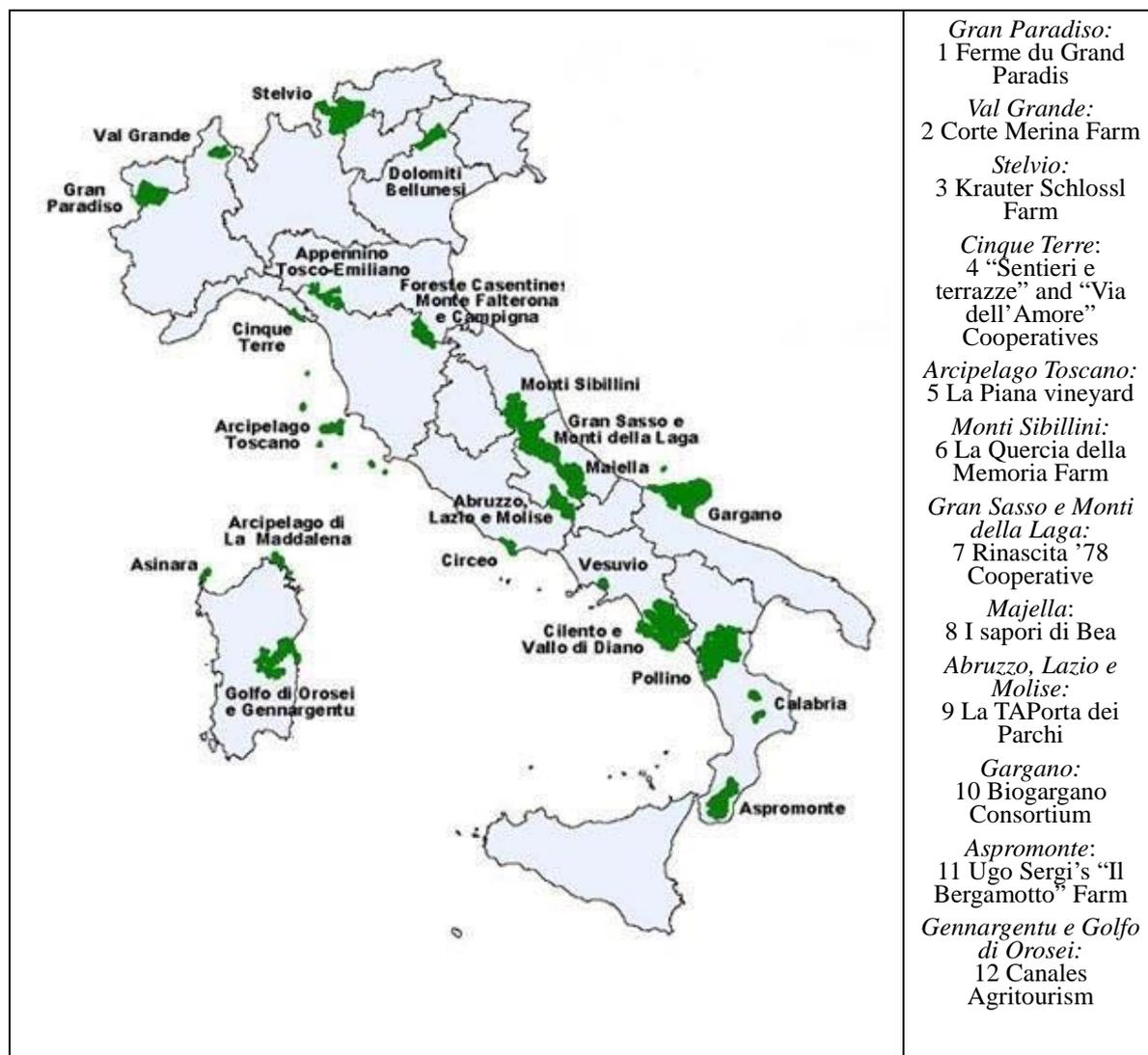


ORGANIC AGRICULTURE IN PROTECTED AREAS

THE ITALIAN EXPERIENCE

by

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1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

This publication is a summary of research carried out by the Italian Association for Organic Farming (AIAB)¹ for the Ministry of the Environment, the purpose of which was to analyze Italian experiences of organic farming in National Parks in order to draw conclusions which could then be useful for the further development of organic farming throughout the Italian Protected area system. A second objective was to highlight the best practices (organic excellences) which integrate the process of organic production with the development of the surrounding area. The project started in March 2007 and was completed in October 2008.

For the first time, more than 500 organic farms within the twenty-four Italian National Parks were interviewed by means of a questionnaire. The directors of the National Parks were also interviewed. Analysis of the immense amount of data thus generated led to the creation of the “**Guidelines for the development of organic farming in protected areas**”. We consider them a useful tool for the managing bodies of protected areas, local communities, businesses and interested organizations which aim to promote a sustainable organization of the land through the sustainable development of virtuous organic food production chains.

Through the use of specifically designed environmental, social and economic indicators we were able to identify those farms which operate the best practices, known as “organic excellences”. This documentation led to the creation of a “**Catalogue of Organic Excellences in the Italian National Parks**”. Twelve of the farms included in the catalogue are described in Chapter 4 of this document.

We believe that the methods we used and the tools we developed could also be of interest to local administrators in other countries, even though the configuration and management of protected areas is not the same as in Italy.

Agriculture and Protected Areas in Italy

One of the defining features of the Italian national identity is its enormous heritage of traditional farming methods and products, the result of thousands of years of human endeavour. To this day the whole country is distinguished by very ancient agricultural landscapes, easily recognizable by their shape and layout; direct evidence of the wealth and variety of the Italian agricultural heritage. Italy is also home to the greatest biodiversity in Europe, not only thanks to a wide variety of geo-morphological conditions, but also because of the techniques and types of agricultural production in use.



“Fattoria della Mandorla” Farm – Alta Murgia Park

Italian National park authorities are a strong and widespread presence managing more than 3 million hectares, about 10 percent of the national territory. Their development is mainly due to the enactment of law no.394/91. The large amount of farmland within protected areas is a distinctively Italian trait. Protected areas not only preserve natural biodiversity, but the relationship between man and nature has also developed genetic resources (varieties, species) and landscapes which are part of the country's cultural identity.

According to research carried out recently by INEA (the National Institute of Agricultural Economics) on behalf of the Ministry for the Environment, there are more than 230 000 farms situated within the administrative boundaries of the National Parks, about 9 percent of the national total, with an average

¹ www.aiab.it

size of 5.3 hectares. They occupy 9 percent of national farmland, at least 50 percent of which is grassland and pasture, while 34 percent of total farmland is forest. As a result, the farming of livestock is therefore of an extensive type, with an average of 0.7 LU (Livestock Units) per hectare of farmland (compared to a national average of 2.1 LU).

Organic Farming in Italy

In Italy today about 1 million hectares, around 7-8 percent of total farmland, are farmed organically by more than 42 000 farms (SINAB² data on 31/12/2008). Production mainly involves cereals which, together with grazing land, meadows and pastures, cover more than 50 percent of organic farmland. Olive-growing and viticulture are next in order of importance. As for livestock farming, there has been an increase in the number of animals, particularly poultry, sheep and pigs.

Organic Farming and Protected Areas

Organic and eco-sustainable farming is particularly suited to farms situated within national parks because they are not subjected to pollution from external sources and are aided by the presence of wild areas providing a natural habitat for predatory birds and insects, crucially important for the protection of plants. Moreover, organic farming does not harm local ecosystems because it does not use pesticides and promotes biodiversity, improving biological links and creating ideal habitats for animal life. It also promotes grants that reward farmers for acting as “guardians/stewards of nature”.



“La Girlanda Farm” – Abruzzo Park

These characteristics are recognized by international agreements, such as the “Convention on Biological Diversity” signed in Rio de Janeiro in 1992³, and the Italian framework law on protected areas⁴.

However, organic farming in protected areas is still not as widespread as it is in the rest of the country. Organic farming, clearly a viable option in many situations, it is still not fully exploited and is not widespread in protected areas, even though there is very little use of chemical products, as shown by the study “Agriculture in the National Ecological Network”, commissioned by the Ministry for the Environment from INEA, in collaboration with Federparchi and Legambiente.

