



UNIONE COMUNI GARFAGNANA

The preservation of agricultural, plant and animal biodiversity as an element of landscape protection and territorial identity.

Safeguarding agricultural, plant and animal biodiversity

In each territory there are particular productions that represent elements of culture and identity. These are often animal or vegetable species that have evolved as a result of the soil characteristics of the territory, but also the traditions of the producers. They represent an immense value both as a genetic heritage and as elements of the culture of the places, which we cannot afford to lose, even if they are not always products with a certain commercial value.

In particular, in Garfagnana the balance still existing between resources and human presence, where the population has been for centuries the "guardian" of the very nature of the territory, has created real unique containers of different genetic material that evolves and develops locally and that are the object of interest for the preservation of genetic variability.

In reality, biodiversity in the territory represents not only the genetic and agronomic but also cultural variability of the population that constitutes it, so much so that one of the most important elements of this genetic-cultural complex is the "knowledge" of local populations, a sign of the identity of places as a result of the integration between culture and environment, to the point that we can consider biodiversity a resource only if both biological and knowledge aspects are present simultaneously.

It is a path that requires constant guidance, from awareness of the cultural value of one's own production, to awareness of the importance of working together to achieve a shared goal.

Garfagnana and biodiversity

The Garfagnana is the high valley of the Serchio, on the northern edge of Tuscany, between the Apuan Alps and the Tuscan-Emilian Apennines.

From the administrative point of view it is divided into 15 small municipalities.

The landscape is very diversified: on the one hand it is separated from the sea by the Apuan Alps, calcareous, rocky and impervious, on the other hand the sweetest landscape of the Apennines, of sandstone matrix. Inside the numerous secondary chains that develop from Apuane and Apennines form a dense system of side valleys and minor reliefs, which make the orography particularly rugged.

The considerable portion of the territory at high altitudes (about 35% of its 53. 770 are above 1000 meters above sea level) and the relatively low average annual temperatures, make it a difficult mountain area and economically penalized, subject to the dynamics and phenomena that have marked the Italian mountain.

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SERVIZIO TECNICO, ASSETTO TERRITORIO, FORESTAZIONE E PROTEZIONE CIVILE

U.O. VINCOLO IDROGEOLOGICO E BIODIVERSITA'

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Agricultural activity is marginal, from an economic point of view, compared to areas with a higher agricultural vocation, where greater production results are achieved. Agricultural activity is marginal, from an economic point of view, compared to areas with a higher agricultural vocation, where greater production results are achieved.

For centuries, the local economy was based on agricultural-pastoral activity aimed almost exclusively at self-consumption or at a very limited market.

It was a "subsistence" agriculture, but still rich in products, which covered the whole year. The agricultural technique was poor, so the crops and varieties most suited to the environment were affirmed, less demanding, even if with reduced productivity.

Significant differences between micro-environments have therefore given rise, over the centuries, to a remarkable biodiversity, enriched also by external contributions. In fact, some legends tell of seeds coming from far away countries, such as Australia or the United States, carried, in the first years of 1900, by returning emigrants.

This model of development entered into crisis in the 20th century and in particular after the Second World War with the affirmation of industrialization at a national level.

The primary activity was not able to guarantee the workers an adequate income and standard of living and there was a progressive abandonment of the countryside and of the rural environment in general, partly in favour of the main centre characterized by a more industrial and commercial economy and with a better endowment of services and infrastructures, and partly with a distance from the valley.

Industrial development, even for inadequate road infrastructure, has not, however, been a major practical alternative for the area.

Since the 1980s, with the greatest attention to the environment, the growing demand for nature and authenticity, and the increased awareness of the value of rural areas, the particular characteristics of the Garfagnana area have been highlighted.

Also thanks to the development of new market trends, an increasing share of agriculture began to change its production structure towards the realization of higher quality products, in particular the adherence to certified products (organic, PDO, PGI) and began the first experiences of realization of short supply chains.

