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REPORT OF ITALY'S CURRENT SITUATION

2022-2-IT01-KA210-VET-000094268





EUROPEAN NETWORK CIRCULAR FARMERS

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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 ITALY

Italy's agricultural sector has been continuously moving towards a more sustainable approach. In this development, circular farming has gained remarkable traction with a strong focus on the efficient use of resources. In this, there is a remarkable highlight on the reduction of waste and the integration of ecological principles into farming methods. Italian farmers are actively adopting circular farming techniques to minimize environmental impact and enhance the resilience of their agricultural systems. In order to achieve this goal organic farming practices are being adopted, equally as the implementation of crop rotation schemes and the use of integrated pest management approaches. Waste reduction and resource efficiency are the focus of circular farming in Italy. Specific measures in order to follow these goals are composting organic waste, recycling agricultural by-products and increasingly using renewable energy sources. Despite being beneficial for the environment, these steps also lead to cost savings and thus improved farm profitability. Another focus point in Italian circular farming is the conservation of biodiversity. Farmers are integrating agroforestry practices to protect wildlife and plants. To add to that, hedgerows are being grown and natural habitats are being preserved. By enhancing biodiversity within the farms themselves farmers are promoting ecological resilience and foster healthier ecosystems.



Another benefit of circular farming is the further bolstering of the development of local food systems in Italy. Consumers connect with locally sourced produce through farmers markets, community-supported agriculture (CSA) initiatives and farm-to-table restaurants. This reduces food miles and simultaneously supports regional economies. Circular farming is strongly supported by the Italian government through policies and incentives. Included are subsidies for agriculture practice as well as funding for research and innovation. Regulatory frameworks are being developed which promote environmental stewardship.



KEY PRACTICES

Circular farming practices in Italy consist of various different strategies aimed at optimizing resource utilization. Other goals include minimizing waste and fostering environmental and financial sustainability within the agricultural sector. In order to achieve a holistic approach to farming ecological balance and long-term resilience has to be prioritized. The widespread adoption of organic farming methods is one of the cornerstones of circular farming in Italy. More and more, Italian farmers eschew synthetic pesticides and fertilizers in favor of natural inputs. This promotes soil health, biodiversity and a stable ecosystem. Another widely practiced technique in Italian agriculture is crop rotation. Crops are being systematically alternated on the same lands. This has the advantage of maintaining soil fertility, mitigating pest and disease pressures and reducing dependence on external inputs. Despite already using more natural fertilizers they are needed remarkably less. This practice contributes to sustainable land management and enhances agricultural productivity over the long term. Then, an integral part of circular farming in Italy is Integrated Pest Management (IPM). By employing a combination of biological control methods, crop diversification and cultural practices pests and diseases can be managed without heavily relying on chemical pesticides. The consequence is a higher ecological balance and a reduction of the environmental impact of farming generally. Additionally, agroforestry systems are gaining momentum in Italy. The term describes the integration of trees and shrubs with crops or livestock. Goal is carbon sequestration, biodiversity conservation and improved soil fertility.



Agroforestry practices consequently contribute to landscape diversity and enhance the resilience of agricultural ecosystems towards disruptive factors. Furthermore efficient water management is elemental in water-stressed regions of Italy. In summer, water shortages present a serious danger during summer which is why sustainable irrigation practices such as drip irrigation, rainwater harvesting, and precision irrigation technologies are increasingly adopted to optimize water use. They also enhance crop yields and mitigate the impacts of drought. Recycling and valorization of agricultural waste streams are emphasized in circular farming as well. Organic waste is being composted to produce nutrient rich compost that can be used for soil enrichment. Bioenergy production from agricultural residues contributes to renewable energy generation.



BENEFITS

Circular farming contains numerous benefits that resonate with the goal to protect the environment. The contribution to preserving the biodiversity of Italy's ecosystem is one of the primary benefits of circular farming in Italy. Organic farming methods, crop rotation, and integrated pest management strategies enhance soil health and protect native flora and fauna. Consequences are the preservation of the ecological balance and the development of resilience of agricultural systems against environmental stresses. Circular farming practices in Italy play an essential role in ensuring the quality of agricultural products as organic farming methods prioritize soil health and nutrient cycling. This results in a higher nutritional content and contributes to the consumer's health. As these attributes are increasingly valued, circular farming also contributes to the economic viability of Italian farmers. Other advantages of circular farming in Italy include the mitigation of the environmental impact of agriculture in Italy, the development of local food systems, strengthening connections between producers and consumers and the social interconnectedness of Italian communities.



CHALLENGES

While circular farming holds immense promise several serious challenges impede its widespread adoption and implementation in Italy. First, one of these challenges is the investment that stands at the beginning of each circular farming journey. Often, the entire infrastructure of a farm has to be changed before circular farming is possible. Moreover, market dynamics pose a significant challenge. Commanding premium prices for sustainably grown produce. Despite consumer interest in locally sourced and sustainable products, competing with cheaper conventional alternatives, affect profitability and viability of circular farmers. Access to knowledge and education is another obstacle. Many farmers lack access to training and resources on circular farming practices so despite an interest in adopting sustainable techniques, it can be hard to find a starting point. Policy and regulatory frameworks also present hurdles. Regulatory barriers in implementing agroecological practices on farms due to rigid zoning laws and bureaucratic hurdles can stop farmers from embracing new techniques. Challenges navigating the complex regulatory landscape, may hinder the ability to embrace circular farming principles. Other challenges might include land tenure and fragmentation or water scarcity. Fragmented land holdings and diverse land tenure arrangements may make it difficult to forge collaborative partnerships which limits the scalability and impact of circular farming initiatives. Water scarcity is yet another pressing challenge. During dry spells farmers might struggle to sustain crops due to limited access to irrigation infrastructure and water rights.



EDUCATION IS KEY

Education has to be the starting point of spreading the implementation of circular farming across Italy. In practical terms, education initiatives offer training sessions on sustainable farming practices specifically designed for the Italian agricultural context. These programs facilitate access to a wealth of up-to-date information. Utilizing a range of platforms including online resources, extension services, and agricultural publications, farmers are empowered to make informed decisions. Education also plays a vital role in skill development among farmers, providing training opportunities that cover a spectrum of technical proficiencies. Through collaboration between research institutions, universities, agricultural organizations, and farmers themselves, new technologies are developed and tested to address evolving agricultural challenges and opportunities.



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