



UNISECO



European Union's
Horizon 2020
Programme
GA N° 773901

Promoting cropping system diversification in a highly specialised and market-oriented winegrowing area

Foto: A. Povellato

Understanding and Improving the Sustainability of Agro-ecological Farming Systems in the EU

ISSUE BRIEF

Crop diversification is a key element of agroecological transition. New local food chains and the recovery of abandoned land can be part of a strategy aimed at improving the resilience of specialised and market-oriented areas.

In Chianti, the environmental issues generated by vineyard monocropping led some farmers to cooperate to create a "Biodistrict", a grassroots initiative based on strategic planning that supports the use of abandoned land for crop diversification (olive groves, cereals, vegetables) and the creation of new food chains.

ABANDONMENT OF MARGINAL LAND

A key negative effect of high-profitable vineyard monocropping is the abandonment of marginal land, which has reduced the quality of the cultural landscape and biodiversity and led to woody encroachment. Increasing crop diversification can address those issues. However, the lack of coordination among farmers and between farmers and downstream actors in the value chain is among the main barriers to crop diversification.

RECOVERING CROPS THROUGH NEW FOOD CHAINS

Chianti Biodistrict's actors identified a strategy to support the agroecological diversification in Chianti via the removal of key barriers. The strategy includes a series of initiatives that should be activated by local actors in the short-mid-term to stimulate horizontal and vertical collaboration.

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Country:
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**Related to UNISECO
case study:**

Chianti Biodistrict

Languages:
EN, IT

Year of release:
2021

Publisher:
UNISECO project

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The co-construction of the strategy.

The strategy was co-constructed via a participatory process that involved a series of workshops with local actors and policy experts.

Key initiatives are as follows: setting up pilot projects to activate new local food chains; strengthening farm advisory services to cover both the agronomic and marketing aspects of the agroecological transition; improving the coordination with local supply chains to make effective and further promote existing public and private procurements initiatives.

POTENTIAL OUTCOMES

Recovering crop production on abandoned land could improve the care for rural landscape elements and increase farming system resilience to economic shocks, by creating the basis for new local food chain and synergies with restaurants and tourism. Having acknowledged that Biodistricts can support the agroecological redesign of the farming system at the territorial level, in 2019 Tuscany Region has enforced a Law on Organic Districts that recognises Biodistricts as institutional actors.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Chianti Biodistrict website - <https://www.biodistrettodelchianti.it/index-en.html>

UNISECO project website – Case Studies – Italy - <https://uniseco-project.eu/case-study/italy>

ABOUT UNISECO:

UNISECO is a European research project aiming to develop innovative approaches to enhance the understanding of socio-economic and policy drivers and barriers for further development and implementation of agro-ecological practices in EU farming systems.

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Project timeframe: 1 May 2018 – 30 April 2021

<https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/773901>

<https://zenodo.org/communities/uniseco-h2020/>

UNISECO in the EIP-Agri projects database:

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This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement N° 773901. This issue brief represents the views of the authors. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.