

Italia / Italy / Italien

Situation in Italy

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Who is saving the diversity of cultivated plants and/or fighting for peasant rights of saving seeds in your country? Who is involved in GMO-free seed production? Are there new groups or networks that are setting up?

1. We have organic seed companies, but they don't work for GMO free production and are not interested in saving diversity. Regarding the fight of saving seeds, we don't have farmers' union or other seed producers involved in it. It is not yet an issue for farmers, even if it is a topic of other social movements.

Please give some examples for using cultivated biodiversity. How do you see the importance of peasant, local or traditional varieties for agriculture and vegetable gardening?

2. we have many examples of cultivated biodiversity, mainly in marginal areas where agriculture is not so industrialized. The use of local or traditional varieties is still important in Italy but it is quite hard to estimate its value. It is sure that could be a problem for organic farmers if they will be obliged to use only certified seed instead of their own seeds produced on farm. Two examples of use of local varieties are:
 - a. the Quarantina potato in Liguria. In this case a local variety of potato has been the starting point for the sustainable development of the marginal area of the Appenini. More and more farmers and also consumers are involved in it and now this community is creating an association;
3. the wheat project in Tuscany has been set up by the University of Florence. It consists in using old varieties of durum and bread wheat for making pasta and bread in the traditional way. All the process is monitored by health scientists in order to evaluate the impact on consumers' health.

Which are the main (legal) obstacles that constrain you? How can you avoid them?

4. the main obstacles we have is the lack of the implementation of the EU directive 98/95. it would have been a useful tool for our Regions to start disseminating and distributing the seeds they are preserving, collecting and characterising. Last month the Parliament voted a new law on conservation varieties, proposed by Semi Rurali, but it is not yet in force. We have to wait for a decree made by the Ministry of Agriculture. At the moment the situation is stopped because officials in the Minister prefer to wait for the coming text of Eu directive on conservation varieties instead of creating an Italian law. For Semi Rurali the importance of having the Italian law before the EU directive is that our law is much more flexible with more space for biodiversity and farmers. The last text of the EU directive is too strict and not able to recreate the flow of seeds necessary for preserving and improving biodiversity.

Which are the public gene banks in your country? What is the cooperation with them like? Do the gene banks have public access? How do they assure GMO-free quality?

5. we have an interesting law on public seed banks, but is not put in practice. We have many public banks from national to local level, including public university. The access is very complicated at the moment and as we know the access is only for scientists and they don't have measures to assure GMO-free quality.

What are the perspectives of public gene banks for the future in your country?

6. if the regional laws continue and improve their work a field level, public seed banks could be a fundamental piece of a local seed system.
7. in Italy biodiversity in agriculture is a topic for universities, public institution and intellectuals. If local varieties have an economic value (as in the case of geographic indications), farmers are interested on the market and not more on the varieties. In many cases they simply replace the old varieties with modern ones, but continue to use the old name. are consumers able to understand the difference? Unfortunately, not! We are talking about traditional, old, local varieties and the problem is conserve or preserve biodiversity. The debate on creating new varieties by farmers' selection is completely absent in Italy. Innovation is still considered a matter of scientists, breeders or professionals. It is important to say that farmers' union are completely absent from this scenery.