This study highlights the need to expand and develop multifunctional farming in such areas, through a series of coordinated actions and measures in line with EU programming of funds and initiatives. These should generate income and employment, stability and social cohesion, whilst promoting the maintenance and extension of farming practices which preserve and increase landscape and biological diversity and expand the number of recognized and certified products, especially if organic. In Italy it

² SINAB: National Information System on Organic Farming

³ The convention encourages farming practices (such as organic farming) that increment productivity whilst promoting biodiversity (Decision III/11,15e); it recognizes that environmental labeling and low input farming in and around protected areas contribute to the local economy and employment (Decision V/25 4g, 12e); It uses organic farming as an indicator of progress on the convention's 12th target, whose goal is to make sure that, by the end of 2010, 30% of plant products come from sustainable sources (Decision VI/9).

⁴ Law 394/41 identifies organic farming in article 12, comma 2c, as a means of production for protected areas, stating that in “*protected areas in which, in accordance with the park authority's initial objectives and its general criteria, agro-sylvo-pastoral activities can take place along with fishing and the harvesting of natural products following traditional methods, or organic farming methods. High quality hand-made production is also encouraged*”

is mostly thanks to the pioneering work of organic farmers and the association that represents them, AIAB (Italian Association of Organic Farmers), that there have been significant examples of organic farming in protected areas⁵.

Organic Best Practices or Organic Excellences

The project has also allowed us to identify organic best practices, or “organic excellences”, in Italian National Parks and the farms that implement them. “Organic excellence” implies a virtuous food production chain that safeguards biodiversity and the environment, promoting sustainable land management in all its stages, from initial production to processing, retail and the promotion of tourism. A virtuous organic food production chain contributes to the environmental, social and economic sustainability of the park and exemplifies sustainable management and use of natural resources.



Wegleit Farm – Stelvio Park



Terrace farming – Cinque Terre Park

⁵ In April 2005, AIAB organized the First Italian Conference on “Organic Farming in the Management of Protected Areas: Sharing Ideas and Experiences”, during which some concrete examples of organic food chain development in protected areas were presented.

2. SURVEY: METHOD, ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Method

Representatives of the national parks as well as organic farming, at both national and local levels, were all involved in the study on a large scale. A qualified special committee, with representatives from the Ministry of the Environment, AIAB, INEA, Federparchi, Legambiente, the WWF and LIPU coordinated the whole process.

Two questionnaires were used. The goal of the first one, aimed at the park authorities, was to obtain precise information on the agri-environmental and socio-economical situation in the protected area, as well as qualitative information about the park's agricultural policies and its relationship with farmers.

The second was addressed to organic farms operating within the park area or, if outside the park, within its municipal territory. The aim was to obtain a range of data on each farm, its agri-environmental management, the type of marketing and investments undertaken, whether it performs a variety of functions, and its relationship with the park management. The last part of the questionnaire was designed to identify organic food supply chains in Italian National Parks, so as to highlight the presence of “best practices”: virtuous production chains that can be positive and extendable examples of organic farming promotion.



Circeo National Park

The vast amount of data collected through these questionnaires was then analysed in order to provide a picture of the current situation of organic farming in protected areas (see results in next section), from which the “Guidelines for the Development of Organic Farming in Protected Areas” were subsequently created. These guidelines were adopted after having been widely discussed and revised by both the special committee and a wide selection of stakeholders in the course of a dedicated workshop.

About one fifth of the 500 farms surveyed were classified as “organic excellence”, and a short description was written for each one⁶. They are examples that should be studied and used as inspiration for the development of organic farming in protected areas. Twelve of these descriptions are included in this document.

Analysis of Interviews with Park Authorities

These interviews were carried out with the presidents, directors or those responsible for the management of agriculture and natural resources. The analysis focuses on the policies these agencies are implementing in the field of agriculture, in particular organic farming, and on their relationships with farmers.

As regards *national park policies in the agricultural sector*, we have examined the actions which the parks have carried out in relation to creating a park brand, the promotion of biodiversity, organic farming and local products, economic contributions towards the development of sustainable farming, training programs for organic or sustainable farming in general, and the use of strategies for rural development. The following table summarizes the results, highlighting areas of importance to organic agriculture interventions.

⁶ All of the descriptions are available in Italian at www.bioeccellenze.org

ANALYSIS OF PARK POLICIES REGARDING AGRICULTURE
Park actions
Park brand-names. Almost all of the parks have adopted the option of using their own logo for promotion purposes. For some protected areas the Park brand works very well as a means to promote local products and services that fit in with its charter. A few Parks have given up due to the complexities of trying to implement it, others are working towards its implementation. There is no single approach, but almost all parks recognize it as a great promotional tool. Specifically, 53 percent of the parks have already implemented their brand in different forms, 7 percent are in the process of developing one, 20 percent have not considered it.
Agro-biodiversity initiatives. Many parks (67 percent) have set up specific initiatives to foster agro-biodiversity, for example: “Cultivating Biodiversity” (Dolomiti Bellunesi), “Biodiversity Farmer Guardians” (Gran Sasso National Park); “Let’s Cultivate Biodiversity” (Majella National Park).
Promotion and marketing of local agro-food production. Most Parks (73 percent) have developed initiatives in this area: from the use of the trade mark or logo of the park, to “Declarations of Quality”, to Visitors’ Centres; from participation in specialized trade fairs to the financing of processing facilities for local production. It is a key sector, and is recognized as such also by the farmers interviewed.
Contributions for sustainable agriculture. Most of the funds made available by the Parks for agriculture go towards compensating farmers for the damage done by wildlife, the restoration of farm buildings, and stone walls. Economic support for the development of organic farming is missing in almost all parks (with the exception of the Dolomiti Bellunesi).
Organic farming initiatives. 53 percent of the parks have taken no action in this regard, while the remaining 47 percent have developed some initiatives or mentioned organic farming in their planning, but without giving space to practical initiatives. Clearly: there are still all too few initiatives. It must be said, however, that there are good examples of initiatives that have given good results, such as in: Dolomiti Bellunesi, Cinque Terre, Gargano, Majella, Gran Sasso.
Training in organic and sustainable agriculture. The majority of the parks have not undertaken training initiatives with their own direction and resources.
Priority in rural development plans (EU funds for rural development). The replies received highlight two things: the limited attention of RDPs towards the parks, and above all, the limited knowledge, in many agencies, of the major instrument available for fostering local rural development.

According to the Table above, only few Parks are developing actions for supporting organic agriculture, but most of Parks are carrying out initiatives, such as promoting brand names, biodiversity and local agro-food production. These activities represent a conducive environment for developing organic agriculture and could be easily reoriented in order to support it.



Grand Paradiso Park

The relationship between the *Parks and the agricultural sector*, in particular organic farmers, varies widely from case to case. The analysis of the opinions expressed by the agencies who answered the questionnaire may be summarized as follows:

<p>How to involve the farming community? Most of the parks acknowledge a limited degree of participation by the farming community in the management of the protected area. In detail, 46 percent of the agencies declare a total lack of involvement of farmers in the management of the park; 31 percent recognize the involvement of only the farmers' professional associations, and only 23 percent declare that they ensure a systemic participation of farmers in the life of the Park.</p>			
<p>How do organic and conventional producers perceive the National Park? The replies of Park representatives indicate a more positive attitude on the part of organic farmers, and a greater willingness to cooperate.</p>			
How conventional farmers perceive the Park designation?		How organic farmers evaluate the Park designation?	
☺	☹	☺	☹
31%	69%	54%	46%
<p>How does organic farming support the Park's aim of conserving natural resources? Most of the parks recognize the added value of organic farming in ensuring the achievement of a sustainable activity that combines production, income generation, and the achievement of some conservation aims. They also acknowledge the capacity of organic farming to increase the "appeal" of protected areas.</p>			
<p>What should Parks be doing for the organic sector? Proposals include: the use of a collective brand-name for the promotion of local agro-food products, a quality guarantee for park products, dedicated training courses, promotion of the organic food chain, participation in specialized trade fairs, support for the development of the short supply chain, support for farmers by financing the costs of certification up to 50 percent, management of the problem of damage caused by wild animals.</p>			

Finally, the SWOT analysis brings together the main comments made by the managers of the various parks. It provides a clear picture of the situation and identifies the points of weakness and the "environmental" threats which limit the development of the organic sector. It also sets out a purposeful framework of the strengths of organic farming and the opportunities provided by the Park for its development.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
High environmental quality perceived by the aware consumer.	Limited availability of integral organic supply chains.
Pristine environment of the Park. Additionally, the Park gives a "healthy" image.	Scarce consideration of the Park, on the part of farmers, as a useful resource in the development of the sector.
The external visibility and the resources that the park can provide.	Poor entrepreneurial spirit and lack of confidence among the local population. Previous models of making a livelihood having been lost, along with the traditional knowledge associated with them.
The Park Brand, provision of processing and marketing facilities.	Inability to counter the influence of the agricultural policies carried out just beyond the park borders.
Within the Park everything should be organic.	Abandonment of agricultural areas, property fragmentation, the difficulty of reclaiming terraced landscapes for farming, presence of wild boars and wild sheep (mouflons) with their devastating impact on vineyards, market gardens and orchards.

OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
Development of the short supply chain in the tourist areas around the Park.	Low awareness and lack of information about organic farming on the part of the local community.
Sustainable tourism within the territory of the park, as part of increased options for on-farm tourism (multi-functionality).	Limited sensitivity to environmental issues on the part of farmers, who need to make a reasonable living.
Farmers as "stewards" of the landscape. Renewed interest in traditional agricultural products. Possibility of reclaiming abandoned areas.	Current national legislation gives priority to the Park: while there are many advantages to be gained from being situated in a Park, (various Rural Development Programme measures, for example), the Park itself, as the managing body, is prevented from benefitting directly from these measures.
The possibility of taking advantage of opportunities offered by European, national, regional and local support programs made available by the park.	Excessive freedom and intensification of production systems (at the expense of the environment).
The park brand-name will create more opportunities to market local produce.	Parks seen as "marginal" entities in the planning of Rural Development Programmes. Little chance to influence decisions.

Analysis of Interviews with Organic Farmers in National Parks (Their Point of View)

In this section, we report the direct opinions of organic farmers working within the parks, with minimum interpretation of results. With all the data and information available, we have tried to merge the farmers' analysis with that of the various park authorities, in order to assess the different perspectives and the real needs of organic farmers. As in the previous section, references to specific National Parks have been omitted, focusing mainly on general notions.

Analysis of the questionnaires reveals some interesting information. Firstly, that the organic farmers of the park areas are, on average, considerably younger than national and European conventional farmers. This is a positive element that is often accompanied by a more positive attitude towards learning and updating, communication, investment and especially innovation. It is worth taking this factor into account.

Average age of farmers		
Organic Farmers in National Parks (2007)*	Italy (2000)	EU 25 (2003)
47,6	59,0	54,0

* The data refers to organic farmers in the National Parks, and in some cases in the buffer areas (data from 16 National Parks).

Secondly, the marketing of agricultural products is perceived as the main problem afflicting organic farms. The feeling is that a suitable means for promoting local produce is lacking, as are direct channels for reaching consumers.

Analysis of the questionnaires shows that the short and local supply chain is clearly prevailing among the farms situated in the parks. In 62 percent of the parks, the organic farms market mainly through direct sales, farmers' markets and through specialized shops /restaurants/wine bars. Direct marketing to organized groups of consumers are almost totally unexploited channels, with the exception of Gargano National Park.

Furthermore, we can summarize that, organic farmers:

- perceive the National Park in a significantly more positive way than their conventional colleagues;
- almost always recognize the value of the Park and the benefits, received or potential, of living in a protected area;
- are willing to be involved with the park authorities, but are at the same time demanding;
- show a strong propensity for the short supply chain;
- are interested in the conservation of biodiversity;
- manifest a strong propensity for multifunctional uses of the farm such as agritourism, educational resource, or as a base for natural and excursion services.

The following Table lists what organic farmers usually say about the advantages and disadvantages of being located within (or in some cases in the buffer area of) a national park.

Farming in a National Park	
Advantages	Disadvantages
I believe that (the park) has led to benefits in terms of tourism, but the agricultural activity has not benefited (at least to date).	The park has been unable to manage and resolve the problem of wild animals (wild boars).
For us the park was positive, although this is mainly due to the fact that our farm was particularly proactive compared with all the others.	The park has generally brought disadvantages in economic terms through the restrictions it imposes on the agricultural sector, including bonds and quotas to accomplish.
I think the park designation has certainly improved the rational management of the territory and the protection of its natural resources.	Only the tourist structures have gained by being in the park; the small farms haven't received any advantages.
It seems to offer benefits, particularly from the promotional point of view.	The Park does not offer aid to limit the damage caused by wild boars, low compensation.
In the agricultural sector the park is absent.	My business has not received any advantages.

Finally, it is interesting to find out why the almost 500 farmers interviewed in the national parks during this project made the decision to convert to organic farming.

Their replies have been ordered into three main categories of choice:

- for environmental reasons and for the protection of the territory: 24 percent;
- for ethical reasons and for the benefits for personal health and that of consumers: 26 percent;
- for better market opportunities and/or access to EU support schemes (agro-environmental measures per hectare payments): 50 percent.



Organic agriculture at Sila Park

The figures highlight the prevalence of economic reasons in deciding to convert to organic farming, in order to increase farm income due to better market development and/or access to EU support schemes.

3. GUIDELINES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF ORGANIC FARMING IN PROTECTED AREAS

Although organic farming is a choice for many, it remains an underused resource overall: it is still not a widespread practice, despite its sustainability and the lack of use of chemicals. These guidelines propose practical solutions to foster the development of organic farming in Italian national parks, in line with the comments expressed by Park authorities and organic farmers.



Graiss family Farm – Stelvio Park

They suggest various approaches to the main problem areas identified in the analysis, including:

- communication and participation by the agricultural sector;
- support the capacity building of organic agriculture and food chains;
- complete the organic production chain and the promotion of direct sales; and
- promote multi-functionality of agriculture and agro-biodiversity.

Communication and Participation by the Agricultural Sector

Communication and participation by farmers in the decision-making processes of the parks is seen as a critical issue by both parties. Almost all the parks have their own means of communication: newsletters, magazines, posters, websites, etc.; the farmers on the other hand generally prefer personal or direct communication, through their organisations of reference. There is the need to develop a "governance" of the agricultural sector in the national and regional park authorities.



AIAB workshop – Cilento Park

Actions:

- Create a partnership platform between the agricultural sector and the park authorities, not limited only to institutional representation of agriculture (representative of the Ministry) or to the exclusive involvement of the farmers' unions, but extending participation to local producers' associations (cooperatives, consortia) as well as to organic associations.
- Promote a decentralised and direct communication, as for example:
 - organize technical seminars, preferably in response to requests from farmers, in order to present the Park's initiatives and to explain certain objectives or decisions taken by the management;
 - carry out these events in a decentralized way directly on farm premises: organic farms have good demonstration potential for other farmers;
 - farm visits: This may sometimes be hard on the park staff, but it is certainly a very useful way of giving direct visibility to the park;
 - ensure shared processes for the implementation of projects regarding the agricultural sector.

Support the Capacity Building of Organic Agriculture and Food Chains

Park managers generally consider organic farming the reference method for the maintenance of biodiversity, landscape and soil conservation and the promotion of the park's products.

Giving support to a systematic development of the sector requires more than the development of a single measure such as the “Agro-environment”: it requires a global, structured strategy which includes training, extension services, the opportunity to close the food chain locally, promotion, and above all creating the conditions for the organic food chain to develop and grow independently. The system must be encouraged and helped (for the widely recognized social and environmental benefits) but must be self-supporting.



Vannulo dairy farm – Cilento Park

Actions:

- Institutionalise organic farming, including it in the priorities of the management plans of the Park and the Nature 2000 areas.
- Support the efforts of organic farmers (which have a cost) with targeted interventions such as:
 - contributing to organic certification costs (50-70 percent, preferably not 100 percent);
 - contributing to the purchase of local breeds threatened with extinction;
 - contributing to the purchase of sheepdogs to defend cattle from predators;
 - contributions for fences to protect cattle from predators, and pens for wild boar;
 - contributions for sustainable agricultural activities: maintenance of paths, on-farm conservation of biodiversity, improvement of permanent meadows and pastures, etc.;
 - organise group purchase of technical input such as organic fertilizers, seeds and natural pesticides, which can be difficult to find in remote areas;
 - create small nurseries for the cultivation of fruit and vegetables (preferably local varieties) available to local farmers.
- Training and information activities such as short courses (on topics requested by farmers), seminars and field visits. The latter constitute a particularly effective strategy for training and promotion, through which different parks can build networks and exchange experiences with excellent results.
- Capacity building: support through funds or facilities (such as providing a meeting place) for farmers who are trying to organise themselves in order to improve the marketing of local products or farm services.
- Support the integrity of the Park brand by drawing up standards for organic production (with experts in the field), tailored to local needs, which go beyond agro-food production, such as sustainable tourism, textiles, cosmetics;
- Support the process of certification of organic farming with technical and administrative assistance.
- Facilitate the process of certification experimenting with new approaches such as “group

certification” and “*participatory guarantee systems*”. In the case of small farms, encourage simplified certification for small producers through special agreements with government agencies, to reduce certification costs and bureaucracy.

