



Agricoltura Nuova: a Multifunctional Cooperative Farm integrated in its territory

Periphery of Rome, Italy

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Case Study from a Series on Access to
Land for Community Connected Farming

Case Study Series on Access to Land for Community Connected Farming

In 2010-11, an informal group of civic organisations from across Europe conducted a project on Access to Land for Community Connected Agriculture. A key part of the project lies in a series of seven case studies, documenting experiences from various European countries and different levels of activity (local, regional, national). These case studies seek to explore both the functioning and the benefits of community

connected farming. From this they seek to identify the constraints that limit access to land of sufficient quality and size, and the potential solutions that have been found to reduce the impacts of these constraints. The case studies are illustrative of a variety of issues and situations and, taken together, present some interesting and innovative approaches to the development of local, civic agriculture.

• Viva sol, Lithuania:

A National Association of cheese eaters and producers established to support the development of solidarity between urban and rural people, and to encourage the settlement of small farmers and artisans in rural Lithuania. Viva sol has started a farmers' market in Vilnius, a box scheme, environmental training and activities to support small-scale breeders. Faced with the issue of several farmers being unable to find affordable land, it is currently envisaging creating a Land Fund to raise investments or donations in order to buy agricultural land.

• Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farms, UK:

Two Biodynamic Community Farms located in East Sussex, UK, wholly owned by a cooperative (an Industrial and Provident Society) with approximately 600 shareholders, most of them local to the farms. The farms occupy approximately 300 hectares of land, the majority of which is owned by St Anthony's Trust, a local land trust. The farmers employ about 20 staff, process and sell their products directly and have established strong community connections.

• Hamburg City Estates, Germany:

For decades, Hamburg municipality has purchased agricultural land to be able to influence city development. In 1989/1994, the city opted for the conversion of three large estates in its ownership to organic farming. These farms all play a major role in providing local organic food, and two of them have developed direct marketing and a large array of social and cultural activities involving the community.

• Terre de liens, France:

A civic organisation established to assist organic and peasant farmers in gaining access to land. The organisation also promotes new ways to own and manage land as a common good. Terre de liens has created financial tools (a solidarity investment company and an endowment trust) to collect investment funds and donations, and educational tools to inform the public and raise awareness about land access and agriculture. It now has a network of 2000 members and 8000 shareholders, and owns 2400 hectares of farmland, supporting about 200 farmers.

• Jaglea Farm, Romania:

An organic farm located near Sibiu, in the Carpatians, which illustrates a new kind of farm in Romania, where tradition and innovation meet to form an emerging "new peasantry". The Jaglea family practice a low-input, largely manual agriculture, which is certified organic and which seeks new ways to be economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. They process and market all their products directly, and took part in the creation of the first organic producers' cooperative shop in Romania. One obstacle that they face in seeking to expand their activity is gaining access to more land in the vicinity of the farm.

• Cooperativa Agricoltura nuova, Italy:

A cooperative farm on the periphery of Rome, formed in 1977 following occupation of the land by a group of young people opposing urban development. It is now a 250 ha mixed organic farm, geared towards on-farm processing and direct marketing and hosting a range of environmental and social activities (an information centre on renewable energies, community gardens, social integration of vulnerable adults, etc.). In 1996 it obtained a tenancy contract from the municipality of Rome, which has established a regional park in the area surrounding the farm.

• Regionalwert AG, Germany (RWAG):

A citizen shareholder corporation, located in the area of Freiburg im Breisgau, that supports the development of organic agriculture and local food production, marketing and distribution. It has collected €1.7 million from about 500 mostly local shareholders. The capital is invested in 6 farms and associated land, processing businesses (caterer, processor), and marketing businesses (retail and wholesale shops, box delivery). As part of its operation, RWAG has developed a detailed methodology to report on the social, economic and environmental impact of its investments in the region.

These case studies have been brought together and edited by Véronique Rioufol (Terre de liens) and Neil Ravenscroft (University of Brighton and Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farms).

Agricoltura Nuova: a Multifunctional Cooperative Farm, integrated in its community and territory

by Marta Fraticelli, aGter¹

Overview

Agricoltura Nuova is an agricultural cooperative located on the south-western periphery of Rome. The cooperative was formed in July 1977 when a group of young unemployed people from Rome occupied 180 ha of agricultural land that had been designated for non-agricultural development. Their goal was to transform this land into a workplace and a residence, hence defending it against urban expansion. The cooperative was – and remains – a unique experiment that came out of a very particular historical context associated with social protest against the excesses of a rapidly modernising Italian society.

Over the last 30 years, Agricoltura Nuova has formed a strong relationship with the residents of Rome. From the start, the Cooperative has managed to mobilize support from the local community, particularly in preserving the agricultural use of the land and, more broadly, maintaining local agriculture around Rome. Over the years, the Cooperative has changed, but has remained true to the ideals and goals of its founders. Successive decisions all had the same unifying thread: to create an alternative rural space that breathes new life into traditional agricultural practices and values, wherein farmers manage complete production cycles, from working the land to selling food that has been processed on-site.

