

BEST PRACTICES

Project "Legumes & Legumes" The Guardian Farmers and Young People Meet

Institutional information

Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park
Italy, Abruzzo
www.gransassolagapark.it

Summary

Explain your case in one or two sentences

With the slogan "Nutritious seeds for a sustainable future", 2016 was the International Year of Legumes, to raise awareness of the benefits of legumes, increase production and trade and encourage new uses throughout the food chain.

The Park Authority wanted to create the opportunity to increase the cultivation of legumes by involving young people in the hope of triggering a virtuous mechanism of cultivation and cultural expansion, with positive effects on the environment and on the protection of the territory.

The project not only sows legumes, but also skill, tradition, trust and hope with the certainty of harvesting and leaving to future generations the result of the efforts faced by our ancestors.

Background information: How was the situation previous to your actions?

The Park Authority has surveyed a great autochthonous variety encouraging its cultivation and creating a network that relates not only producers but also restaurateurs and consumers. Other initiatives have highlighted a considerable interest in quality production and the rediscovery of ancient crop varieties. In this context, young people who have finished their studies and are looking for a professional identity not linked to the farming world but are interested in it and those who have lost their jobs and who see in the agricultural sector the possibility to stay in the territory.

What were the needs you identified?

The protection of the agricultural and zootechnical biodiversity represents for the Park a necessity but also an opportunity to re-launch a rural economy that for centuries has guaranteed the subsistence of people in marginal and impervious areas, but that over time has seen a departure of young people.

In view of the fact that there are elderly farmers who feel the need to pass on their knowledge, culture and experience to young enthusiasts so as not to disperse this centuries-old work, it is appropriate to find a solution that brings young people closer to the quality agricultural sector.

What solution you found to cover those needs?

The initiative that the Park Authority puts in place, has addressed the following issues:

- Research of young people interested in deepening the theme of cultivation and willing to join the guardian farmers;
- Research of elderly caretaker farmers interested in passing on knowledge to young people;
- Search for varieties of legumes among the guardian farmers to be provided to young people;
- Creation of a final event to raise awareness of the initiative with a presentation of the production carried out, the results and analysis of prospects.

What actions did you take to reach the solution?

- Spreading knowledge, tradition and peasant skill;
- Encourage the cultivation of legumes;
- Increasing the production of ancient varieties of legumes to maintain agricultural biodiversity;
- Seeking new employment opportunities;
- Promoting aggregation among farmers;
- Strengthening relations between producers, restaurateurs, traders and consumers;

If any, which partners or other organisations did you involve during the process?

The subjects involved in the initiative were the young people willing to learn and cultivate who responded to a specific call promoted by the Park and the guardian farmers willing to spread their knowledge.

The extension of agricultural biodiversity can only be guaranteed if young people who believe and invest in the territory are present.

What were the main problems or difficulties you had to face?

Access to agricultural property is made difficult by numerous laws and regulations. Especially in the mountains it can be difficult to identify the owners of the land in order to purchase or rent it. Furthermore, in the mountains, the agronomic difficulties of cultivation with considerable expenditure of energy not supported by adequate and economically sustainable yields are particularly evident. This has discouraged many young people or still makes their work difficult.

What is the situation now, after your actions?

With this project it has been possible to offer many young people the opportunity to learn a trade directly from those who have been practicing it for decades. In this way it has been possible to create several new jobs or, in any case, new sources of income support. It was also possible to recover and keep alive the agricultural traditions of the area and with them the cultivation of local varieties of legumes. The guardian farmers have thus been able to pass on their valuable knowledge to the younger generations, who will certainly make good use of it.

Main lessons learned along the way?

The most interesting aspects were:

- The passion of the old growers who have kept many different varieties even if of little commercial interest;
- The appearance of young people in the world of quality agriculture with greater hope in the potential of the agro-zootechnical sector;

- The rediscovery of quality food linked to tradition and territory;
- More information for tourists and consumers who are looking for a healthy, local product that reflects the vocation of the place of production and the seasonality.

Annexes:

ImaD.1

ImaD.2

ImaD.3