- Group certification is universally accepted in the south of the world as a means to enable small producers to participate in international markets. In Europe and North America, however, this system is not recognized for local production. The collective system of certification works for groups of small farmers (the definition of ‘small’ varies according to location) who are organized in associations, consortia or cooperatives by establishing an Internal Control System (ICS), with technicians who provide assistance and verify adherence to the rules of organic farming among the members of the group. The ICS and the farms are then checked and certified by a third party agency, recognized by the Ministry. Each year a fixed number of farms are drawn to be inspected by the third party agency. A group certification project was piloted in the Gargano park: it should be replicated, with the support of the Ministry of Agriculture, in other national parks where it could encourage small farmers who already apply organic farming rules but are not certified. The many examples include: producers of chestnuts and nuts in general, small producers of olives, citrus fruits and fruit, etc. Without a simplified process of certification such smallholders continue to be left outside the organic system.
- Establish a network of “Organic excellences” pilot farms to showcase sustainable rural development, encouraging technical exchange and field visits from other national parks.

In order to put these proposals into practice, they must be coordinated in one of two ways: Either by the Park agency, where the necessary expertise exists, or through the creation of an “**Organic Information Point**”, run by competent and experienced professionals who work together with the Park agency in the management and development of the organic supply chain. The example of the Cinque Terre has shown concrete results, as has the work of the Dolomiti Bellunesi and Gargano national parks.

Complete the Organic Production Chain and the Promotion of Direct Sales

It is fundamental to limit the production chain to within the borders of the park in order to give local character to the products on sale and make the use of a Park brand meaningful.

One of the most common requests made by the farmers who took part in the survey was to have the possibility to promote and sell their products at the right price directly to the consumer.



Valle di Porto Vecchio Farm – Arcipelago Toscano Park

Actions:

- Support by own or external funds the creation of facilities for processing local production, such as mills or dairies, in order to close the production chain within the park area (or just outside).
- Support direct relations between farmers and consumers such as “GAS” (buying groups); often farmers are not able to manage the relationship with the consumers by themselves: this process could become much easier and more effective using the Park interface.
- Support the creation of farmers’ markets within the Park, where there is a demand.
- E-Marketing could be a possibility but does not yet ensure good results. Nobody mentioned it

in the interviews.

- Promote the use of park products in local schools and sell through park structures such as the “Visitors’ Centre”, information offices, and other park structures compatible with food sales.
- Participate in relevant trade fairs: SANA Bologna, where appropriate, BIOFACH, Nuremberg, the world showcase for organic products (possible in partnership between parks); and events at a local level.

Promote Multi-functionality of Agriculture and Agro-biodiversity

The recent Italian framework law on agriculture (228/2001) has practically sanctioned the right of all farms to perform a variety of functions: not only to produce goods via cultivation and livestock, but also to provide services of different types to create diverse sources of income. This is undoubtedly a useful opportunity for the parks as well as for farmers.

Agritourism is the most widespread example of this phenomenon, certainly the most successful, even in the Italian parks.

There are many other functions that the farm could perform in keeping with the aims of designated protected areas: from the conservation of the landscape and biodiversity to “on farm” training and education (school farms).

Actions:

- Organize courses, seminars, field-trips on various aspects of the multi-functional farm in the Park area. Among these activities: bio-agritourism, eco-tourism facilities, school farm services, and local craftsmanship.
- The same law 228/2001 offers a good opportunity to implement agreements with farmers entrusting them with the maintenance and protection of agricultural and forestry landscapes. These are small contracts worth a maximum amount of €25,000 per single farmer, which can be very useful in involving farmers in, for example, the maintenance of country roads and trails.
- Provide information & promotional materials to help farms become more visible to the general public.
- Support for school farms. The national park is an ideal location for the promotion of “school farms” which can introduce students to organic farming and the value of biodiversity in a practical way and, importantly, raise awareness of the role of conservation among young people locally.
- Support for demonstration or pilot farms: unlike school farms, these cater for a specialized public of university students, farmers, and in certain cases, also researchers. Pilot farms are centres of excellence providing farm research and dissemination facilities, in collaboration with research bodies, and the park itself. Many of the examples of “Organic excellence” identified in this survey could play this role in their parks.
- Support for social agriculture. This work has highlighted the very few cases in Italian parks which promote farming for social objectives - a field which deserves to be supported and extended since it provides the opportunity to combine respect for the environment with social



Aureli Maccario Agriturismo – Monti Sibillini Park

inclusion. Social agriculture fits well with organic farming, as can be seen in the many projects that have been set up recently in many parts of Italy. Activities such as horticultural and pet therapy can also be included in this category.

- Conservation and fostering of agro-biodiversity: in this field, there already exist many important examples among the various parks; it would be useful to create a national network to facilitate the sharing of these experiences. Organic farming in itself represents the best method of agricultural production to ensure the maintenance of biodiversity. The most important strategies are listed below:
 - replicate successful experiments like “Let’s cultivate biodiversity”(Majella National Park), “Biodiversity farmer guardians” (Gran Sasso National Park), “the Quality Project” ((Dolomiti Bellunesi);
 - provide premiums for the maintenance of permanent pasture and meadowland and other grassland conservation systems;
 - contributions for non-usable crops to feed wildlife;
 - creation or maintenance of green spaces on farms to improve the look of the landscape and the ecology of the wider area; for example for the nesting of birds;
 - creation of nurseries in situ managed by the park, or by individual farms, for the conservation of native genetic resources, and for the dissemination of their cultivation among local farmers by providing seeds, rootstock and cuttings for grafting.



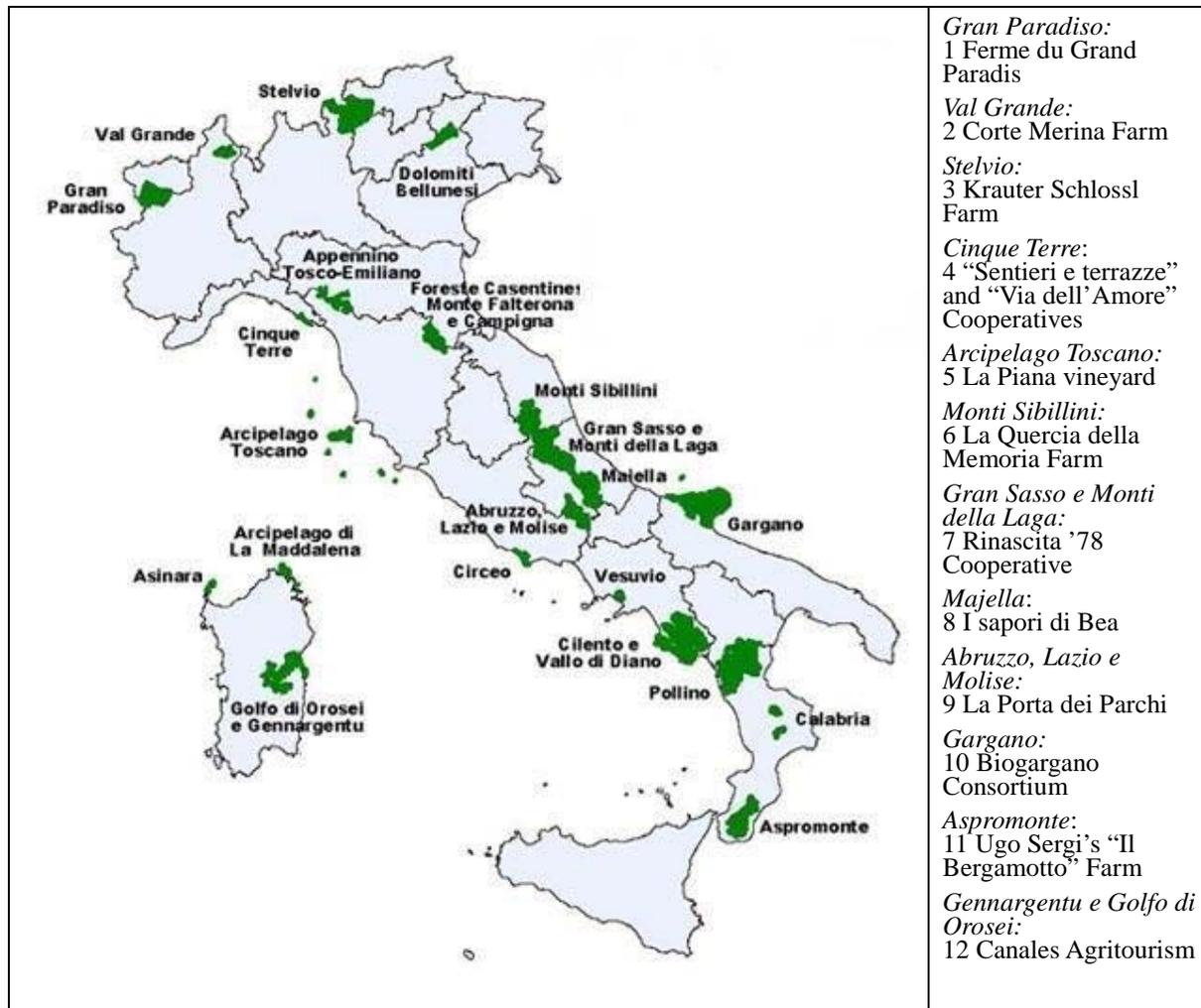
Corn cobs from “La Casa Rossa” Farm – Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga Park



