



Giacche Verdi Bronte

Associazione Nazionale Giacche Verdi Sicilia ODV
Raggruppamento Provinciale di Bronte

**Project "Farming in Sicily's Lands of Biosphere
Men, wildlife and good practice research in the Etna valleys"**

Mid-term report

01.03.2021, written by Andrea Aidala from Giacche Verdi Bronte



Sustainable double use of a cabbage field in Moio Alcantara

From October 2019, the Giacche Verdi Bronte together with MHS and in collaboration with the University of Catania and LIPU Italia and NABU, are promoting the project "Farming in Sicily's Lands of Biosphere - Men, wildlife and good practice research in the Etna valleys". The project aims to support sustainable and traditional agriculture in the Lands of Biosphere area, sharing knowledge on the agro-ecosystems peculiar to the Mediterranean area, through an integrated approach between naturalistic and agronomic studies, encouraging the exchange of experiences between naturalistic experts, agronomists and farmers, identifying agronomic "good practices" for the conservation of biodiversity in perennial Mediterranean agro-ecosystems to be implemented also thanks to the support of the funds of the 2021-2027 CAP programming, collecting the criticalities and problems of the local agricultural and environmental world to be brought to the attention of European and regional policy, dissemination of "good practices" to a public of experts and citizens.



Typical pistachio cultivation and treatment:

Left: The sustainable farm of Marco Meli, Bronte

Right: Traditional machine for removing the pistachio pulp at the farm of Giuseppe Rizzo



Contact persons of the University of Catania are Professors Guarnaccia (Department of Agriculture), Timpanaro and Scuderi (Department of Economics-Agriculture) and the young researcher Dr. Silvia Zingale; contact person of LIPU is Dr. Federica Luoni.

Participants of the initial training

October-November 2019, recruitment of multipliers and initial training: The first step of the project concerned the recruitment of multipliers who were assigned the task of going to the farms to administer, during two visits, two different forms: a questionnaire and a final form. After receiving numerous curricula, President Gino Montagno, Andrea Aidala and Lidia Marullo for the GV, Stefanie Hermsen for the MHS and Giuseppe Rizzo of the UIA Bronte selected the team of multipliers participating in the project during numerous interviews. The active multipliers are: Carmelo Gorgone, Alfonso Orlando, Salvatore Vinciguerra, Giuseppe Montagno, Vincenzo Calamunci, Anna Spitaleri and Antonio Fresta; all have signed a collaboration contract for the project. Three other initially selected persons have withdrawn from their initial commitment and have been replaced by the organizers Giuseppe Rizzo, Stefanie Hermsen and Andrea Aidala. On 11 and 12 November 2019, the initial training seminar was held at Nebrodi Park Palace in Bronte. The speakers and training managers were Dr Luoni (LIPU) and Giuseppe Rizzo (Agriculture Office of the Sicilian Region). In addition to the multipliers, Dr Zingale (UniCT) and the GV staff, the training was also attended by the international volunteers of the GV, the president of the Bronte City Council, Nino Galati, and Sebastiano Carcione, an agriculture student who wrote his thesis on *Lands of Biosphere*. The seminar was documented and also featured in the important local newspaper "La Sicilia" (article reported by the online newspaper Bronte118 at the following link <https://www.bronte118.it/bronte-e-pronto-il-progetto-su-biodiversita-nellagricoltura/>).

Beginning of December 2019, drafting of first questionnaire and identification of farms: Using the input provided by GV, MHS and LIPU following the training days and a subsequent online meeting between the parties, the team of the University of Catania drafted the questionnaire to be administered to farmers and livestock producers. The questionnaire is divided into four parts (specific questions on the farm, questions on economic contributions for farms, good practices concerning biodiversity and soil, questions on the farm staff). The sending of the final questionnaire to the multipliers was followed by an online meeting where Dr. Zingale and Prof. Guarnaccia gave the guidelines and explained the contents of the questionnaire in detail. Each multiplier was assigned a micro-area in which to identify farms in order to obtain the most truthful results possible on the characteristics of sustainable agriculture in the Biosphere Lands. It was decided to target almost exclusively sustainable farms, both with and without an organic certificate, but with a traditional business conduct and a path of respect for the environment already undertaken.

