from the final result, but from the obstacles we encountered throughout the process.

Working with Regulations and Public Authorities.

One of our first challenges involved obtaining the necessary permits for a shelter that was part of the project infrastructure. The approval process took much longer than we had anticipated. There were periods when progress seemed completely stalled, and waiting for official decisions tested our patience. Eventually, the permit was granted, but the experience taught us an important lesson: successful projects require not only good ideas and technical knowledge but also an understanding of administrative processes and the ability to work constructively with public institutions.

Understanding the Impact of Seasons and Weather.

While we were waiting for approvals, winter arrived. Although we were eager to begin construction, excavation and building work simply could not take place. The ground was frozen, and many planned activities had to be postponed until spring. This taught us another important lesson: when working outdoors, nature sets the timetable. No matter how well a project is planned, seasonal conditions and weather patterns must always be taken into account. Learning to adapt plans to natural cycles became an essential part of our project management.

Flexibility and Finding the Right Partners.

When spring finally arrived and we were ready to begin, we encountered another challenge. The professionals and contractors we had initially planned to work with became increasingly unavailable. Meetings were frequently postponed, communication slowed down, and the project gradually stopped moving forward. Rather than giving up, we decided to reassess the situation and look for a new partner who could offer greater flexibility and availability. This decision proved to be crucial. We learned that choosing the right collaborators is just as important as having a good project plan. Successful partnerships require not only expertise but also reliability, communication, and a shared commitment to achieving the goal.

Perhaps the most important lesson of all was perseverance.

WHAT WE LEARNED

At several points, it would have been easy to become discouraged. Delays, unexpected obstacles, changing circumstances, and uncertainty are all part of real-world projects. Yet every challenge provided an opportunity to learn, adapt, and continue moving forward. For our students, this became one of the most authentic learning experiences of the entire project. They discovered that meaningful work rarely progresses in a straight line. Real projects require patience, flexibility, problem-solving, and determination.

We are incredibly grateful to the E.ON Foundation in Berlin and the ESK Foundation in Bratislava for giving us the opportunity to turn our ideas into reality. This wasn't just another school project. We learned how to work with experts, solve unexpected problems, and build something that will help our farm for many years.

We hope more schools will get the chance to create projects like this, because some of the best lessons don't happen in a classroom—they happen when you build something that really matters. Thank you for making this possible.

See you on the farm! 🌱

Sara, Matúš, Elko (Graduates 2025/2026) and their Teacher Vierka





European Climate Fund Winner Certificate

This certificate is hereby presented to
Jolly HOMESCHOOL Private Elementary School
for the project **"Water is Life - Climate Adaptation of the Jolly
School Farm"**

for your contribution to shaping a sustainable and socially just future.
Your project has exemplified our values and our vision to foster a sustainable and resilient future
for Europe. We are delighted to support it financially through the E.ON Foundations'
European Climate Fund 2025.

We congratulate you on this accomplishment and look forward to witnessing the positive impact
of your project on our environment and communities.

Berlin, 20 November 2025

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Dr. Stephan Muschick



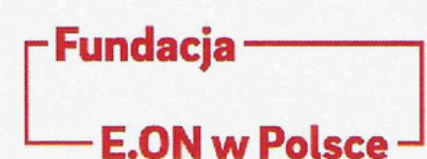
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Andrea Tragalová



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Aleksandra Smoczyńska", written over a horizontal line.

Dr. Aleksandra Smoczyńska

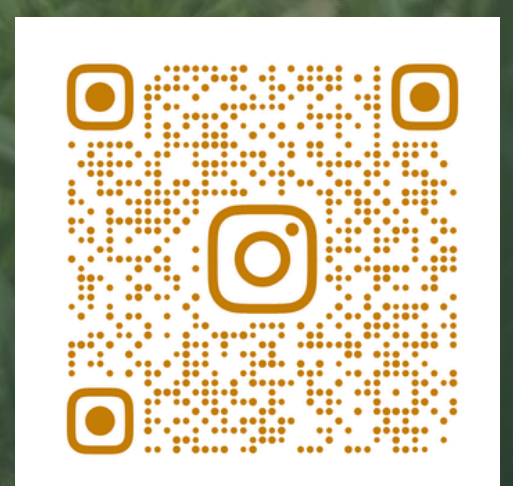




Thanks For Walking This
Journey Together

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS TO OUR PARTNERS

*Great things are never built alone.
They grow through trust, collaboration,
and people who believe that every
small step can create lasting change.*



www.jollyhomeschool.sk