¹ - Site : www.agter.asso.fr

1. The Italian Context

In Italy, as in other western European countries, agriculture is a minor economic sector. In 2009 it accounted for 1.8% of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and 3.9% of the active population (compared to 5% in 2000)². Italy is a mountainous, hilly country; plains only occupy 23% of the territory, principally in the north. There is considerable regional diversity: in the north-centre of the country, agricultural production covers less than 40% of the territory, 1.6% of the GDP and 3.9% of the active population. In the south, it covers half of the territory, 3.4% of the GDP, and 8.6% of the active population.

1.1 Access to land

Evolution of farm structure over time

Land ownership has historically been polarized in Italy. There were a large number of small farms and a very small number of large, latifundary farms³. The land redistribution policy of 1950, which consisted of agrarian reform and the creation of an office for the formation of a small-holding peasant class, led to the virtual elimination of very large properties. However, it did not prevent the smallest landholdings from fragmenting into even smaller ones. Subsequent land reform policies have not been able to reverse this trend.

In the wake of the agrarian reform, Italy underwent a major rural exodus in the 1960s and 1970s. This change occurred later than in most European countries. A simultaneous process of modernization and mechanization further exacerbated inequalities between the different types of farms.

² - A. D., *L'agricoltura italiana conta 2010*, INEA, 2010. The figures from this section were taken from this work and from the Italian Statistical Institute (ISTAT)

³ - Latifundary farms are large industrial agricultural units often producing a limited number of crops for export.

Current dynamics: continued reduction and concentration of the Utilized Agricultural Area (UAA)

The number of farms in Italy has almost halved since 1990. At the same time, Italy's utilized agricultural area (UAA) has been significantly reduced: in 2007, at 14.2 million hectares, it accounted for 16% less than it had in 1990⁴. The decline in the UAA has essentially been caused by urbanization and associated development. Uncultivated land is also a considerable problem, with approximately 500,000 ha of unused agricultural land in Italy that has not been put up for sale or rent⁵.

Property has also become extremely concentrated: farms of more than 50 ha, numerically the minority (2.4%), take up 50% of the utilized agricultural area⁶, while farms of less than 5 hectares (73.4%) only occupy 15.8% of the utilized agricultural area. Most concentration has occurred in the north of the country, where the majority of capital intensive farming companies are located. In the south, agriculture still creates many jobs and plays an important social role. The state of the land market has seriously restricted the expansion of existing farms and access to land for new farmers: each year only 2 percent of the utilized agricultural area is involved in a transaction of any kind, and land prices are very high (with an average price of €17,500/ha in 2008). Italian farmers have developed a number of different strategies to deal with these constraints: they have intensified their systems of production, diversified their activities, chosen to concentrate on high value-added products (organic farming, processing at the farm, etc.), farmed part-time, and externalized certain agricultural activities⁷.

4 - Source: FAO <http://faostat.fao.org>

5 - L. Gallico, *Promuovere il diritto d'uso rispetto al diritto di proprietà*, *BioAgricoltura*, March-April 2011

6 - A. Onorati, *Nessuno vende la terra su cui cammina il suo popolo. A parte gli stolti*, *BioAgricoltura*, March-April 2011

7 - *The purchase of external services consists in contracting out certain activities (labor, harvest, etc.). This has allowed many smaller farms to survive.*

1.2- The success of local and organic agriculture

In Italy, organic farming has increased significantly over the last two decades. Between 1993 and 2000, the UAA used for organic farming grew from 0.6% to 8%, and the number of farms from 4,700 to 54,000⁸. Italian organic production is greater than organic production elsewhere in Europe, both in terms of the surface area utilized and the quantities produced. In 2009 it accounted for 10% of the world organic market. This is above all the result of the agro-environmental measures put in place under the CAP in 1992. It has also been reinforced by the success of direct sales and the use of organic food in large scale catering (restaurants in schools, hospitals, public authorities and large companies, for example).

Direct sales have expanded considerably over the last few years (+32% from 2007-2009); consumers are seeking out fresher and healthier products, as well as products that have been produced with local knowledge and traditional methods. Direct sales have principally been developed through farm shops and through producers' markets. From 1994 onwards, "group purchase organizations" ("Gruppi di Acquisto Solidali" or GAS) multiplied very quickly. A GAS comprises at least 5 households who make a combined weekly group order directly to producers, mostly of local and/or organic products, but also of imported foodstuffs and non-food products such as clothes. This system differs from that of AMAPS/CSAs, which focus on food products and encourage interactions between producers and consumers. There were more than 750 GAS in 2010.

1.3- Social integration through agricultural activity: the growth of "social agriculture"

The term "agricoltura sociale" designates agricultural activities that integrate social services aimed at the training and social integration of dependent, disabled, and/or marginalized

8 - Trisorio, A., *Misurare la sostenibilità. Indicatori epr l'agricoltura italiana*, *rapport INEA*, 2004

individuals (children at risk, unemployed, etc.)⁹. Activities of this kind were first developed in the 1970s, in co-operation with youth movements in favour of cooperative agriculture, against drug addiction, and against conditions in prisons and psychiatric units. A number of different legislative measures have contributed to the emergence of this form of social agriculture, in particular the “Basaglia Law, 1978”, which required that psychiatric units should be closed and also provided legal status for social cooperatives. The law distinguishes 2 different types of social cooperative: Type A, which provide socio-sanitary and educational services, and Type B, which offer activities that facilitate social integration.

