

ITALY

Restructuring and
developing physical
potential and
promoting innovation

Location
Galbiate

Programming period
2007 - 2013

Axis / Priority
Axis 1 – Improving
Competitiveness

Measure
M124 - Cooperation for
development of new
products, processes and
technologies

Funding (EUR)
Total budget 215 748
EAFRD 106 374

Project duration
2011 – 2012

Project promoter
Centro Flora Autoctona (CFA)

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Rural businesses and native flora receive boost from demand-led research project

Summary

Italian nature conservation scientists joined forces with commercial horticultural growers in a cooperation project to promote a new range of garden shrubs and other plants that help to increase the sustainability of native flora in Lombardy.



A partnership of public and private sector bodies implemented the project. They included a research centre, a university, a foundation, a natural park and 10 plant nurseries. Project activities included collecting native species to test reproduction systems. Some 40 000 plants were tested and findings led to a horticultural production process that was certified with an ISO 22005 standard. A promotion campaign followed to raise awareness about the new ranges of ornamental plants. This included carrying out market research to determine demand for plants that customers found attractive.

Results

A total of 20 different certification procedures were developed and validated for native plants.

Over 28 000 plant specimens were produced and branded as 'Flora Autoctona®' (certified origin).

More than 12 000 of these had the environmental certification UNI EN ISO 14020 concerning native plants.

The partners established a consortium to take the project actions further. This producer group included 60 members ranging from plant nurseries, consulting services, publishing bodies, greenhouse producers and exhibitors.

Lessons & Recommendations

- ❑ It is key involving rural businesses in scientific research at an early stage of the project planning. This helps research to be demand rather than supply-led.
- ❑ Technical lessons included how to overcome challenges associated with large stocks of 'mother plants' in a breeding programme of this scale.
- ❑ Other useful knowledge was gained about optimal time planning for different aspects of the *ex-situ* conservation procedures.

Context

Nature conservation commitments in Italy's Lombardia region led to an increase in demand for large volumes of potted native plants that could be used for 'restoring' vegetation in protected biodiversity areas. Horticultural scientists and commercial growers recognised that this demand also offered an opportunity to establish new ranges of ornamental plant species for the domestic market.

Objectives

Goals for the partners in this cooperative research project focused on establishing an on-going and large volume supply-chain for native plant species. These were to be certified with a quality label confirming their authenticity as native plants.

Activities

A partnership of public and private sector bodies implemented the project. They included the Centre of Autochthonous Flora (CFA), the University of Pavia, the Natural Park of Monte Barro (Lecco), the Foundation Minoprio (Como) and 10 plant nurseries. Initial work involved collecting native species to test reproduction systems. Some 40 000 plants were tested and findings led to a horticultural production process that was certified with an ISO 22005 standard. A promotion campaign followed to raise awareness about the new species. This included carrying out market research at nurseries and horticultural exhibitions to determine demand for plants (as well as plant features) that customers found attractive.

"It was very useful for us to be involved in the research project from the beginning because this helped us to gain the result that we wanted."

*Francesca Beschi, Azienda Agricola Antica Pieve.
Horticultural Nursery*

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Such positive results helped to encourage a consortium to become established to take the project actions further. This producer group included 60 members ranging from plant nurseries, consulting services, publishing bodies, greenhouse producers and exhibitors. Their work sustained the project results and focused on launching a full-scale production process for the native plants. This activity also secured RDP co-finance.

"We shared our different perspectives and this led to the research being 'demand-led', and not simply and purely 'supply-led' "

Roberta Ceriani, Native Flora Centre of Lombardy



Lessons

A key lesson relates to the success of involving rural businesses in scientific research at an early stage of the project planning. This helped research to be demand-led rather than supply-led. Nurseries needed the research to help them choose the right species and to implement the best production methods. At the same time, the researchers needed the nurseries' understanding of the needs and requirements of their customers in order to grow new products that were well adapted to the market.

Technical lessons included how to overcome challenges associated with large stocks of 'mother plants' in a breeding programme of this scale.

Other useful knowledge was gained about optimal time planning for different aspects of the *ex-situ* conservation procedures.

Additional sources of information

- www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqsl-CgioCI