

KE BIO – practicing organic farming in a challenging environment

A large family farm producing organic, arable crops in a challenging environment receives annual payments to maintain its organic farming practices and methods.

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Santa Maria Madalena, Gubbio, Italy

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P4 – Ecosystems management

Focus Area: Biodiversity's restoration, preservation & enhancement

Measures: M04 – Investments in physical assets

Funding:	Total budget*	143 843.00 (EUR)
	EAFRD*	62 025.00 (EUR)
	National/Regional*	81 818.00 (EUR)

*Annual

Timeframe: 2016 to ongoing

Project promoter: KE BIO

Email: piero@kebio.it

Website: kebio.eu

Summary

Tenuta di Fassia, commercially known as KE BIO, is a family farm located near the Apennine mountains. In 2009, the farm converted to the organic production of wheat and other cereals, in an area that is characterised by hard clay soils, cold winters, and roaming wild boar. In order to compensate for its higher-than-average management costs in this difficult environment, the farm applied for annual payments from the Rural Development Programme of Marche.

Project results

Thanks to the support received from the Rural Development Programme, the farm was able to revive production of some heritage varieties of wheat and other cereals; establish a longer rotation of crops; and increase the overall resilience of crops against extreme climatic conditions.

Lessons & Recommendations

The economic support per hectare provided by the organic farming measure makes a significant contribution to the sustainability of organic farms, whose production costs are higher than those of conventional farming.

Context

Tenuta di Fassia, commercially known as KE BIO, is a large farm that owns around 500 hectares. Out of these 500 ha, only 160 ha are usable farmland as the farm is located near the Apennine mountains, close to the border between the Marche and the Umbria regions (central Italy). In 2009, the farm owners, the Musini family, decided to convert to organic farming. Practicing organic farming in this area is quite difficult from an agronomic point of view. The area is characterised by hard clay soils, cold winters, roaming wild boars which damage the crops, etc.

Objectives

The payments for maintaining organic farming are aimed at helping the farm sustain its revenue. Practicing organic farming on the steep hilly areas of the region leads to reduced crop yields and there are other associated costs, such as the higher cost of the certified organic seeds/products, the appropriate processing unit for the farm produce, etc., that make sustaining this type of farming system difficult.

Activities

In compliance with the norms set by the EU regulation on organic farming (EU Reg. 2018/848 and amendments), receiving support to maintain organic farming requires the responsible use of energy and natural resources; the maintenance of biodiversity and preservation of the local natural ecological balance; the



enhancement of soil fertility; the maintenance of water quality. In addition, the farm must be regularly monitored by an independent third party that certifies that its products have been produced according to organic standards.

In turn, the farm receives annual payments per hectare to maintain organic farming practices for its arable crops, mainly cereals and leguminous crops. As part of their organic farm management, they use heritage varieties of cereals and modern ones for other types of crops.

Main results

Thanks to the support received from the Rural Development Programme of Marche, the farm was able to:

- > incorporate some heritage varieties of wheat and other cereals (e.g. millet) that are considered more healthy;
- > establish a longer rotation of different crops, also involving various leguminous crops (vetch, field bean);
- > increase the overall resilience of crops against extreme climatic conditions thanks to the use of old, more resilient varieties, coupled with the longer crop rotation;
- > improve the wild fauna.

Other indirect results achieved were that the farm was able to expand its educational and hospitality activities at the local and



regional level. It was also invited to participate as a representative of the organic farmers association in the regional discussions about the new CAP plans and interventions.

Key lessons

The economic support per hectare provided by the organic farming measure makes a significant contribution to the sustainability of organic farms.

A few years ago, the owner tried to promote his own brand for organic pasta and organic cereal-based products. However, this failed as demand for these kinds of product is limited. This shows that at the regional level, the market is not fully ready to embrace organic products because their cost is still higher than conventional products.

“Without the economic support provided by the RDP maintaining organic farming would be extremely challenging, because in this context yields are very low.”

Piero Musini

Additional information:

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