In 2001, the legislative decree 228 legitimated agriculture’s ‘social’ status by recognizing both its multifunctional character and the social activities associated with it. Many agricultural cooperatives provide an organized approach to improving the relationship between rural and urban communities, by offering education activities to schools. These are referred to as “educational farms.”

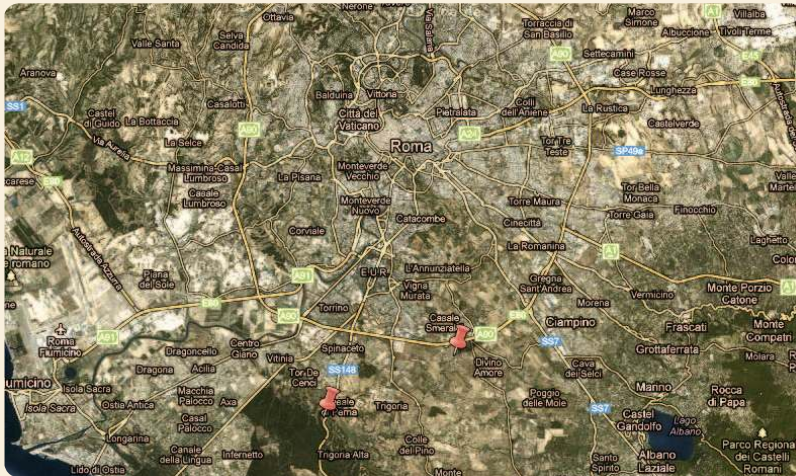
“Social Agriculture” is currently widespread in Italy: in 2007, there were around 2000 such farms, of which 470 were Type B. The majority of these farms use organic methods while maintaining the more general goals of environmental conservation and worker and consumer health.

⁹ - A. Ciaperoni, *L'agricoltura sociale biologica tra nuovo modello di sviluppo rurale e nuovo welfare locale*, in the issue AIAB “Bioagricoltura sociale, buona due volte” AIAB 2007



2- Agricoltura Nuova today

2.1 A multifunctional farm located in the periphery of Rome



Agricoltura Nuova is a large multifunctional organic farm started in 1977. It occupies some 250 hectares, in two locations to the south of Rome, just a few minutes from the ring road. The first of these two locations, "Castel di Decima," where the cooperative was founded, consists of 180 hectares belonging to the municipality of Rome. The second site, at "Castel di Leva," a few kilometres to the east, belongs to the Santa Catarina religious conservatory. The conservatory, which owns a significant amount of land in the region, is involved in a range of activities benefitting socially marginalized people. In 2006, it offered to rent 70 hectares to Agricoltura Nuova, which was already renowned for its achievements in the field of social agriculture, as a way to expand employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

Agricoltura Nuova was started by a group of young people who decided to occupy an abandoned farm. While they started

as a conventional farm, they rapidly reoriented their activities towards a diversified organic farm, processing food products (dairy products, bread and pasta, etc.) and focusing on direct marketing. It has also developed a broad range of social and pedagogical activities to give access to the farm to visitors and schools. These activities are a means to engage with the local community, to consolidate relationships with a range of local players and to diversify income.

2.2 A Workers' Cooperative

Agricoltura Nuova was founded as a workers' cooperative to own and run the farm. For a long time, all those working and living on the farm had the status of 'associates' who were involved in the management as well as the work of the cooperative. As the organisation has grown, fewer associates have lived on the farm, while the cooperative has also recently started to hire contract workers. There are currently 50 workers, employed in a range of activities: farming, food-processing and sales, educational activities, etc. Of these, 27 are associates, and 23 are contract workers. The Cooperative is currently seeking a way to better involve the latter, either as associates or under a different status.



The Cooperative is managed by the 27 associates, who each have one vote. Profit cannot be shared out between associates and must be invested in productive activities. Each production sector (gardening, sheep husbandry, cereals and bakery, etc.) is relatively autonomous: the choice of products and production methods are decided by each sector, which then communicates with other sectors regarding the appropriate quantity to produce.

2.3 A large diversified organic farm

The cooperative has been a certified organic farm since the 1980s. It produces a broad array of products, from the cultivation of fruits and vegetables to the processing of grains into bread and fresh pasta.

Fruit and vegetable gardening

This is the farm's dominant activity. It is also its most diverse. Vegetable and fruit cultivation is extensive and spread throughout a variety of rotating locations linked to cold greenhouses and tree nurseries.

Cereals

The Cooperative produces a wide range of cereals. Half of the cereals used for processing bread, pasta, and other bakery products come from the farm, with the other half bought in from outside.