Over time, the sector, while confirming a downward trend, has seen the remaining companies implement interesting initiatives towards the diversification of production and research systems of short supply chain for quality products, and it has begun to register the entry of some new entrepreneurial figures young and active.

Recently, the socio-cultural substratum understood as a set of customs, popular traditions, social relations, use of the territory, has taken up new stimulus from the convergence of the attention of all those tourist users who are also attentive to the characteristic cultural elements, which is giving a new slant to the economic structure of the area.

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In this process, over the years, the patrimony of agricultural biodiversity has been considerably impoverished by the competition of more competitive varieties, but it has nevertheless come down to us, with a wealth of knowledge, customs and skills inextricably linked to it, thanks also to the particular link existing between the Garfagnana and its origins.

In fact, the negative conditions that have prevented the development of intensive agriculture have favoured the maintenance of varieties and breeds that are perfectly adapted to the environment, often a raw material for the expression of traditional gastronomic culture.

These are examples where the processes involved in the rearing or cultivation cycle represent maximum environmental sustainability for that environment

Finally, these are local products that have, over time, shaped the landscape, the result of the constant interaction between man and the environment, which today increasingly assumes a productive value in relation to the multifunctionality of companies, the interaction between the different production sectors (tourism, crafts) and in the protection of the territory..

The action of the Union of Garfagnana Municipalities

The Union of Garfagnana Municipalities is a public organization established in 1976 with the task of promoting rural development in the area.

It is a Consortium of Municipalities that brings together 14 municipalities, for which it performs various functions: forest management, civil protection, land use, tourism, development of inland areas, rural development.

Since its establishment, it has been involved in the sustainable development of the territory and the enhancement of typical agricultural products.

Since the early 2000s, it has taken important action to safeguard the biodiversity cultivated and bred for the recovery of the important heritage of species, knowledge and traditions, ancora present in the area, and able to trigger participatory processes with the communities of farmers spreading, in a network between producers and consumers increasingly aware, a new relationship between a land and its inhabitants.

To this end, specific projects have been activated that have received awards and have given life to the "Garfagnana model".

The action of the Unione Comuni Garfagnana has taken place within the regional system of conservation and valorisation of local variety breeds (LR 56/97 and 60/04) and the national system (Law 194/2015).

In the "Garfagnana model" are present:

- one of the regional offices of the Germoplasma Bank where more than 200 plant varieties recovered in the territory are preserved and reproduced,

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- 40 "guardian farmers" who over time have formed an informal but very active network that promotes knowledge of traditional crops and the values of identity associated with them,

The phase of recovery of the genetic material began with the "Home Gardens" project, which focused on the family gardens of small villages, precious places of conservation "in situ", where, unconsciously, a precious work of safeguarding biodiversity was carried out.

In 2005, the "Seeds of Knowledge" project was launched in the phase of recovering the genetic material, involving local schools in order to carry out a more widespread survey of the territory and to establish direct contact with the local community.

In the next phase of analysis and characterization, the "Presidium" project activated collaboration with the research institutes for all those actions that require in-depth scientific knowledge (from the characterization of the varieties to the technical organization of conservation).

To date, the following are kept in the Bank at the La Piana Centre

- 35 local herbaceous varieties 28 from Garfagnana (beans -10-, cereals -9-, tomatoes, potatoes, pumpkins) and 7 from neighbouring territories;
- 190 varieties of fruit trees (apples, pears, figs, cherries, plums, peaches), 26 of which are listed in regional registers in a collection of 435 fruit trees
- 50 traditional vines in a collection of 1200 vines.

The "Garfagnana model" has also developed and collaborated projects:

- of recovering local breeds, such as: the "Garfagnina Bianca" sheep breed and the "Mucca Garfagnina" cow breed (VAGAL project);
- in 2017 it set up the 1st Community of Food and Agrobiodiversity of Tuscany, which in 2019 became an association of social promotion for the enhancement of Biodiversity.

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