

SUPURBFOOD is a research project funded by the European Commission's 7th Framework Program. It aims to contribute to the development of sustainable modes of urban and peri-urban food provisioning.

About the project

Until recent, short food supply chains and multifunctional agriculture were considered to be part of the rural development realm. However, this project looks at these topics from the perspective of urban rather than rural development. Short food supply chains have been advocated as a means to reduce the environmental impact of the agro-food system. However, to improve the ecological performance of the agro-food system other flows (e.g. nutrient, water, and urban waste) need to be considered as well. In the current context these aspects are usually treated separately. This project will treat them in an integrated manner.

Approach

Research will be carried out in seven European city-regions (Rotterdam (NL), Rome (IT), Ghent (BE), Vigo (ES), Bristol (UK), Zürich (CH) and Riga (LV)) in collaboration with a diverse group of SMEs to further innovate in urban and peri-urban food provisioning, nutrient, water and waste management, and multifunctional use of urban and peri-urban space. Finally the project will also establish links with researchers, policymakers and SMEs in these domains in developing countries. This will be organised through a process of dialogue, sharing of experiences, exchanging of best practices and joint learning.

More information

www.supurbfood.eu



What is "Casale Vecchio" about?

"Casale Vecchio" ("Old Farmhouse") is an organic and biodynamic farm settled in the countryside in the north of Rome, in the heart of the Regional Park of Vejo.

The principal activity is horticulture, with more than 30 different varieties of fruit and vegetables grown following biodynamic method and permaculture. Other activities include grazing, bee keeping, fruit trees and olive trees, about 250 egg laying chickens and some horses.

Six hectares of wood enriched with wildlife are also part of the farm property, together with about 9 hectares of meadows and grass. Processed food is also sold by the farm, though produced by a specialized firm with Casale Vecchio's primary products.

Who is involved?

The farm was founded in 2006 by a group of families who had moved to an 18th century farmhouse in the countryside North of Rome. They became also owners of some hectares of land and had to decide how to use them, according to the regulation of the Regional Park where the site was located. Their social beliefs led to the establishment of a farm which aims at being inclusive of both socially disadvantaged and disabled people. Since 2008 onwards persons with these problems have actually worked in the farm.

The farmer comes from previous experiences in the agricultural and in the catering sectors made in the UK. He came back to Italy after five years overseas and got in touch with the families. Shortly afterwards the farmer and his wife decided to cooperate with the initiative, and now they are member of the administrative board alongside some of the founders.

Which activities are carried out?

Products are firstly sold to the funders themselves, that buy products through purchase groups. In the farmer's words "It's like the buy food from themselves". Other purchase groups have also been formed, in particular the northern parts of the city. Northern outskirts round the via Cassia are residential areas inhabited by middle-high class households, who have the possibility to pay higher prices for high quality products, and this is the target of the farm. In particular two other collective purchase initiatives are customers of the farm: a social purchase group, the "*Casale del Podere rosa*" and the consumers' association "*Equologica*".

Another share of the production is sold to macrobiotics corner shops throughout the city. Relationships with kindergartens and school refectories or for high quality restaurants have also been established, and provide other outputs for the farm produce (macrobiotics shops and kindergarten are the only cases of food transport organized by Casale Vecchio: in the other cases customers pick up products directly on farm).

Where is Casale Vecchio located?

The farm is settled in a beautiful protected natural area, with woods and green hills in a typical roman countryside landscape, though very close to the city (see the red mark with "A"). The closeness to residential middle and high class areas has been important for the development of a business based on high quality products with a price higher than average (as well as for the support that professionals customers are capable to give the farm, when needed).



Lessons from Casale Vecchio for SUPURBFOOD

- ✓ High quality productions can profit of urban centres to find middle-class consumers who are willing and capable to pay a price premium for their food
- ✓ The creation of a network among producers and customers gives opportunities for the farm to profit of customers' skills and relations
- ✓ The location in protected area gives room for multifunctional activities but the relations with environmental regulation must be carefully managed
- ✓ Disabled and disadvantaged people can be employed in a small farm with mutual advantage, if farmer's culture and sensibility supports their activity

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