Sheep husbandry and cheese production (ricotta, pecorino, yogurts)

A flock of 1000 Sarde ewes, known for the quality of their milk (which is used in pecorino cheese), graze on 150 hectares of extensive prairie. This is supplemented by grains (barley and oats) over the course of their 180 day lactation period. They produce one litre of milk per head per day. 90% of the cheese produced is distributed through direct sales. The cooperative's cheeses have received many awards for "best regional organic product."

Additional livestock: lamb, veal and pork

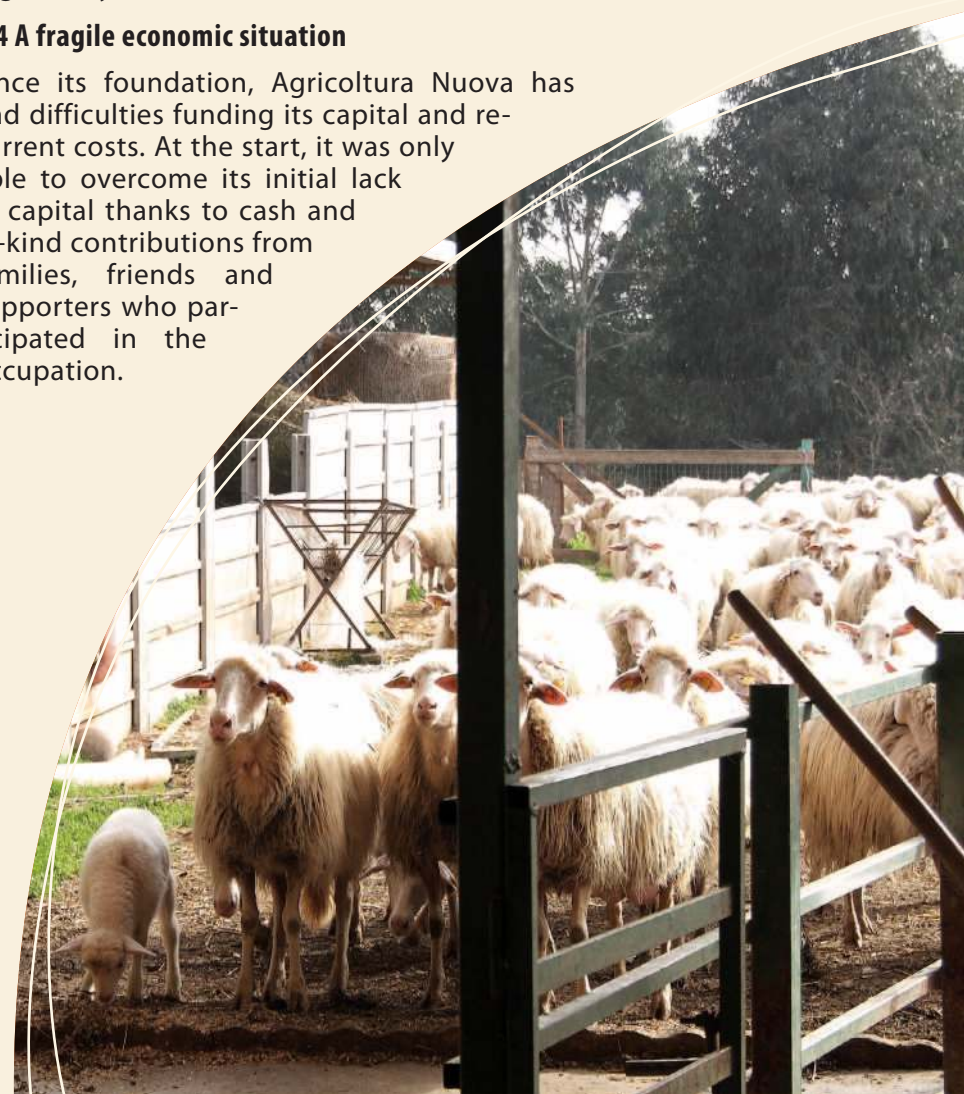
These animals graze and consume a mix of horse beans, bran, corn, and barley. Animal feed is grown on the farm as a catch crop.

Beekeeping

Thanks to more than 400 hives, the cooperative produces six different kinds of honey (more than one hundred quintals), honeydew, royal jelly, and pollen. These are all produced organically and sold on the farm or in local markets.

2.4 A fragile economic situation

Since its foundation, Agricoltura Nuova has had difficulties funding its capital and recurrent costs. At the start, it was only able to overcome its initial lack of capital thanks to cash and in-kind contributions from families, friends and supporters who participated in the occupation.



The Cooperative's economic situation has slowly stabilized over time. In 2009, it had a turnover for goods and services of 2,22 millions euros (2,37 Mi euros in 2008). It also had an estimated 200,000€ worth of food consumed by the cooperative's workers. About a third of the agricultural turnover comes from fruits and vegetables, and over a third from dairy products. Very little of the farm's income is derived from CAP payments (about 90,000€ in 2009). The cooperative sells all its food directly (through farm shops, markets stalls, GAS and the farm restaurant), which has proved much more profitable than wholesaling. Non agricultural activities (mostly the restaurant and educational activities) have become a significant part of the Cooperative's income.