Turchessa ecotype potatoes from “La Prata” Farm - Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga Park

4. EXAMPLES OF ORGANIC EXCELLENCES “BEST PRACTICES” IN ITALIAN NATIONAL PARKS

These following examples of Organic Excellences have been taken from the “Catalogue of Organic excellences in Italian National Parks”⁷ (www.bioeccellenze.org). The farms in the catalogue are the ones that implement the best practices from an environmental, social and economical point of view.



⁷ The entire Catalogue is available in the web site www.bioeccellenze.org.

1. Ferme du Grand Paradis - Grand Paradiso National Park (Valle d'Aosta Region)

This 15-hectare farm in Cogne, Aosta, is part of the Grand Paradiso national park: a mainly alpine environment. It has been organic since 2003 and raises animals belonging to endangered breeds, which graze freely on permanent pastures. The natural habitat that surrounds them is vast, and there are chamois, ibex and foxes that “graze” almost alongside the domestic animals.

The farm owns forty goats, eight cows and ten sheep. The goats belong to the ‘Camosciata delle Alpi’, Saanen and Valdostana breeds. The first two are cosmopolitan breeds, originally from the Alps, but by now found more or less worldwide, whereas the Valdostana breed is present only in the Aosta valley and a few valleys in neighbouring Piemonte. The Valdostana breed is certainly not as productive as the Saanen and Camosciata, but it is more interesting as its superior adaptation to local conditions enable it to use pastures that are not accessible to other animals.

The cows belong to all of the three original breeds of the region: the Valdostana ‘Pezzata Rossa’ is a typical mountain cow which provides excellent milk on a diet of alpine pastures and forage,. The Valdostana ‘Pezzata Nera’ and ‘Castana’ are less productive but stronger breeds meant for fighting. Every year some of these animals take part in the “Batailles de Reines”, held at the end of September in the fields around St. Orso, a contest in which the cows compete with each other without cruelty to achieve group dominance.



Free range poultry - Ferme du Grand Paradis farm

There is also a small group of ‘Rosset’ sheep, an ancient breed from Valle d'Aosta. From being on the verge of extinction this breed has now been rediscovered and is regaining its place on local farms thanks to its rustic nature and its ability to use summer pastures that are otherwise inaccessible to all but wild animals.

In the summer season they are taken up to alpine pastures, where they wander up to an altitude of 2 500 or 3 000 metres: here they are able to raise their lambs on a diet of fresh mountain grass and milk from their mothers, ready for slaughter when they leave the mountains in autumn. About a hundred free range chickens are also reared.

The Ferme du Grand Paradis is also able to produce its own butter and both fresh and hard goat's and cow's milk cheese on the premises, thanks to its mini dairy processing and seasoning facilities. It sells its produce through its own farm shop and to a buying group composed of 20 families. It also supplies local restaurants and organic food shops. The farm's dairy products have a special brand, which complies with their own self-imposed rules. The farm participates in festivals and fairs where it sells its dairy produce. It employs a total of two people year-round.

On account of its commitment to organic farming, the farm pays close attention to safeguarding its own land and the environment. It uses solar panels and has an area of constructed wetlands for water purification; it also saves energy through the use of energy-saving light bulbs and insulation. The farm is planning to adapt its buildings for tourist accommodation.

2. Corte Merina Farm – Val Grande Park (Piemonte Region)



Corte Marina Farm

The Corte Merina Farm, in Cossogno (Verbano Cusio Ossola), is the only farm completely within the borders of the Val Grande Park, now mainly wilderness following the area's progressive abandonment by man. The farm occupies more than 50 hectares, 1.5 percent of which is its own property, while the rest is rented or on loan. It uses the municipality's rented pastures.

Since the surroundings are so wild, it is an interesting experiment in both traditional and extreme livestock farming, raising milk goats and pigs.

The farm is managed by the owner and his wife who, in their own words: “Believe in clean and healthy farming, tailored to the needs of man and the land... We may even have been guided by recklessness”. The farm has been managed with these criteria since 1995 and was recognized as an organic farm in 2000.

There are about 50 goats of the ‘Nera di Verzasca’ and ‘Camosciata delle Alpi’ breeds. The former have a tough and well built frame, whereas the others are thinner and more gracious. They are well adapted to the mountain environment and spend most of the year in the pastures.

They eat grass, leaves and local fruits. Pigs are also kept at the farm and are fed with milk whey, a by-product of the dairy production.



“Nera du Verzasca” goats – Corte Merina Farm

Every part of the production chain is carried out on the premises: from grazing, milking, cheese making and maturing (aging) to retail. Goat's milk is worked raw by hand in the farm's small dairy to produce fresh goat's cheese. The farm's products: cheeses, cured pork products (sausages) and ‘capretti’, are almost all sold at the farm's shop; the rest is sold at local markets and fairs and a small amount supplies three buying groups (GAS) in Verbania and Milan.

The farm offers a few tourist services; a camping and picnic area and a restaurant. Salvage operations, using local building materials, have been started on two existing buildings, so as to expand the farm's agritourism facilities and create a teaching farm with information about cheese making and traditional mountain livestock farming. The newly restored buildings will be fitted with solar panels for the production of hot water and the barn will have photovoltaic panels for the production of energy.

3. *Krauter Schlossl Farm – Stelvio Park (Trentino-Alto Adige Region)*

This farm is in Coldrano, Bolzano, at the mouth of the Martello valley, just outside the Stelvio park. It cultivates 5 500 square metres of aromatic and medicinal herbs, used for the production of herb teas, salts and cosmetic products. It also manages six hectares of forest which are used for harvesting wild herbs. It has been an organic farm since 1990 and pays great attention to the care and appreciation of the environment. A small amount of land is dedicated to the growth of wild plants, so as to boost natural biodiversity. The farm is a sanctuary for all those insects that cannot find their natural habitat in the surrounding apple orchards.

More than twenty different types of plant are grown: chamomile, mint, basil, lavender, calendula, elder, tarragon and many more. Cultivation is extremely labour-intensive as everything is done by hand, from the initial growth of the plants to transplanting and harvesting.

As well as cultivation and the picking of wild herbs in the park, there are facilities for drying and packaging. For the drying process the plants are arranged on sieves and placed in a dedicated structure where they gradually lose their humidity in a very delicate way.



Aromatic herbs growing – Krauter Schlossl Farm

Syrup is produced using fresh plants and flowers while dried ones are used for herb teas, salts and cosmetic products. There are about 150 different products in all. Even though the farm is quite small, it requires the work of all six family members, spanning three generations, each of whom have different tasks. Products are sold in the farm's shop, at fairs or in herbalists' shops. Cosmetic herbs are dried and sent to a special centre in Padua.



