



Country Report for Italy

Work Package: WP01 - Regulation & policy framework regarding production, use, and transparency of organic seed

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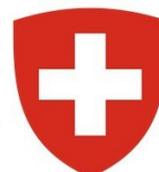
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About the report

This report has been produced in the framework of the Horizon 2020-funded project LIVESEED.¹ The main aim of LIVESEED is to boost the production and use of organic seeds and plant breeding for organic agriculture across Europe. It is co-ordinated by IFOAM EU, and its scientific coordinator is FiBL-CH.

Work Package 01 of LIVESEED explores EU Member States in terms of their implementation and best practices connected to the EU Organic Regulations, in the contexts of national regulatory and policy frameworks, specifically regarding the production, use, and transparency of organic seed.

As part of this Work Package, Bionext, FiBL-DE and IFOAM EU visited selected countries during 2017-2018, where the organic seed production is low, to understand their bottlenecks and possibilities for improvements regarding the production and the use of organic seeds at the national level. During the visits, several stakeholder groups were interviewed (competent authorities, seed database managers, seed companies, research institutions, organic farmers, seed associations, organic certifiers, etc) in each country.

The main outcomes of the visits were summarized in country reports presenting the status quo for that given Member State. The reports' findings then were disseminated among a wide range of national stakeholders in 2019 and discussed during workshops to define viable next steps to improve the status quo in each country. The Workshop for Italy took place on 19th September in Firenze and was co-organised by the LIVESEED partner Rete Semi Rurali.

This country report is recommended for national policymakers, and all stakeholders involved in the production and use of organic seed: national authorities, farmers, certifiers, producers, retailers, plant breeders, seed authorities, and the general public.

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¹ <http://liveseed.eu>



Implementation of the regulation on organic seed in Italy

Findings from the national visit to Italy, 4-8th September 2018

1. General information

In 2018, there were 79,046 organic farmers in Italy covering 15.5 % (1.9 million hectares) of the agricultural land area. From this area 53% is grassland, 19% is covered with arable crops, 25% are permanent crops and 3% are vegetables (source: SINAB, 2019).

2. Production and use of organic seed

Due to the good climate for seed production, many seed companies locate their seed multiplication in Italy. Assosementi, a trade organization that represents the Italian seed industry, has 160 members. About 8-10% of the members produce or trade organic seed. Another association of seed producers "Asseme" has three of their 30 members producing organic seed.

Cooperativa Agricola Cesenate (C.A.C.) is an Italian farmer cooperative for seed multipliers. They multiply seeds for seed companies on a contract basis and work with specialized farmers. C.A.C. has about 2.200 members and around 100 of them are organic farmers, which results in 3 to 5 % of their seeds being organic. They mainly produce vegetable organic seeds for international companies. The price the farmers receive is connected to the yield, but if the seed production fails the farmer is compensated. When the demand for organic seed grows, they try to find new organic farmers for seed production, instead of making their conventional farmers convert. The farmers associated with C.A.C. are supported by the technical staff of C.A.C, which takes care of several aspects of seed multiplication, from checking the isolation distances and delivery of stock-seed for planting to the collection of the harvested seeds.

In addition to the seed market, there is a large informal seed system in Italy in which farmers produce and exchange seeds, mainly from local and traditional varieties and often only within their network. One of these farmers seed networks is Rete Semi Rurali, which focuses on local and organic seed systems. Furthermore, there is a lot of farm-saved seed used, especially in cereal production. For some crops, for instance wheat, it is estimated that over 50% of the seed used is farm-saved. When organic farmers re-use their seed, it is accepted as organic seed. This means they can use it without asking for derogation.

3. Implementation of the EU regulation: the database and derogation policy

In general, the organic farming office of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Forestry, and Tourism Policies (MIPAAFT) is responsible for the organic seed database and the derogation report. However, certain tasks like the management of the seed database and individual derogation requests were delegated to CREA, the National Agricultural Research Institute operating under the supervision of the Ministry.

At the time of the national visit, the organic seed database consisted of a static downloadable table, which was nearly empty and not functioning well. Most of the organic seed on the market was sold directly to farmers and not through the database. At the end of February 2019 though, a new organic seed database came online, also introducing a new derogation request system. In this database, there are three categories: a general derogation list (green list) with currently 517 crops, a single derogation list (yellow list) with 201 crops and a non-derogation list (red list) which is still empty.



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All seed companies that have a branch and an organic certification in Italy can register their varieties on the database. If Farmers want to use conventional seed from a crop that is listed on the single derogation list (yellow) they must ask for a derogation online.

4. Policy measures to increase production and use of organic seed

To improve the situation on the use of organic seed, the Ministry issued a national decree in 2017, with three main aims: (i) to establish a computerised database (BDS) of organic seed availability; (ii) to define a list of equivalent cultivars to reduce the number of derogations; (iii) to simplify the procedure necessary for the granting of derogations. The decree led to the establishment of the already mentioned new database and a new derogation system in 2019. Besides that, there are two expert groups concerning organic seeds. One of those works on political issues and taking political decisions and the other is focused on the technical/research aspects to advise the political group. The main role of the technical group is to monitor the implementation of the new database and to establish which crops can be assigned to the three database categories.