Thanks to its widespread recognition, the quality of its products, and its reputation as an innovative local farm doing social agriculture and a range of other activities, Agricoltura Nuova has managed to establish a large and stable pool of customers and supporters. It has also consolidated its appeal to local authorities and now receives public funding for various projects (an information centre on renewable energy, agronomic and food-processing experiments, etc.). Life however remains hard for the Cooperative, as for many small and large diversified farms, and it does not always make a profit.



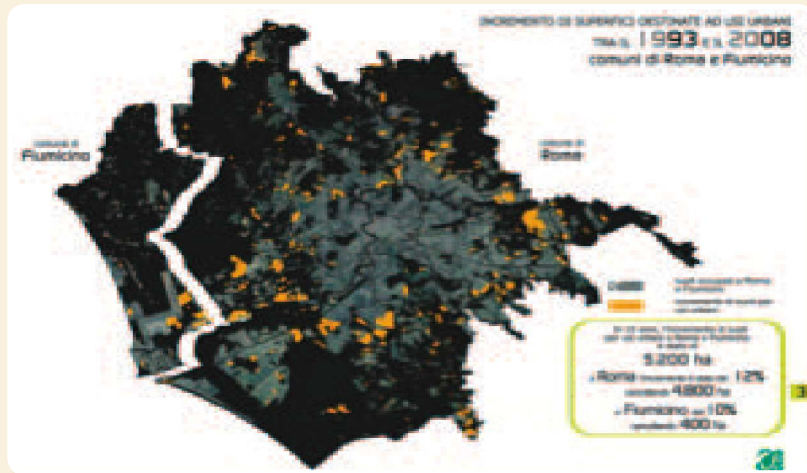
3- Agricoltura Nuova's long struggle to acquire land rights

3.1-Urban pressure on the outskirts of Rome

Unlike many other European capitals, Rome has retained a significant amount of green space and rural land. With 52,000 hectares of agricultural land (about 40% of the municipality's surface area), Rome is the most agricultural municipality in Europe. A third of this agricultural land is public property. In 2006, there were roughly 1900 farms, including 200 farms of more than 50 ha. Many of them now include on-site food processing and/or have converted to organic farming over the last few years. Rome also possesses a lot of natural space and an impressive degree of biodiversity. Municipal, departmental, and regional administrations have accomplished much in the way of managing this natural, agricultural, and cultural heritage.

Despite the presence of farming and green space, commercial and housing pressure around Rome is considerable. There has been large-scale development on the city's periphery since the end of WWII. In many cases, land has been illegally developed, with the apparent acquiescence of public authorities. It has led to the formation of extensive commuter neighbourhoods that lack basic services. Agricultural lands were the first to be developed; absentee latifundist owners profited from this by leaving their property unutilized in the expectation of non-agricultural development. From 1962 onwards, urbanization plans have attempted to manage land usage more closely and to limit urban expansion. In a 2011 report, Legambiente, the Italian League for the Protection of the Environment, denounced the pace of development around Rome: between 1993 and 2008, 4800 ha, or 12% of the municipal territory (indicated in yellow on the map), was urbanized. The area that extends towards the sea, which includes both Rome and Fiumicino, was the most affected.

Conversion of land to urban uses - 1993-2008 (source: Legambiente, 2011)



3.2- Founding the cooperative: from illegal to legal occupation

A cooperative founded under exceptional circumstances

On July 2nd, 1977, a group of 30 young people, students and former agricultural workers looking for work occupied 60 hectares of the "La Perna" estate, which had been abandoned for 25 years. Although the municipality of Rome had purchased the property in 1960, they were tacitly tolerating a local absentee owner, who was claiming ownership of the land in the hope of developing it. The project in question involved the construction of a residential neighbourhood capable of housing 6000 people on 86 ha. In occupying the land, the cooperative's founders aimed to preserve its agricultural function, and to create employment for young people who wished to return to the countryside.

From the beginning, the collective enjoyed the support of family, friends and volunteers, who provided them with a tractor, plough and tools to work the earth. Buildings abandoned for decades were very quickly restored and transformed into housing and agricultural infrastructure. Residents from



surrounding neighbourhoods supported the members of the cooperative in their effort to prevent the area from being urbanized. The cooperative organized a call for subscriptions for the purchase of tools, seeds, and fuel, with contributors being asked to make a once-only payment of 500,000 lira (€258 today). The first harvest was sold two months after the start of the occupation. During the months and years that followed, the cooperative became very popular throughout Italy and Europe, attracting numerous young people who hoped to contribute to its success and development. Salaries remained very low during these first years, as the bulk of the cooperative's revenue was reinvested to improve the farm¹⁰.