Herbal products - Krauter Schlossl Farm

Teaching workshops on the organic farming and processing of medicinal herbs have been created. About 300-400 people attend every year. The owners are extremely enterprising, and are well known in and outside Val Venosta. They have appeared on the TV News (TG2), the German television program ZTF and on a private Swiss TV channel. They are also soon to feature in the Austrian television program ORF.

Various brands are used to promote the farm's products: European organic farming, German organic farming ABCERT, the tourist service www.ilgallorosso.it , South Tyrol organic products (www.biosudtirol.com) and their own brand, for which they have a contract with climber Reinhold Messner whose picture appears on a line of perfume and cosmetic products. The farm is part of the Unione Coltivatori Alternativi (UCA: Union of Alternative Farmers). It is a regional group, made up of a small handful of farmers who do not use any chemical substances at all for farming, not even sulphur or copper which are generally allowed for organic farming.

4. “Sentieri e Terrazze” and “Via dell'Amore” Cooperatives – Cinque Terre Park (Liguria Region)



Reclamation of unused land

These cooperatives were formed as a result of a park management project for the reclamation of unused land. The main aims of the project were firstly to stem the hydro-geological impoverishment of terraced farmland in the area and secondly to rekindle local agricultural production to run alongside the area's well established wine production.

Through the application of a national law⁸ on disused land, the Park rented some lots from their owners on a 20 year lease, guaranteeing that the land would be maintained and farmed organically. The project started in 2000 in the Riomaggiore municipality, with the reclamation of four hectares of land on which a vineyard was then established. Old olive groves were then reclaimed, along with land used for cultivating vegetables, herbs, citrus and other fruit. To date about a dozen out of the 35 hectares destined for organic farming have been reclaimed.

The project is managed through two local cooperatives: the “Sentieri e Terrazze” cooperative farms the land whereas the “Via dell'Amore” cooperative takes care of processing, packaging and retail. The “Sentieri e Terrazze” cooperative reclaims disused land and takes care of farming it. Produce is then sold to the “Via dell'Amore” coop which processes it in its own workshop, packages and sells it. A total of 19 people (mostly locals) are employed by the two coops.

Organic produce includes: basil for pesto, peppers, rocket, celery for sauces, herbs for cosmetic products, for which some essences are also gathered; lemons for marmalade and limoncino liqueur. The six hectare vineyard is conventionally farmed, as the grapevine flavescente dorée disease would put organic production at risk. However, a 4 000 square meters vineyard is experimentally farmed organically with a view to farming the whole vineyard this way eventually.

Chestnut, acacia and mixed flower honey is also produced in two different locations inside the Park.



Basil growing in terraces – 5 Terre Park

Alongside the production of its wide range of organic products the “Sentieri e Terrazze” coop takes care of trail maintenance, the construction and upkeep of monorails, the rebuilding and maintenance of dry stone walls and the creation of fences to keep out wild boar. It also works as an “open farm” so as to showcase its efforts in reclaiming disused land and its organic farming methods to a variety of visitors, from universities to the media.

Promotion is guaranteed by the coop's frequent participation in various fairs, including: SANA (Italian Organic Fair), Salone del Gusto and Fancy Food in NY. The media (both newspapers and TV) is also very interested in the Cinque Terre area and guarantees good publicity for its agricultural products. Distribution is mainly through direct retail at the Park's Visitors' Centres, the “Cooperativa Cinque Terre” (which produces Cinque Terre DOC wine) shop, specialized organic shops in Italy and specialized “gourmet” shops in foreign countries. Further information can be found at www.parconazionale5terre.it.

⁸ National law 440/78, which contains guidelines on the farming of disused, abandoned or insufficiently cultivated land.

5. La Piana vineyard – Tuscan Archipelago Park (Tuscany)

This vineyard on the island of Capraia began using organic farming methods from its inception in 1999, without the need for a transition period since its land, about 13 hectares, was entirely within the Park's territory and had not been farmed for at least 20 years.



La Piana vineyard

Production focuses on wine. The Aleatico⁹ grape is cultivated, from which Aleatico Toscano IGT¹⁰ wine is produced. Once the grapes are ripe, they are left on the vine for about twenty days. After picking there is a six-day controlled fermentation period.

Yearly production reaches about 1 900 bottles with 13 percent ABV. A hectare dedicated to Vermentino grapes has also been planted recently.

The vineyard also includes a mixed fruit orchard with a wide variety of species and cultivars, including some local wild species from which jellies and jams are made. There are also local olive trees, myrtles, prickly pears, oleanders and aromatic herbs.

A great deal has been done to combat erosion and hydro-geological instability through the construction of dry stone walls and drainage channels, built using local stone with no mortar or cement. A similar line has been followed in the maintenance of the vineyard's roads and paths, restored using bioengineering methods.

Green areas within the farm's boundaries have also been planned in order to improve the landscape and natural environment. The composting of plant waste, which is implemented by the vineyard, also testifies to its careful attention to environmental awareness.



Dry stone walls and drainage channel – La Piana Farm

Retail is taken care of entirely through a short supply chain, through direct sales in the vineyard, through food markets and fairs and through local distribution to shops, restaurants and agritourism businesses. The farm organizes walking tours around the island and guided tastings of its produce. Workshops on organic farming, vitiviniculture and the cultivation of local species have also been organized. The vineyard is working towards opening a small agri-campsite.

Marketing and advertising is carried out through their website at www.lapianacapraia.it as well as directly on site.

⁹ This type of grape has long been in danger of extinction, because of extreme difficulties involved in its cultivation and its very low return: an average crop provides no more than 6000 kilos per hectare.

¹⁰ IGT (Indicazione Geografica Tipica) denotes a wine produced in a specific region of Italy.

6. *La Quercia della Memoria Farm – Monti Sibillini Park (Umbria Region)*

Founded in 2003 in the Ginesio, Macerata, La Quercia della Memoria is an organic farm covering more than 8 hectares, which operates mainly as an agri-tourism business.

Organic farming was chosen mainly because of the owner's personal and ethical convictions, so as to show the visitor: “A new way to live in the past, linking old and modern discourse, local history and that of faraway cultures; so that the guests’ immersion in the rural world can be a learning experience about men, the environment and what is inside it”.



La Quercia della Memoria agri-tourism

One of the farm's characteristics is its recovery of ancient plant ecotypes and rearing of ancient breeds of farm animal. Cereals, legumes, fodder and medicinal plants are cultivated, with an eye to reinstating local plant types such as “senatore cappelli” durum wheat, “dicocco” spelt, naked barley, Kamut wheat, “otto file” maize, and the Altamura black chickpea so as to promote “eco-regional conservation”. The livestock includes animals that belong to endangered breeds such as three Martina franca and one Monte Amiata donkey and about fifty heads of poultry, like the Ancona chicken, also used in the farm’s educational programmes.

Medicinal plants are dried and sold as herb teas, tinctures and essential and aromatic oils. Leaves, flowers, roots and seeds are hand-picked, naturally dried indoors or in the sun-drier, and packaged on the premises.



Photovoltaic panel

The farm takes care to look after the landscape and natural biodiversity. Private roads within the farm have been restored along with dry stone walls and nesting structures for birds, bats and insects.

The visitors’ accommodation was built in accordance with green housing rules, featuring energy saving systems and the recovery of rain water; phyto-treatment facilities and photovoltaic panels. Everything around the building is built with environmentally compatible materials; for example all the signposting is in wood and flower beds are made of wood and stone.

School Farm activities are also organized. There is a very wide range of activities on offer: excursions through the park on donkeys; workshops on medicinal plants, forgotten fruits and the organic vegetable garden; sensory journeys through medicinal plants. The farm also owns a toy library and a specialized library with reference books on organic farming and plant identification.

It also houses a rural museum. Some old millstones have been restored and placed in a room dedicated to grain cycles, where they are used to make flour, subsequently turned into bread and pasta. In the loom room an old loom from the Sibillini mountains from the early 1900s has been recovered and is displayed along with other tools for working wool, flax and hemp.

In total the farm employs three people full-time, plus two seasonal workers. Further information can be found at www.querciadellamemoria.it

7. *Rinascita '78 Cooperative – Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga Park (Lazio Region)*

The Rinascita '78 cooperative, in Accumoli, Rieti, has been an organic farm since it was created in 1979. The ten-member cooperative, because of its history and attachment to the land, is an example of organic excellence in the field of animal husbandry. Its members have participated in specialized training courses and, thanks to its rigour, this cooperative played a major part in the foundation of the Park.

