

Farmers To Safeguard Biodiversity in Parma Province

Castello, L.¹, Carboni, M.², Piazza, C.³, Zanon, A.⁴

Key words: *biodiversity, local, farmers, safeguard, varieties*

Abstract

Safeguarding of biodiversity is an issue of increasing relevance at various levels; Emilia Romagna Region has recently approved a Bill concerning the safeguarding of indigenous genetic resources in agriculture. Most local breeds and varieties are nevertheless threatened with extinction.

“Limona” pears, “Picciona” grapes, “Rosso Grosso” tomatoes and “Cornigliese” sheep are only a few of the evocative names of plants and animals belonging to the treasure of agrobiodiversity in the Parma Province - specimens often existing in our land in the past and then left out, replaced by modern breeds and varieties, more interesting from an economic and productive point of view. For instance, there used to be forty-two different pear varieties in the Parma Province, as recorded by an anonymous writer in an 18th century report on agriculture in the Parma area. In 1937 only two cultivars were still existing.

Today, even though in a small amount and often still threatened with extinction, many of these plants and animals have been assessed and recovered by real “seekers” of biodiversity, keen researchers and persevering farmers. Since 2005, thanks to their contribution, the Province of Parma has been co-ordinating a project aiming to recover and develop indigenous genetic resources, therefore promoting three main activities:

- *Make a census of existing indigenous genetic resources surviving in rural areas. The research focuses on animal breeds, such as Parma Black swine, the Parma and Piacenza turkey, Corniglio-breed sheep and also on cereals, traditional vegetables and fruit varieties. Researchers are also surveying the typical agrarian ecosystems of the Parma area;*
- *Create a network of Farmers willing to safeguard local biodiversity by growing trees and plants and breeding animals threatened with extinction, but worth preserving. At the end of 2006 the number of “Farm Keepers” claiming to have animals or plants were about 66; at the end of 2007 there were more than 100;*
- *Spread knowledge and information among farmers, consumers and institutions about the value, taste and history of local genetic resources through the Internet, organising technical panels, seminars and conferences and also participating to fairs and local markets.*

After two years several goals have been achieved; this paper aims to outline the activities undertaken.

¹ Province of Parma – Department of Agriculture, 43100 Parma, Italy, E-Mail l.castello@provincia.parma.it, Internet www.portale.parma.it

² E.q.u.a. s.r.l., Du Tillot Street, 43052 Colorno, Italy, E-Mail info@equasrl.com

³ Stuard Agro-Experimental Farm, San Pancrazio, 43100 Parma, Italy, E-Mail c.piazza@stuard.it, Internet www.stuard.it

⁴ Veterinary doctor, breed expert, Italy, E-mail zanonalessio@hotmail.com