From the beginning, the occupation faced threats from previous residents, and the cooperative members frequently had to resist public authorities. Thanks to union and political

¹⁰ - In 1978, the 12 members of the cooperative were receiving a monthly salary of 70 000 Lire, thanks to fees and voluntary contributions (source: "Il Corriere della Sera").

support, they were able to remain on the land for 20 years. They received considerable aid from the Federation of Agricultural Workers (la Federbraccianti), the Peasants' Alliance, and the Regional Association of Agricultural Cooperatives. Support also came from agricultural cooperatives in the north of Italy which, for example, waited until after the harvest was sold to receive payment for seeds and fertilizers. The cooperative also enjoyed the support of all the Italian environmental organizations, who were fighting to append a clause to Rome's urbanization plan that would protect "remarkable" areas because of the quality of their landscape, environment, or cultural heritage. In the very polarized political context of the 1970s and 1980s, the support of the communist party was also decisive: it provided both day to day advice and conveyed the cooperative's needs and requests to political authorities in Rome. Because of the power and influence of the construction industry, however, the cooperative's relationship with the municipality of Rome was quite difficult, even during left wing administrations.



Towards the recognition of land rights

The occupation initiated a 20-year battle against the urbanization project and for the recognition of the cooperative's right to the land. In this fight, the cooperative highlighted the fact that they were occupying one of the few non-urbanized areas leading to the sea. Urbanizing this land would bring about the complete urbanization of the Tre Decime region (>1.400 ha), a haven for biodiversity and a natural water source for the city of Rome. The cooperative also relied heavily upon an agro-pedological study commissioned by the Deputy Mayor in 1978. This study emphasized the alluvial quality of the soil, which was appropriate for agricultural irrigation but would require significant investment in order to be viable for construction.

In 1989, the municipality ordered the cooperative to leave the land. From this moment onwards, it benefited from the support of its local district (the XIIIth circumscription of Rome¹¹), which approved of its request that the urbanization plan be modified. The Lazio region, which was able to mobilize a 1927 law guaranteeing civic usage rights of land in the "Tre Decime" region, also wished to prohibit further construction.

The cooperative finally obtained a tenancy contract for the Castel di Decima land in 1996. The contract required that the cooperative pay rent for the 19 years that they had already been occupying the land. The contract was negotiated in the context of an agreement between the agricultural assistant to the mayor and the construction industry. It granted permission to construct buildings only outside of the Tre Decime region, which was now designated as a protected natural zone.

11 - One of the administrative districts of Rome

4- Becoming an environmentally friendly, civically responsible and multifunctional cooperative

Agricoltura Nuova has evolved over the years and now has multiple purposes and produces a variety of goods and services. It is also nationally recognized as an historic experiment in “Social Agriculture” and as a pioneer in agricultural land preservation. The unifying thread of all its evolutions has been the will to construct an autonomous, alternative, agricultural model that is environmentally friendly and anchored in its territory.

4.1-From monoculture to mixed farming

Initially, the cooperative sold only to large scale retailers. This meant that only one crop was cultivated on the land, and production was entirely oriented towards the demands of the market. Bulk distributors sought large quantities of grains and vegetables (zucchini, broccoli, etc.). This system was both specific and demanding, and was not profitable for a farm of the cooperative’s size; after 2 years, members began to think

about other options. The cooperative chose to diversify its garden production and began cultivating trees and grains. It also began beekeeping and animal husbandry, both for meat (beef, pork, poultry), and other animal products (eggs, cheese).

4.2-From large-scale wholesale to direct sales

While the cooperative was diversifying its production it was also moving away from large scale commercial distribution and towards direct sales. In 1980, it stopped selling to bulk distributors and retailers and began selling its products from the farm and at local markets. The farm shop includes all of the cooperative’s products as well as a variety of organic products from partner cooperatives and individual producers, to provide a wider range of options for its customers. The cooperative now sells at two local markets on the outskirts of Rome, five days a week. The success of these direct sales was such that, in 2010, the Cooperative decided to open a second farm shop at its new production site, Castel di Leva.

Since 2006, the cooperative has also sold fruit and vegetable baskets through GAS groups. At first, it collaborated with other local organic producers in this; together, they formed



a cooperative with its own quality control label, which kept prices down and provided an online ordering system¹². But management problems eventually ended this collaboration, and Agricoltura Nuova now furnishes the GAS groups alone.

Selling directly has proved profitable: not only does it encourage the local sale of products, but it underpins economic viability and frees the cooperative from the requirements imposed by bulk distributors and retailers. It also reinforces Agricoltura Nuova's relationship with consumers, by encouraging direct contact with producers, providing information about the origins and history of products and building trust that encourages loyalty.

4.3-Conversion from conventional agriculture to organic and biodynamic farming

The cooperative started producing organically at the end of the 1980s; members were increasingly attracted by the possibility of non-chemical, non-genetically manipulated farming that would preserve the quality of the soil and ecosystem, as well as protecting worker health. This transition towards organic farming complemented the transition towards direct sales; eliminating intermediaries and providing quality products is what has allowed the cooperative to survive.

More recently, the cooperative has become interested in biodynamic agriculture. In 2010, it signed an agreement with the regional government of Lazio to begin a biodynamic trial on one piece of its land. The cooperative wants to be sure that it can obtain sufficient yields with this system before converting the entire farm.