December 2019-June 2020, farm questionnaires: Initially, the roadmap called for the multipliers to identify a target of 100 farms to which the questionnaire would be administered by March 2020. Unfortunately, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic slowed down the work and from the end of February to end of May 2020 Italy suffered a severe lockdown that made farm visits impossible. The multipliers therefore concluded the first phase of questionnaire administration in beginning of June 2020, not without the difficulties of having to maintain interpersonal distance and with an initial fear on the part of some farmers of receiving people

on their farms in the weeks following the partial relaxation of anti-covid measures. In addition to the multipliers, Giuseppe Rizzo, Stefanie Hermsen and Andrea Aidala participated in the selection of farms and administration of the questionnaires. The target number of farms reached was exceeded and the total number of farmers and livestock farmers interviewed during the first phase was 106.



Agriculture land biodiversity: *Anthocharis damone*, *Scarabaeus variolosus*, *Orchis italica*

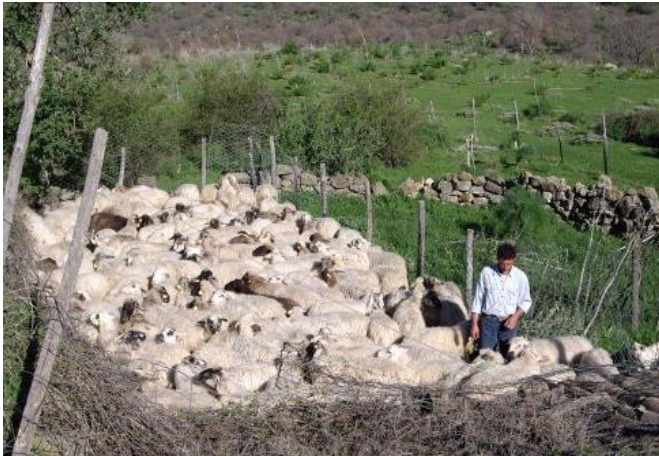
June-July-August 2020, collection of questionnaires, intermediate meeting, strategy definition with partners: Once the administration of the questionnaires was completed, the GV were in charge of collecting the documentation and sending it to the team of the University of Catania for the analysis of the questionnaires and the drafting of the report on the data collected, in order to identify the dissemination and influence strategy towards the political authorities, especially regional and national ones. Dr. Zingale started the preliminary phase of the analysis of the questionnaires, indicating some gaps or missing parts and giving the multipliers the opportunity to clarify some aspects and implement the missing information on some questionnaires. Dr. Luoni of LIPU prepared a document called "*PSR 2014-2020 of the Sicily Region and Biodiversity: An analytical approach*", in which the measures to support agriculture in Sicily in relation to biodiversity are documented. This document is useful to understand how to positively influence the Region in supporting agricultural sustainability. An online meeting between project responsables, partners and multipliers was organised on 16 July 2020, with the following agenda: 1. Introduction by Dr. Luoni (LIPU) on the state of the discussion at the European level on the new CAP, identification of aspects that emerged from the audits in farms to be submitted to the European Commission; 2. Preliminary analysis of the questionnaires by the UNICT Team with aspects to deepen or improve; 3. Feedback from the multipliers following the audits; 4. Debate on the development of the second form for the second visit to the farm; 5. Explanation on the document PSR Sicily and biodiversity by Dr. Luoni; 6. Conclusions by Prof. Guarnaccia. The meeting was very important in the perspective of a fruitful collaboration between the parties and the multipliers provided very interesting feedback on the experience of the farm audits. It also emerged that it was difficult for Covid-19 to go to the farms because of the mistrust of the farmers. The university team itself had to work remotely as schools at all levels were closed due to the pandemic and this slowed down the work considerably. The first thing that emerged was a largely traditional agriculture consisting of small, often family-run farms. Not all of them have an organic certificate even though they operate in a context of sustainability and according to the tradition handed down by their ancestors. Unfortunately, not all farmers are able to access economic support measures, both because of the difficulty in interfacing with agronomists and professionals in the sector (who are often more interested in fees than in the farmer's real needs) and because they are unaware of the economic aid available. At the same time, the effects of the agricultural crisis and the long stop resulting from covid-19 forced some of the farms interviewed between December 2019 and February 2020 to close due to inability to meet all expenses.