Three hundred hectares within the park, part owned and part rented, are used by the cooperative for raising sheep, pigs and cattle. All the animals are semi-wild and are taken to mountain pastures for the summer. All the breeds raised are native Italian, well acclimatized to local conditions and therefore well suited to living in the wild: 900 Sardinian sheep, 120 Romagnola cattle and 80 mixed race Romagnola pigs.



Turchessa ecotype potatoes

The cooperative has reclaimed land that had long been unused, restored an old building now used as a farm shop, and built some water-troughs for when the animals are in the mountains.

A small amount of land, about half a hectare, is used for growing local varieties of beans (Regina and Mughetto ecotypes) and potatoes (Turchesa ecotype), thus helping to safeguard biodiversity. Manure is composted and used as fertilizer, as is organic waste from the cooperative's kitchen.

There is an on-site dairy which produces ricotta and hard cheeses, and a workshop for meat processing and the preparation of meat products (salami, pork loin, Accumoli mortadella, ham).

Produce is sold through a short supply chain (direct sales, buying clubs and the cooperative's agritourist visitors), whilst lambs and pigs are sent to a large organic firm in Rome for finishing.



On-site dairy production



Rinascita '78 Sheep Festival

The farm also provides picnic and rest areas in the mountains as well as an agritourism business near the town of Grisciano, which sleeps ten and offers bed & breakfast and meals on request. The cooperative also organizes ecotourism and food and wine tourism activities within the park's territory. It is very active as a school farm (It is part of the AIAB network), with frequent visits from the students at Rieti's Agricultural College. The cooperative also organizes a sheep festival and takes part in other local fairs.

In total four people are employed full time along with one part-time employee.

8. *I Sapori di Bea – Majella Park (Abruzzo Region)*

“I Sapori di Bea” is a six-hectare farm in Abbateggio, Pescara. Organic since 2001, it produces cereals, vegetables and olives. The owners are a young local couple. Their story is typical of those pioneer farms that introduced organic farming to the Majella National Park.

The story began with the rediscovery of spelt, which was planted in semi-abandoned land, achieving the transformation from traditional extensive farming to organic.

The farm chose to grow local native varieties of cereal and traditional legumes from the area. The use of organic fertilizers (mainly manure from livestock farms) and the rotation of crops in harmony with the natural fertility of the soil contributed to the decision to grow native plant varieties which have great gastronomic and cultural value.

The decision to cultivate local plant varieties was also influenced by the possibility of their generating a higher income. A workshop for processing spelt has been built along with a farm shop.



Workshop for processing spelt

The maintenance of natural biodiversity (hedges, shrubs, natural ditches, dry stone walls built with typical Majella stone, rebuilding of natural paths) is very important to the farm. The land in this area is very difficult to work and very often has a lower yield compared to the flatter land in nearby valleys.



Tholos – I Sapori di Bea Farm

The farm is dedicated to preserving the ancient rural huts that can be found in the Majella area, known as Tholos. Guided tours to these huts are organized for school trips, Park visitors and visitors to the farm. In total the farm employs one person full time. Produce is mainly sold either directly (through a short supply chain) or to local restaurants and shops.

The farm also participates in the “Majella card” scheme. The “Majella card” is given by the park authorities to local farms, shops and restaurants that not only provide their visitors with products from within the park, but also offer information and services related to it.

This is a positive example of cooperation between local farms and the park authorities. The Park’s acknowledgement of outstanding examples of virtuous farming within its borders led to the creation of the “Let’s cultivate Biodiversity” project, thanks to which local farms and inhabitants are able to maintain and safeguard a native gene pool of great cultural and agricultural value.

The example set by this farm has inspired other farmers to grow spelt and has also prompted the local authorities to set up two very well known and popular events, one gastronomic and the other cultural: The Spelt Festival and the Majella National Park literary prize.

9. “La Porta dei Parchi” Organic Agritourism – Abruzzo National Park and Majella National Park (Abruzzo Region)



Abruzzo National Park

La Porta dei Parchi is an agritourism enterprise run by a cooperative. It was founded in 1977 to meet the challenge of re-evaluating a rapidly depopulating mountain environment through an innovative approach to traditional agriculture.

Certified as organic in 1995, the farm owns 1 100 hectares of land, distributed between the Abruzzo National Park and the Majella National Park.

About 1 300 mainly Sovravissana sheep are raised extensively along with about a hundred goats and a dozen donkeys. Local “San Giovanni”, “Limoncella” and “Pianucci” apples are also grown. The farm chose to invest in Sovravissana sheep, a very strong and resilient endangered native breed, well adapted to poor mountain pastures. The Sovravissana is one of the few breeds of sheep that perform well in all three categories, providing very good quality milk and wool as well as meat. The sheep only eat meadow grass.

This means that transhumance is necessary in the summer months. Transhumance, vertical in this case, means moving the flock in June from the farm (at 600 metres above sea-level) to summer pastures at 1 500 metres, so as to offer the sheep fresh and renewed pasture grounds. The flock is moved on foot along the thirty kilometre route and stays in the mountains until October, when it is moved back down to the farm.

The farm has its own dairy where the sheep's milk is processed and various types of soft and hard cheese are produced, as well as a workshop for processing meat.



Sheep transhumance

The agritourism business offers thirty beds, a restaurant, a picnic area and a fishing pond. It organizes walking, car, bike and horse trips throughout the two parks. It also functions as a school farm and offers workshops and courses on organic products, cheese making, medicinal herbs, natural diets, typical products, natural wool dyeing and loom weaving.

Since 2000 the farm has been the main promoter of the “Sponsor a sheep and protect Nature” venture, whose goal is to combat the abandonment and depopulation of mountain areas. It gives naturalists, nature lovers and gourmets the chance to sponsor a sheep and receive in exchange not only produce (lamb meat, milk, cheese and wool), but also a guarantee that the portion of land the sheep lives on will be safeguarded. This venture has been so successful that more and more people are sponsoring sheep from other European countries and even further afield.

The farm also works on various projects which link its activities to the development and conservation of the area around it. La Porta dei Parchi is also part of the Parco Produce cooperative, which was set up in 1996 by farms within the Abruzzo part of the Majella and Abruzzo National Parks to sell its participants' organic produce. It has also taken the opportunity to revitalize the small village of Anversa degli Abruzzi, by requalifying abandoned houses as tourist accommodation. The cooperative is now able to offer about 150 beds in the villages of Anversa, Casale and Cucullo, all within a few hundred metres of its main buildings. Further information can be found at www.laportadeiparchi.it

10. Biogargano Consortium – Gargano National Park (Puglia)

The Biogargano Consortium was set up in 2001 by the Gargano National Park with organic farmers, agritourism and traditional produce providers operating within its borders. Its aim is to promote organically farmed and traditional Gargano products from the area. The Consortium is made up of 23 organic farms - more than 2000 hectares of land in total - , three processing businesses and the park authorities themselves.



From Biogargano Consortium web site

The consortium has been able to safeguard the development of traditional Gargano products through the institution of an organic food supply chain. These include: Gargano citrus fruit (the “arancia bionda” and “limoncella IGP” oranges), Gargano caciocavallo podolico cheese and the Gargano podolico cow, the garganica goat, Carpino broad beans, Dauno-Gargano PDO extra virgin olive oil and buffalo mozzarella. The farms also produce jams, vegetable preserves, pate and traditional Gargano liqueurs and sweets. Thanks to the consortium, these farms have been able to diversify, providing additional services such as agritourism, organized hiking trips in the park, nutritional education projects and organic restaurants.

The consortium also promotes products and services through a number of ad hoc solutions such as “Bioitinerari”, “Nature Farms” and a “ Sales points network”. “Bioitinerari” are tours through the traditional organic farms in the Gargano National Park. A network links the consortium's farms in which it is possible to see the preparation of traditional agri-food products and then taste and buy them. Every stop along the way offers pamphlets with detailed descriptions of the farm's characteristics, its main products, the most important features of the area around the farm, and interesting historical and cultural sites near the route.

“Nature Farms” are a network of farms that offer educational services as well as their traditional produce, so as to strengthen the bond between the consumer and the farmers that promote agricultural diversity and rural tourism in the Park.

Every farm in the consortium can, if it is equipped for it, take part in the “Sales points network” and display information about itself in a special area provided by the consortium.