¹² - <http://www.officinaebio.it/> This website offers small and large organic fruit and vegetable baskets (€7.50 and €14), plus a €3 deposit.



4.4-From production to processing

The cooperative has also engaged in on-site processing. This allows it to exercise more control over the production cycle and to benefit fully from the added value obtained from processing. It has begun this transition with the transformation of ewe's milk into pecorino cheese. It started out artisanally, using local knowledge, and then developed its production and expanded its range of products to include bread, pasta, jam, cakes, etc.

While diversifying its agricultural activities, the cooperative has also begun to engage in a number of non-agricultural activities as a way to diversify income, fulfil multiple social roles and create stronger connections with the local community.

5- A Cooperative integrated into its territory

Agricoltura Nuova is more than a place where food is produced and processed. It is a farm that is connected to its territory, provides social activities, forms bonds with local people and actively constructs partnerships with local economic actors and institutions.

5.1-Social integration of marginalized individuals

From the beginning, one of the Cooperative's goals was to create employment through agricultural activities. It very quickly expanded upon this objective in seeking to offer jobs to socially excluded people and individuals with mental disabilities. Ten of the cooperative's current workers (all associates) are going through a process of social integration. They work, but do not live on the farm, in a range of agricultural and non-agricultural activities.

5.2-A plural environmental approach

The cooperative's activities have always been designed to respect the environment and the landscape. It is also involved in the development of renewable forms of energy. In 1979, members equipped the farm with photovoltaic panels. They then installed a windmill, expanded the farm's use of solar panels and installed a rainwater collection system. More recently, the cooperative partnered with local companies to construct an information centre focused on eco-construction and renewable energy. The centre works to share practical information with both experts and the public. It allows visitors to watch the production of wind and photovoltaic energy, facilitating their comprehension of the way these systems work. It also provides visitors with the opportunity to evaluate the costs and the yields of this equipment and to explore a number of different funding possibilities. Since 2002, the Cooperative



has also been reusing the organic waste generated by the city of Rome's park and garden maintenance functions. It benefits doubly from this activity, in terms of soil fertility and a fee for accepting the waste.

5.3-An agricultural cooperative at the heart of the Decima Malafede Regional Park

While engaged in the fight for the recognition of its own rights to the land, the cooperative was also fighting for the creation of a protected natural zone. The agreement it signed with the city of Rome in 1996 also resulted in the creation of the Regional Park "Decima Malafede." The cooperative's lands are in the centre of this park. The park, which is managed by Roma Natura (a public conservation body) has prevented the urbanization of 6000 hectares of land and made possible the preservation of agricultural lands as part of a protected natural zone. The goal of the park's management is to balance natural landscape and habitat preservation with environmentally friendly agriculture.

If farmers provide services that valorize the regional territory (direct sales, tours of the farm, educational activities, promotion of regional products, renewable energies, etc.), they can make use of the “multifunctional company” label¹³.

5.4-A place for exploration, information and education

With Roma Natura, the cooperative has become involved in the “Educational Farms” project initiated by the city of Rome. The project aims to develop educational activities around environmental issues and sustainable agriculture on farms surrounding Rome. Each year, 10,000 schoolchildren visit the cooperative to attend tours and agricultural workshops that demonstrate its various production and processing activities and discuss renewable energy sources. In workshops, children participate in the production of bread, cheese and wool, amongst other things. The cooperative also allows family visits. Its farm shop is the initial entry point to its activities. Visitors can

13 - Roma Natura created a directory that includes all multifunctional farms in the region. These farms can use a logo designed by Roma Natura. Partnership projects between Roma Natura and these farms can be developed as a priority over other projects

also go to the restaurant, which is open every week-end, or use the picnic grounds, which are always accessible. Finally, they can go to the equestrian centre or visit the information centre on eco-construction and renewable energy. The cooperative also allows other groups to use its land for cultural, athletic, and scientific events.

5.5-The garden sharing project

Since 2006, the cooperative has rented 70 hectares in the Castel di Leva zone, which it farms with the participation of workers with disabilities, thus meeting its obligation to the Santa Caterina religious conservatory which owns the land. The Cooperative has opened a farm shop and a restaurant at Castel di Leva, allowing it to distribute and promote its products on an even wider scale.

Since 2009, the cooperative has also been collaborating with the organization “Sole, Acqua, Terra” on a family vegetable farming project. It has divided one hectare of land into 111 plots of 40 m², the surface area needed to satisfy the average family’s annual fruit and vegetable needs. All products cultivated in these gardens are organic. The cooperative financed the creation of the gardens, and support for participants is provided by two agronomists who work for the cooperative. Each family signs a contract giving them access to their plot for 4 years, which is automatically renewable one time in exchange for a modest contribution (€350 for 8 years). The cooperative also offers paid services to these families (initial plot preparation, making wells and footpaths, etc.).

The vegetable gardens have an educational purpose: to encourage organic farming and enable participants to experiment environmental protection and composting. They encourage citizens, notably children, to interact with the environment and to view the earth as a common good that must be protected.