5. Breeding research and field trials

The government is funding organic breeding research and field trials at CREA for rice, durum wheat, tomato, and heterogeneous material (CCPs). CREA has a crucial role in monitoring the outcome of the experiment on marketing heterogeneous cereal populations (decision 2014/150/EU), which was extended until February 2021.

CREA's research site in Monsampolo (as part of the research centre for vegetables and horticulture) and has a certified organic farm of 1 hectare. On this site, 18 years ago, CREA started a long-term experiment MOVE LTE, which includes 6 cash crops and 3 cover crops. The purpose of this rotation is high soil coverage (also in winter) and high biodiversity. In this long-term research, the organic system is evaluated on sustainability, sub-divided into four topics: agronomy, genetics, environment, and economics.

As part of the LIVESEED project, CREA researchers are supporting a participatory tomato breeding program, which aims to develop varieties adaptable to climate change and organic growing conditions. They make crossings of populations to create heterogeneous material and try to find out if heterogeneous material also has advantages in vegetables: proof of concept. CREA is also involved in the project BRESOV for organic vegetable breeding in broccoli, snap bean and tomato. There, the aim is to establish a core collection of genotypes for each species and exploring the genetic basis of main traits for organic cultivation and develop molecular markers.

6. Obstacles and opportunities

The large-size organic farmers in Italy are mainly looking for hybrid varieties to produce uniform products for large scale distribution. For them, the price is the most dominant factor in choosing the seed. They do not see the advantage of using (more expensive) organic seed if the organic varieties are the same as the ones used in conventional farming. In addition, the processor is often more influential in the choice of varieties than the farmer. Sometimes farmers even get the seeds from the buyer of their product.

On the other end, there is a strong interest in the Italian market for products from old, local and niche varieties. Unlike conventional farmers, organic farmers cannot easily grow these products because the varieties used are often not registered. In those cases, organic farmers don't get a derogation for the use of the seed from these varieties.



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Another obstacle in view of some farmers is that the available organic seed does not perform as well as the conventional seed and that there are hardly any varieties on the market that are especially bred for organic farming. In the last years two National Seed Action Plans included field trials. Based on those results, a list of varieties that are suitable for organic farming (for some crops) was developed. Unfortunately, this list is never used.

Several seed companies that have started with organic seeds in Italy stopped again because they could not find a market for their seeds. According to them, this is due to the derogation policy which makes it very easy for farmers to avoid the use of organic seed. Farmers then use the database to look for a variety that is not organically available. Seed producers also face contamination problems during seed multiplication. For instance, pumpkin and zucchini seeds easily absorb chemicals from the soil. Even chemicals from the seventies can be found sometimes. If organic seeds are contaminated, they are downgraded to conventional seeds.

An opportunity is that the farmers in the consortium Conmarchebio are encouraged to use organic seed. They are educated about its advantages and the consortium creates financial incentives to use it, for example through an agreement with a seed supplier that gives a 10% discount if members of the cooperative buy organic seeds. Furthermore, those farmers can get their seed-purchase pre-financed by Conmarchebio.

Another opportunity is that CREA has 45 test locations for variety registration across Italy and they intend to create a network for organic test fields within this system.

7. Recommendations from the stakeholders

- The Ministry should organize a dialogue between farmers and seed companies to match their requirements and learn about the specific organic growing conditions.
- The Ministry should establish a new national action plan for organic seed. This is needed to consolidate the activity for the evaluation of the appropriate varieties for organic farming.
- The regions should include measures that encourage organic farmers to produce or use organic seed, in their regional action plan for organic farming.
- Prohibit derogation when there is sufficient availability of organic seed for a certain crop; create a non-derogation list (red list).
- The seed expert groups from the Ministry need more technical expertise to make decisions on this subject. Seed producers are currently not involved but should be considered.
- Seed companies must produce organic seeds from varieties that have an added value for organic farmers.
- There is funding needed for organic breeding research to better match varieties to specific organic growing conditions.
- Develop a standard certification and logo for organically bred varieties so products from these varieties can be recognized by consumers.
- Organic farmers need more legal possibilities to exchange seeds.
- Create a place on the internet (a pre-database) where farmers share with breeders what varieties they need and what they grow. This could be a first step before a database-system, where crops can be identified for the red list. Working together with a growing



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group of organic farmers that are committed to using organic varieties might be a better strategy than forcing farmers to use organic seed. In this way, a snowball-effect can be created that is solid enough for breeders to invest in organic seed.

- Breeding researchers need an international network to combine and share their knowledge on the complex topic of organic breeding. This is needed to have more insight in what directions and decisions they need to make in organic crop breeding.

8. More information

Italian seed database:

www.sian.it/conSpeBio/index.xhtml

Derogation reports:

<http://scs.entecra.it/biologico-indice/autorizz-concesse.html>

National legislation for organic farming:

<http://www.sinab.it/normative/all/all>

National Information system on Organic Farming:

<http://www.sinab.it/content/bio-statistiche>

Italian seed association:

www.sementi.it/

C.A.C.:

www.cacseeds.it/eng/colture-cac.asp

Instruction to register as a user of the database and/or sent an online derogation request:

<http://scs.entecra.it/biologico-indice/biologic.html>

Ministry Decree Nr 15130/2017:

https://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/atto/serie_generale/caricaDettaglioAtto/originario?atto.dataPubblicazioneGazzetta=2017-04-24&atto.codiceRedazionale=17A02812&elenco30giorni=false



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