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# REPORT OF GREECE'S CURRENT SITUATION

2022-2-IT01-KA210-VET-000094268





# EUROPEAN NETWORK CIRCULAR FARMERS

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**End date** 31-12-2024

**Project Reference:** 2022-2-IT01-KA210-VET-000094268

**EU Grant:** 60.000,00 €

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**Action Type:** Small-scale partnerships in vocational education and training

**Countries covered:** 3

**WEBSITE:** <https://www.piattaformaprogetti.eu/european-circular-farmers-network/>



## Objectives

The fundamental objective of the project is to create an open European network, formed by young aspiring farmers, for the promotion of circular agriculture, through cooperation with local institutions, media, associations and training centers; the will is also to keep this network active even after the end of the project activities, thanks to targeted fundraising campaigns and crowdsourcing platforms on the web.

## Activities

The activities consist of 4 phases: 1) planning and preparation activities; 2) implementation of local activities and transnational mobility (within which there will be 3 mobility to be held in Lublin, Drama and Rome); 3) implementation of measures to ensure the management, effectiveness and quality of the project; 4) activities to evaluate and share the final results of the project.

## Impact

The expected results are: A) a manual of good practices for aspiring circular farmers called "The Green Circle" to be made available as an open educational resource; B) creation of a motivational story video on the web to spread the principles of circular agriculture and encourage young people to undertake this profession, through a collection of short video tutorials, demonstrative of some sustainable agricultural practices, entitled "How to be a circular farmer".



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## SITUATION IN GREECE

Greece's agricultural sector is deeply connected to tradition and rooted in a rich history. Nowadays it faces challenges like water scarcity, soil degradation, and climate change. The Mediterranean climate presents both opportunities and obstacles for sustainable agriculture in a climatic environment that keeps getting hotter and hotter every year. Traditional practices such as crop rotation and terracing are inherent which lays a stable groundwork to build up practices of circular farming. By modernizing proven methods of farming through circular farming principles one can enhance resilience to changes in the climatic environment and improve sustainability.



## KEY PRACTICES

There are a number of key practices that are implemented around circular farming. First, crop diversity and rotation help to maintain soil fertility and mitigate pests and diseases. Different agricultural products take different nutrients out of the soil which makes it possible to abdicate chemical fertilizers for the most part. Integrating trees into farmland not only conserves soil but also provides additional income streams through timber, fruit, and nuts while sequestering carbon. While a diverse cultivation of farms might present challenges in equipment, expertise and specialization it can benefit the farm long term. To continue, Greece's water scarcity makes it necessary to implement efficient irrigation techniques like drip irrigation and rainwater harvesting. In the already dry climate it is crucial to conserve water resources, especially looking in the future that promises to be even dryer. Greece is already quite adapted to localized food systems, emphasizing local and community-supported agriculture. Especially in a European context where competition within its domestic market is remarkably high and Greece's main export products are agricultural (cheese, table olives, olive oil and cotton) it is beneficial for the country to also be able to rely on stable sale's structures within its own borders. To add to that, utilizing organic waste from farms and communities for composting enriches soil health and reduces the dependency on synthetic fertilizers. Also, harnessing Greece's many hours of sun with solar panels and utilizing wind energy from the sea can reduce farms' carbon footprint and dependence on fossil fuels.



This can stand in contrast with the protection of natural habitats within and around farmland promoting biodiversity, crucial for pollination, pest control, and ecosystem resilience. Ecological research conducted by the Hellenic Centre for Marine Research has highlighted the importance of seagrass meadows for supporting coastal biodiversity and fisheries in Greece. Protecting and restoring seagrass habitats not only enhances fish stocks and ecosystem resilience but also provides valuable ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration and shoreline stabilization. Both areas to utilize for the accumulation of renewable energy sources and protecting natural habitats have to go hand in hand.



## BENEFITS

Benefits of circular farming in Greece can be connected to the factors of environmental sustainability, economic resilience and social cohesion. Environmental sustainability is achieved by several key elements of circular farming. Soil health, achieved through crop rotation and lesser chemical influences significantly reduces erosion and nutrient runoff in Greece's mountainous and semi-arid regions. When it comes to water conservation, studies conducted by the Greek Agricultural Organization "DEMETER" have shown that adopting precision irrigation technologies can significantly reduce water usage in Greek vineyards and orchards. Said technologies may be soil moisture sensors and automated irrigation scheduling. Findings additionally indicate that agroforestry systems, which integrate trees with agricultural crops, sequester significant amounts of carbon in biomass and soil, thereby mitigating greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture. When it comes to economic resilience, diversified income streams through agritourism and value-added products, additional revenue can be generated. By offering authentic farm experiences and showcasing traditional farming practices, agritourism enterprises contribute to the revitalization of rural economies and the preservation of cultural identity.

Looking beyond initial investments, input costs in synthetic fertilizers and pesticides can be reduced. Moreover, locally grown and organic food can be sold for higher prices.



Promoting Geographical Indications (GI) and Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) labels, farmers can differentiate their products in the market and command premium prices, thereby enhancing market access and profitability. Lastly, social cohesion is another relevant benefit of circular farming. Community-based initiatives such as farmers' markets and farm-to-table cooperatives facilitate direct connections between farmers and consumers in Greece. Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiatives promote social cohesion by creating networks of mutual support and solidarity among farmers and consumers which enhances food security in rural communities.





## CHALLENGES

Greece's agricultural sector faces significant challenges, particularly in managing water scarcity due to its dry climate. Efficient water management strategies are the key to sustaining agricultural productivity. Especially as many water-intensive crops like cotton are widely grown all over Greece. However, the widespread adoption of circular farming practices in Greece is hindered by a lacking policy frameworks and limited financial incentives. Analysis by the Greek Ministry of Rural Development and Food has found remarkable gaps in agricultural subsidy programs. Unfortunately many of those fail to prioritize sustainable agriculture initiatives. Furthermore, comprehensive regulatory frameworks are needed to support circular farming practices, easy to understand and to access for all farmers who do not commonly have an academic background.



## EDUCATION IS KEY

Access to education and training on sustainable farming practices can help and is also needed to overcome traditional mindsets and embracing innovation in Greek agriculture. Initiatives led by the Greek Ministry of Education, Research, and Religious Affairs aim to integrate sustainable agriculture education into formal curricula at agricultural schools and universities, equipping future generations of Greek farmers with the awareness necessary to address contemporary agricultural challenges. While Greece generally has an elaborate system of educational institutions related to agricultural practices, extension services, such as the Greek Agricultural Extension Service (GAEA), play a complementary role by providing ongoing support and guidance to farmers in implementing sustainable farming techniques.



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