5.6-A network of partnerships with territorial stakeholders

The cooperative has numerous accords with local and regional institutions (examples include its partnership with “Roma Natura,” and its collection of green waste from Rome). It also collaborates actively with the Lazio Region, in particular with the Regional Agency for Agricultural Innovation and Development¹⁴, which promotes multifunctional agriculture and emphasizes the ways in which agricultural activity preserves the environment and the landscape. Agreements with the province of Rome have also benefitted the cooperative, by contributing to the information centre on renewable energy and to experiments with traditional cheese-production techniques.

The cooperative has also forged strong bonds with a number of other organic producers in the region. This has allowed it to broaden the range of products that it sells directly, and has contributed to other processing activities. For example, it planted 40 ha of olive trees, with a local agricultural company, Castel di Guido, responsible for processing these olives into olive oil. Income from the sale of the oil is shared.

Some institutional relationships have proved difficult, in part because the cooperative has traditionally functioned quite independently from other institutions. For example, all of the cooperative’s activities must conform to the Regional Park’s ‘Territorial environmental management and agricultural improvement’ plan,’ which requires it to request authorization every time it wishes to construct or modify buildings.

¹⁴ - <http://www.arsialweb.it/cms/index/php>



Conclusion:

The significance of Agricoltura Nuova

Today, Agricoltura Nuova legally occupies 250 hectares and employs 50 people full-time in its farming activities. Over the last 30 years, it has progressively constructed an alternative agricultural model that is autonomous, close to the people and integrated into its local environment. In the minds of the cooperative's members, organic production cannot be dissociated from a variety of activities including both animal husbandry and the cultivation of vegetables; it must also be accompanied by control over the entire production and processing chain and must be sold directly. This model has managed to provide quality products at reasonable prices while maintaining high levels of employment.

The cooperative is not only recognized for its agricultural activities. It is widely viewed as one of Italy's first experiments in social agriculture and as an exemplary agricultural model that uses educational and environmental activities to restore a strong bond between the territory and the citizens who live there. This experiment, which was born out of a very particular political and historical context, seems difficult to reproduce today. Current challenges and concerns have changed, and the divide between the urban and rural worlds has become more pronounced; land access is more difficult in a context where farmable land is rare and prices are high. However, new dynamics are developing with the population's increasing desire to 'return to the land' and establish closer relationships with producers. There are currently many initiatives aiming to recreate relationships with the land and with agricultural activity around new values, such as respect for the environment and through community bonds. A new social contract is forming in Italy, between farmers and society.

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Access to land for Community Connected Agriculture in Europe Project 2010-1

This case study is part of a broader project on Access to land for Community Connected Agriculture in Europe run by a group of European civil society organisations.

Project Presentation

Our European project on Access to Land for Community Connected Agriculture focused on experiences of Community Connected Farming where there have been particular issues related to gaining and maintaining access to land.

We define Community Connected Agriculture as:

- sustainable, i.e. with no chemical inputs and minimal use of external and non-renewable resources, such as organic farming or extensive grazing;
- civic, i.e. concerned with the broader social, economic, environmental and cultural implications of caring for the land and producing food and/or engaging directly with their community;
- local, i.e. open onto their local environment and nurturing the local social and economic fabric through direct marketing, on-farm transformation, job creation, social activities, consumers' participation, etc.

The objectives of the project were:

- To document such experiences, through seven case studies and a mapping exercise of about 100 community-connected farms and related projects throughout northern, southern and central Europe;
- To disseminate information about and analyses of these experiences and the difficulties that they have faced, to feed into the broader public debate about the future of European agriculture and rural areas.

Local, civic agriculture is developing in Europe, and is gaining broader support from consumers, citizens, civic organisations and local authorities. Such farms often have many benefits: they provide local and quality food to consumers; they contribute to the protection of the environment and the reduction of farming's carbon footprint; they often create more jobs, per hectare, than more conventional farms; they contribute to the maintenance of green belts

around cities; and they are often multifunctional and pluriactive farms, which reinforces their economic sustainability and the vitality and viability of rural areas.

At the same time, one key obstacle to the preservation and development of local, civic agriculture is that many such farms are unable to compete successfully for access to sufficient land that is in good condition. Such civic farmers often struggle to find agricultural land that is available to them at affordable price and on secure terms. A question at the core of our project therefore was to explore these difficulties and, where possible, to identify innovative solutions.

Project Partners

The project was coordinated by Sjoerd Wartena and Véronique Rioufol - Terre de liens (France) and Titus Bahner - Forum Synergies (Europe). Neil Ravenscroft - University of Brighton and Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farms (UK), Jan Douwe van der Ploeg - Wageningen University (Netherlands), Audrius Jokubauskas - Viva sol (Lithuania), Peter Volz - Regionalwert AG/ Die Agronauten (Germany), and Marta Fraticelli - aGter (France/ international) were all active partners of the project.

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Contact:

We welcome information and contact regarding similar European initiatives and studies. The results of our work, and on-going activities, are available (from March 2012) on the website of:

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<http://www.terredeliens.org>

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