The consortium also takes care of promotion through its website, articles in specialized magazines, product catalogues, workshops, seminars, participation in local trade shows and numerous fairs and events in Italy and worldwide. Education is certainly one of Biogargano's main fields of interest and is focused on: the organization and management of an organic farm, environmentally sound product quality, marketing and retail. Further information can be found at www.biogargano.it

The Biogargano Consortium took part in an IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) pilot project whose aim was to implement an internal control system so as to allow even small farms to obtain organic certification. Unfortunately, even though the project is quite successful, it has not yet been accepted by European Union legislation on member states' production.

11. Ugo Sergi's "Il Bergamotto" Farm – Aspromonte Park (Calabria)

Dominated by the ruins of the Norman Amendolea castle, in Reggio Calabria, "Il Bergamotto" owes its name to the citrus fruit grown here alongside olives trees. The management of this 20 hectare farm is very much influenced by its location, in an area which was once the ethnically Greek part of Calabria, and its closely linked to local traditions and culture. Its revenue is based on sales of Bergamot essential oils and the farm's agritourism activity, which also organizes hiking trips in the park.

Ugo Sergi's farm, organic since its inception in 1996, is particularly dedicated to safeguarding biodiversity and protecting nature. It has not only made organic farming a way of life, it also tries to grow traditional varieties of apple and pear, such as the "bambinuzzu" and "brutta e bedda" varieties. The farm is also trying to increase the number of endangered "Martina Franca" donkeys it raises and has for a long time used renewable energy sources to power its buildings. It also recycles and composts waste.



"Il Bergamotto" Farm building

The farm buildings have been restored with a careful eye to the surroundings and local construction materials. Traditional building methods using stone, mortar, reeds, wood and old tiles were preferred. The same criteria were followed for fixing up the interiors, where, for example, wool and broom covers are used. To make broom fibre, its stalks are left to soak in a river and are then beaten and spun: the result is a very soft material similar to rough cotton. Many items of furniture are old traditional items, such as the wicker baskets for gathering bergamot, used as bedside tables.

The farm has a system for reusing waste waters, which are piped to an area in the garden where they are filtered naturally by a reed grove and then used for irrigation purposes. Hot water is provided, from June to September, by an outdoor tank which is painted black and warms up in the sun, reaching temperatures close to boiling point.

Together with other tour operators who form part of the "Naturaliter" association, the farm organizes hiking trips within the park and throughout the Greek area of Calabria, offering food and accommodation in typical Calabrian buildings. It also offers tourists the chance to learn about the processing of bergamot and bread-making through educational and illustrative workshops. The farm takes part in various 'social agriculture' projects. In collaboration with two rehabilitation centres in Reggio Calabria, it runs donkey therapy projects for disabled people. Then donkeys are also used on the hiking trips.

Bergamot essence is sold to specialist cosmetics companies, whereas the farm's other products such as oil, flour and vegetables, are used in the agritourism business and sold in the farm shop. In total three people are employed full time by the farm along with four people on a seasonal contract.

The owner, a member of the Bio-assoberg cooperative, is particularly interested in training and takes part in various national and international fairs to promote bergamot oil. He has appeared on television programmes such as Linea Verde, Geo & Geo and various satellite television programmes, and has also featured in news reports run by cosmetics companies such as the Body Shop.



Bergamot fruits

12. Canales Agritourism – Gennargentu and Orosei Gulf Park (Sardinia)

The farm spreads over 30 hectares of land on the banks of the Cedrino river, near Dorgali. Over the past twenty years it has been transformed from an extensive livestock farm raising sheep and goats into a versatile organic enterprise that has added agritourism and tour-guiding services to its original activities. In this way the farm has managed to use the natural beauty of an unspoilt area to generate revenue.



Gennargentu Park

Certified as an organic farm in 1995, most of its land is used for grazing about one hundred goats and sheep from various local breeds along with about a dozen pigs. The farm rotates pastures, so the fields can lie fallow for a while. It also owns a small olive grove.

The farm has its own dairy for processing milk and making cheese, along with facilities for processing olives. All of its produce is used in its agritourism business, which has been operating since 2001.

The agritourism's buildings have all been built using local stone and with an eye to minimizing environmental impact. Careful attention has been paid to using renewable energy, and solar panels have been installed to provide the buildings with hot water and central heating in the winter.

The farm has also made a commitment to recovering rural landscapes – it has rebuilt ancient and traditional buildings called “pinnetu” and reclaimed its olive grove. It also combats erosion and hydro-geological instability by rebuilding and maintaining dry stone walls and farm roads and working on the regulation of water flow.



Canoe tours offered by Canales Agritourism

The owner has the only canoe-hire license in the Cedrino area, acquired twenty years ago when, as a simple farmer, he also started offering hiking and canoe tours. In spite of the demand for it, he prefers not to rent motorboats as they would damage the environment.

He organizes horse-riding (in collaboration with a local riding stable), hiking and biking tours along a route created by the “Medoc Project”. It is the longest cycle path in Europe.

The farm is also part of the “Food and Wine Routes in Sardinia” circuit and has bought publicity space at Olbia airport along with other farms. Its agritourism business is very prosperous and is well known even abroad. The owner is sure that the creation of the Park has contributed quite a lot to his business's success, as many of the foreign tourists that stay at the farm do so in order to explore the “Park”.

In total the farm employs four people full time plus three on a seasonal basis. Further information can be found at www.canales.it

5. CONCLUSIONS

The methodology used in the Italian study, as well as the guidelines for the development of organic farming in protected areas produced as a result of it, could well be useful in other countries. As the FAO publication *The Scope of Organic Agriculture, Sustainable Forest Management and Ecoforestry in Protected area Management* (Nadia El-Hage Scialabba and Douglas Williamson, 2004) points out, although the conformation and management of protected areas may be different in different parts of the world, many of the problem areas they face are quite similar.

Just as in Italy, in many parts of the world the main inhabitants of protected areas and the corridors of connection between them are farmers, herders, indigenous peoples; in any case, people who use the land for their survival. Protected areas occupy today some 10 percent of the Earth's surface, in a landscape dominated by the agricultural sector. Even within certain protected area categories, much land is used for agriculture (i.e. 30 percent of categories V and VI). More importantly, connecting areas between protected areas run through croplands, pastures and forests - which globally occupy over 60 percent of the earth's surface. Clearly, relationships with the inhabitants of these areas are fundamental to their management.

The examples of organic excellence given here demonstrate that organic farming can be a valid way to reconcile the need to protect nature with the production of food and services, and thus income, for farmers. Most of these enterprises were made possible thanks to the tenacity and dedication of organic farmers and breeders, with almost no relationship with the Park. In only two of the cases listed, agro-environmental reclamation (Case Study 4: Parco Cinque Terre) and product promotion (Case Study 11: Parco del Gargano), were actively promoted by the Park.

Specific training, support for conversion to organic methods and subsequent marketing, promotion of production should all be ongoing actions on the part of the authorities. Ideally, they should be committed to creating virtuous circuits at a local level, involving food processing businesses, shopkeepers, restaurant owners, consumer buying groups, organising markets and visits to organic farms.

Multi-functionality is also extremely important as it makes it possible to exploit the opportunities offered by nature in protected areas to the full. In Italy, as can be seen from the various case studies, organic farmers in protected or nearby areas receive some of their income from ecotourism, from educational activities, and also from sports and guided tourism within the protected areas. Sadly, these activities are the fruit of the enterprising spirit of the organic farmers themselves and are rarely supported by the park authorities. The Gargano Park example should serve as a model.

Another interesting aspect could be the protection of breeds on the verge of extinction or ancient cultivars, as well as natural green areas within the farm's territory. Many farmers, as can be seen from the case studies, put these practices into action and some parks have set up dedicated projects to sustain biodiversity as "Let's cultivate biodiversity" (Majella National Park) mentioned in Case Study 8, "Biodiversity farmer guardians" (Gran Sasso National Park) and "the Quality Project" (Dolomiti Bellunesi).

The recommendations contained in the guidelines are fundamental for agencies which plan to promote organic farming and agro-biodiversity in protected areas. As has been noted, the involvement and participation of farmers is of paramount importance. This is something which has frequently been overlooked; the Park tends to emphasise Nature conservation, creating quite a few problems between park authorities and those who live in the area. As the experience of the Cinque Terre Park shows us, constant communication and the participation of the local community in the management of protected areas create the basic relationships on which plans for the reclamation of damaged areas and for organic food production chains can be developed, plans which revitalise the economic situation of the local community.