Traditional farming without certification of organic growth:

Left: Saja farm in Paternò, a traditional and totally natural citrus grove, but without organic certification.

Below: Sheep and goat milk production at the farm of Ignazio Burrello, Bronte. He once has been certified in organic growth, but because of high costs it had not been worth it.



September-December 2020, second farm visit and initiatives to influence the agricultural policies of the EU and the Sicilian Region: With a team effort between the GV (with Giuseppe Rizzo), MHS, UniCT and LIPU, the form relating to the second farm visit was completed. Compared to the first one, it is much more concise and focuses on three aspects, namely good agricultural practices (based on the studies carried out by Dr Luoni for LIPU), Biodiversity (for which a booklet on the flora and fauna of the area was specially created and printed by the GV) and a final question on the possibility of conversion to organic farming for farms that have not yet been certified. In order to better explain the contents of the sheet to the multipliers, an online meeting was organised at the same time with the project leaders to discuss the guidelines to be followed for carrying out the audit, given the new anti-covid restrictions. Unfortunately, in this case too, many municipalities in the project area have become red zones (Bronte, Randazzo, Cesarò, San Teodoro, among others) due to the growing number of infected people, so the visits to the farms have undergone significant delays and in some cases it has been necessary to wait until December to fix some appointments (also postponed to January 2021).



Processed products: Horse beans from Claudio Scillirò's farm in Maletto and pecorino cheese from Mazzurco's farm in Bronte

Among the initiatives taken to influence EU agricultural policies, on 9 November 2020 an open letter was sent (at the suggestion of the project leaders) to the President of the European Commission Ursula Von der Leyen, signed by 106 farmers from the Biosphere Lands. The letter expressed the farmers' open disagreement with the European Commission's vote on the amendments to the 2021-2027 CAP regulations and requested more support for traditional and sustainable farmers. It was also sent to the Italian Minister of Agriculture Teresa Bellanova and the Sicilian Regional Councillor for Agriculture Edy Bandiera. The letter was also echoed in Sicilian online newspapers, and was also published in the important online journal specialising in agriculture, 'Sicilia Rurale' (link https://siciliarurale.eu/gli-agricoltori-delle-terre-della-biosfera-scrivono-allue-piu-aiuti-per-le-aziende-sostenibili_4127/). An official response inviting the organisations promoting the 'Farming in Sicily's Lands of Biosphere' project to continue to influence future agricultural policies arrived by post from the European Commission on 4 January 2021. Through the participation of the University of Catania in the Working Group on Agroecology and Organic Farming of the Sicilian Region, the project promoters were invited on 16 November 2020 to participate in an online meeting with Dr. Giovanni Dara Guccione, a close collaborator of the Sicilian Councillor for Agriculture. During the meeting, it was possible to exchange opinions and ideas and agree on a future exchange of inputs to push the Sicilian Region to adopt measures to support farmers working in an environmental sustainability perspective.

Currently, the team from the University of Catania is finalising the report on the results of the audits on farms and the multipliers are finalising the last farm visits.



Details of the Guma natural farm, which deals with beekeeping and obtained CAP funds for the purchase of bee houses, with a contribution of 60% of the cost

The community of Motta Camastra has created a common agreement for pesticide free walnut growth, which was included in the list of traditional agriculture by the Ministry of Environment in 2020.

