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REGIONE DEL VENETO



FONDO EUROPEO AGRICOLO PER LO SVILUPPO RURALE: L'EUROPA INVESTE NELLE ZONE RURALI

A plan for conversion to organic farming

The objective of the SHEEP ALL. CHAIN project is the valorisation of the limited sheep breed farms in the Belluno area, the Alpagò and Lamon breeds, with computerised sharing of genealogical data and production traceability. Valorisation will be achieved both through more scientific aspects relating to the computerised sharing of all useful data to safeguard the presence and continuity of these two breeds, thanks to the support of the University of Padua, and through territorial marketing actions, because the valorisation of the productions linked to the two breeds cannot take place without the valorisation of the territory. The improvement of the competitiveness of the farms of the autochthonous sheep breeds with limited diffusion in the province of Belluno, the Alpagò and Lamon breeds.

The objective of improving herd management also includes a feasibility study for the conversion to organic farming in the Alpagò area, evaluating its future applicability also for farms in the Lamon area. In fact, organic farming promotes the use of native breeds, the choice of which must take into account the animals' ability to adapt to local conditions as well as their vitality and resistance to disease, and requires access to pasture with limited loads, conditions that lend themselves well to the Alpagò context. All the more so in this area where grazing is the only way to reach meadows and pastures that would otherwise be abandoned and left to the forest.

The elements for a feasibility plan

The elements needed to formulate a feasibility plan for a sustainable and feasible conversion to organic farming are the following:

- analysis of the objectives and attitudes of farmers, who are the main actors in this potential evolution;
- analysis of strengths and weaknesses (SWOT analysis) of the Alpagò Lamb production sector and of the territory (agro-ecosystem), with respect to the conversion to the organic system, with particular attention also to management and economic aspects in view of the intrinsic variability of sheep farms;
- innovative proposals to encourage conversion.

Analysis of farmers' objectives and attitudes

In the implementation of the organic conversion plan, an intense and in-depth analysis of the economic-management characteristics of organic-oriented farms was carried out, identifying the critical points and possible strong points in relation to the mountain context of reference. In fact, once the convenience of certifying sheep farms as organic has been assessed, it must also be efficient in terms of the economic cost required to sustain the certification process and its renewal over the years, and in terms of time since it requires specific technical and bureaucratic formalities. These evaluations are not secondary with respect to the advisability of organic farming because they can highlight how in the short to medium term this is an unsustainable solution.

In order to carry out this analysis, a round table was set up to discuss and collaborate with breeders of both native Alpagò and Lamon sheep breeds, carrying out a complete survey on the central aspects assessed in the certification phase: type of management, area management, flock size and management, feeding, supply chain. The collection of data and information for drawing up the conversion plan followed two parallel paths: the first was a survey by means of a series of questionnaires addressed to the farmers of the two indigenous breeds of sheep and farm visits. The second is an analysis of the regulatory sources and of the organic sector in the livestock sector, also by means of telematic meetings with certification bodies to compare the possibilities offered by the legislation, in particular for the collective certification foreseen from 1 January 2022, EU Regulation 848/2018.



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SWOT analysis

The collected data were used to develop a SWOT Analysis in order to evaluate strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and criticalities related to the conversion to organic farming in the Alpagota area, also in comparison with the data collected in the two Lamon sheep farms, and to define a model of conversion to organic farming that could be replicated in marginal mountain areas, evaluating the opportunity to include a district reasoning.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Type of farming already suitable for organic farming Rustic breed promoting cultural identity Strong cooperation (e.g. Slow Food Presidium) Possibility of networking helps small entities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulties (management costs and paperwork) related to certification, especially for small and very small entities Overloading of commitments to manage grazing animals due to the return of predators Traceability
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organic market growth Sales of lambs on the increase among Alpagota restaurateurs Potential link with ecotourism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Closure of the supply chain: lack of infrastructure, services, processing facilities Fragmented territory Predations Marginality of the sheep sector compared to other livestock sectors

Table 1: SWOT analysis on conversion to organic farming for small mountain farms

Innovative perspectives for conversion

The proposal to proceed towards conversion to organic farming has attracted the interest of at least three Alpagota sheep farmers interested in converting their farm in the short term, and then potentially involving the entire Fardjma cooperative. These possibilities are to be evaluated in at least two steps, also on the suggestion of the Agro-Food Directorate of the Veneto Region after a meeting with them:

- Possibility to access the consultancy courses financed under measure 2 of the RDP (path P4.13.1 - Consultancy aimed at guiding the entrepreneur towards conversion to organic farming), in order to encourage the conversion of individual farms.
- assess collective certification, as required by the new EU Regulation 848/2018, in force from 1 January 2022

This strategy can also be active in the Lamon breed, where there is interest from both some breeders and public bodies (Lamon Municipality, Istituto Agrario Della Lucia).

The results of the analysis

From the analysis carried out it emerges that, from a management point of view, the Alpagotas sheep farms are structured in such a way that they do not require particular adaptations for conversion to organic farming. Critical issues are mainly related to the commitments required for certification and traceability. In this sense, the prospect is to leverage strong cooperation in order to encourage small producers to convert to organic production, also taking advantage of the possibilities offered by the evolution of regulations. Similar considerations can be made for the Lamon breed, where, however, production volumes are currently very

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