

Sustainable Development of The Regional Park "Sassi Di Roccamalatina" By Agricultural Small-Holders

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Abstract

The Regional Park "Sassi di Roccamalatina", the County of Modena and the local unions of farmers recently endorsed a specific program for the development of agriculture within the Park territory and established a multi-category steering committee to direct the necessary actions to the full benefit of the interested farmers. The program also includes specific directives for sustainable development by the park-based farmers, including protection of agricultural biodiversity and development of organic agriculture.

The creation of adequate awareness of farmers about agricultural practices that maintain a high level of agronomic and environmental conditions of farms shall primarily receive support and subsidies through the Agricultural Common Policy. Additional funds, if necessary, shall be directed to the financing of supporting actions in this domain, in line with the indications provided by the program steering committee.

In the domain of protection of agricultural biodiversity, the park and the farmers are planning to enlarge the area cultivated under traditional varieties and to increase the number of cows of autochthonous races, such as the "Bianca Modenese" cow. Specific support to the farmers that are willing to give their adhesion to the program shall be provided by both the County of Modena and the Park. The creation of specific databanks of the existing biodiversity within the Park territory, including ancient varieties, native animal races, traditional cultivation methods and long-established agricultural sites shall facilitate the dissemination of technical guidance to farmers concerning agricultural biodiversity maintenance, protection and, if appropriate, re-introduction of ancient varieties and animal lines. A specific catalogue of the Park agricultural biodiversity is projected to be published to promote awareness of the paramount importance of biodiversity.

Short-term and long-term plans designed by the farmers in strict co-operation with the Park shall make the implementation of the biodiversity component of the program possible. The concerned farmers shall benefit from specific incentives for the conservation, the protection and the re-introduction of agricultural biodiversity and from technical advice provided by expert technicians in line with production standards designed and approved by the program steering committee. Those farmers shall sign specific agreements with the Park for the implementation of the designed biodiversity protection measures.

The Park and, if necessary, the Regional Rural Development Program shall make the necessary financial resources available.

The development of organic agriculture shall be strongly promoted by the Park and specific advice provided to farmers willing to start conversion of conventional agricultural methods to the organic agriculture principles. Beyond consolidating the existing experiences in organic agriculture that are already benefiting from the support provided by the Regional Rural Development Program, the program shall aim at facilitating and supporting the launch of innovative initiatives with strong links to certified agricultural production, including organic agriculture and origin-designated products. It is deemed that a close market chain linking those certified farms to high-quality restaurants shall increase the effectiveness of the proposed measures in this domain.

In the frame of the agreement, the Park farmers shall receive assistance and support for the sustainable improvement of rural buildings and facilities of historical and architectonic interest. The Park Land-Management Plan shall identify areas and rural buildings/facilities that may benefit from special support for the adoption of low-impact technologies and materials in maintenance, refurbishment and restoration. In conclusion, in this domain the Park and the County of Modena shall primarily direct financial resources to the compensation of the damages generated by wild fauna, to the necessary preventive actions to minimise damages' occurrence.

Shortly the Park shall launch a proposal for the establishment of a network of farmers' markets and the development of direct sales from farmers to customers. This activity shall be designed in strict co-operation with the union of farmers and the interested Municipalities.

The proposed program shall be completed with a promotional package including promotional materials, dissemination of information about the Park features that can be of interest for visitors and organisation of promotional initiatives. The implementation of specific development plans for the villages of Samone and Montecorone shall likely require a complex multidisciplinary approach, in agreement with the interested territorial agencies.

A major component of the program refers to the development of rural tourism and the diversification of the traditional organisation and offerings of local farms. This shall include support to all rural tourist services, such as farm holidays, Bed & Breakfast services and small teaching farms, which is felt to be crucial for widening and strengthening their local offerings. The local farmers shall be guided and assisted to diversify production and their organisation by adding to their traditional market-oriented products new services related to

"multi-service" and "multi-function" activities. The agreement also encompasses the launch of integrated plans for the development of the villages of Montecorone and Samone – that are located within the Park boundaries – through the implementation of innovative tourist services and of advanced information technologies. The proposed integrated plan shall likely demand a complex multidisciplinary approach requiring the full agreement and co-operation of the interested territorial agencies. It is eventually planned that all activities that are designed for the development of the local farms within this domain shall be supported by the Park with specific training provided in association with the existing agencies of agriculture training and the local agriculture institutes. The available financial resources shall be primarily directed to promotional initiatives, which shall also consider the realisation of the proposed integrated programs for Montecorone and Samone.

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