

## ITALY

# Sustainable use of agricultural land

### Location

Legnaro

### Programming period

2007 - 2013

### Axis / Priority

Axis 2 – Improving the environment and the countryside

### Measure

M214 - Agri-environment payments

### Funding (EUR)

Total budget 1 million  
EAFRD 800 000  
National/Region. 200 000

### Project duration

JAN 2013 – DEC 2014

### Project promoter

Veneto Agricoltura (as project coordinator)

### Contact

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EAFRD support under measure 124 brought together a network of regional actors to preserve animal and vegetal biodiversity in the region and provide targeted support to farmers engaged in this task.

## Summary

Protecting biodiversity is a key priority for the Veneto Region. However, this cannot rely only on farmers' efforts to ensure the preservation of all animal and plant species at risk to be lost. Often financial support is not sufficient and professional advice might be required. Farmers need targeted advice and information actions, and ensure that this can economically sustainable in the long term, in order for it not to be completely dependent on public support.



In this context the project created a network at regional level of actors committed to recover and preserve animal and vegetal biodiversity in the region and to support all farmers engaged in this task. In the first phases of the project implementation the network identified breeds and species to be targeted within the programme. Once those were identified specific working groups were created to carry on preservation activities, e.g. on beef, poultry, cereals, forage, etc. These activities included targeted support to farmers, information and dissemination activities, seminars, conferences, etc.

## Results

All species and breeds identified in the preliminary phase of the project were preserved and characterised by keeping the species in laboratories and experimental fields/farms and by supporting farmers in the region to use them.

The working groups and the targeted support to farmers participating in the programme helped increase the use of these local species as well as the number of farmers joining the programme.

The BIONET network facilitated the dissemination of information about the economic and natural value of preserving biodiversity. Three biodiversity days were organised involving students, public institutions and other professionals to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity in agriculture.

## Lessons & Recommendations

The project showed the importance in the long term of biodiversity preservation via the organisation of structured activities with participation of both public institutions and farmers.

At the moment biodiversity preservation is very much dependent on public and European financial support and mainly managed at regional level. This causes differences between regions and it also endangers the process, as public support is likely to decrease in the future. Thus, a national strategy is needed and also to decrease its dependency on public support.

### Context

Preserving biodiversity has always been a priority for the Veneto Region. In the previous programming period farmers engaged in this task were supported, and so it will be in this programming period. Nevertheless, farmers' efforts might not be sufficient to ensure the preservation of all animal and plant species at risk to be lost. Biodiversity preservation is an expensive activity for farmers; often financial support is not sufficient and professional advice might be required. It is then important to support farmers with targeted advice and information actions, provide them with follow up support and also make the process of preserving biodiversity economically sustainable in the long term, in order for it not to be completely dependent on public support.

In addition, some important activities such as the characterised of species according to the risk of extinction level cannot be done by farmers. On the light of this, a number of research institutes and public authorities in the region joined their forces to implement the BIONET project benefiting from the financial support of M214. Veneto Agricoltura, Province of Vicenza, University of Padova, the Research Institute for Animal Husbandry, the Research Institute for Viticulture, and two professional agricultural schools created a temporary association to implement the project. Veneto Agricoltura was in charge as project coordinator.

### Objectives

The main scope of the project was to create a network of actors at regional level committed to recover and preserve animal and vegetal biodiversity in the region and to support all farmers engaged in this task. A list of animal and plant species at risk to be lost was already included in the 2007/2013 RPD within M214F, but this was considered not comprehensive. As a consequence, BIONET aimed also to integrate this regional list and possibly to have the new species characterised included in the national list.

Specific objectives of the projects were:

- recover, preserve and characterize local animal and plant species at risk to be lost or threatened by genetic erosion;
- maintain and increase of local animal and plant species effectively used in agriculture and husbandry, with particular attention to those species registered at National level;

- identify, classify and conserve of native breeds of high natural value;
- increase people's (farmers and citizens) awareness about the importance of preserving biodiversity as well as knowledge about local and traditional species and their use in agriculture.

### Activities

The network established identified in the first phases of the project implementation (January-May 2013) breeds and species to be targeted within the programme. Once those identified specific working groups were created to carry on preservation activities, namely:

- Beef working group to preserve and characterize the Burlina breed
- Ovine working group focusing on four breeds, Lamon, Brogna, Alpagosta and Foza
- Poultry working group to preserve 15 poultry breeds belonging to five different species
- Cereals working group to preserve wheat breeds Piave and Canove, barley breed Agordino, and some varieties of corn
- Horticulture working group
- Forage crop working aiming to identify and list semi-natural grassland areas in the region and characterize the breeds identified so to make them available to be used in the future
- Viticulture working group which includes continuing the work in existing experimental fields and the creation of others

Each working group carried on their activities from June 2013 onwards. Activities also included direct support to farmers that were already involved in activities aiming to preserve local and traditional species. Farmers were assisted with targeted advice to respect rules and practices related to the cultivation/breeding of local and traditional species.

The project envisaged also the implementation of information and dissemination activities, through the preparation of monthly newsletter to inform about progress, preparation of intermediate and final report and organisation of seminar and conferences.

### Main Results

All species and breeds identified in the preliminary phase of the project were preserved and characterised. This preservation was achieved by keeping the species in laboratories and experimental fields/farms and by supporting farmers in the region to use them.

The work done within the working groups and the targeted support to farmers participating in the programme enabled them to increase the use of these local species and increased the number of farmers joining the programme. Each working group published a final report of its work describing in details the activities undertaken and the results achieved in terms of preservation of local species identified in the preliminary phase, use of these species by farmers in the region and information about their economic viability, and number and nature of dissemination and information activities undertaken.

It was also underlined how the creation of the BIONET network facilitated the dissemination of information about the economic and natural value of preserving biodiversity. Three biodiversity days were organised involving students, public institutions and other professionals to raise awareness about the importance of biodiversity in agriculture. BIONET project and its work was presented in many conferences and seminars at regional and national level, including participation to EXPO 2015.

### Key lessons

The BIONET project highlighted how important it is to preserve biodiversity in the long term via the organisation of structured activities with participation of both public institutions and farmers. Biodiversity preservation is very much dependent on public and European financial support and it is mainly managed at regional level. This causes differences between regions but it also endangers the process, being it based mainly on public support which is likely to decrease in the future. For this reason, it is considered important to have a national strategy to preserve biodiversity (which should happen to a certain extent in this programming period within the NRDP) and also to decrease its dependency on public support.

On the light of these consideration, Veneto Agricoltura implemented a pilot project called Autoconservazione (Self-preservation) with the aim to create the conditions for biodiversity preservation not to depend only on public support. Scope of this project, which was supported only with regional funds, is the creation of a network of farmers and retailers that ensure cultivation/breeding of local species and selling them within the region. This should create a market for these species, which will be easily available in the region, and it would become viable for farmers to continue using them in their agricultural activities. This would also make biodiversity preservation less dependent on public support. The project has just started but the first results seem positive and the regional administration believes on the importance to continue on this effort also within this programming period.

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#### Additional sources of information

n/a