



TERRITORIAL BIO-DISTRICTS
to boost organic production

IDEASS^{ITALY}

Innovation for Development and South-South Cooperation



Presentation

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A bio-district is a geographical area where farmers, citizens, tourist operators, associations and public authorities enter into an agreement for the sustainable management of local resources, based on organic production and consumption (short food chain, purchasing groups, organic canteens in public offices and schools). In bio-districts, the promotion of organic produce is inextricably linked with the promotion of the land and its special characteristics so that it can fully realise its economic, social and cultural potential.

The first bio-district was launched in Italy in 2009 by the AIAB Associazione Italiana per l'Agricoltura Biologica (Italian Association for Organic Agriculture) in an area inside the National Park of the Cilento, Vallo di Diano and Alburni. After 3 years, the Cilento bio-district now includes 30 municipalities, 400 enterprises, 20 restaurants and 10 tourist establishments that use local organic produce. Today it constitutes a permanent national and international workshop of culturally significant ideas and initiatives aimed at fair trade and local development founded on the organic production model.

Having seen the economic, environmental and social impact of the Cilento Biodistrict, the Associazione Italiana per l'Agricoltura Biologica, which launched this innovative practice, is actively engaged in promoting and coordinating bio-districts in other areas of the country. Bio-districts have been set up in Grekanico in the Calabria Region, Via Amerina and Forre in the Lazio Region, and Greve in Chianti in the Tuscany Region.

For over 20 years, the AIAB (Italian Association for Organic Agriculture), a non-profit organisation with more than 7000 members, has been promoting the organic model and the fair, sustainable and environmentally friendly management of land. The association also promotes the creation of Mediterranean and international bio-district networks and works closely with the European Union in campaigns to promote organic production.

What problem does it help solve?

A territorial bio-district is an innovative solution, in line with the aims agreed at the United Nations World Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, in particular the Action Plan of Agenda 21, which orients the policies of countries towards sustainable development in which local authorities play a central role. Bio-districts are also in line with the Declaration of Nyéléni, Sélingué (Mali 2007), which declares food sovereignty as the right of peoples to have nutritious and culturally appropriate foods, which are accessible and produced in a sustainable and environmentally friendly way, and the right of peoples to decide their own food production systems.

In the framework of these international commitments, promoting the culture of organic food and the territorial approach means orienting development towards the conservation of resources, environmental compatibility, the valorisation of local differences and, thus, the quality of life. In particular, bio-districts help promote the organic

model in the framework of rural development and fair trade, valorising natural and typical products of an area and the area itself, contributing to a form of economic development that benefits tourism and is based on the respect and valorisation of local resources.



Organic food strategies are changing and it is no longer a question of getting individual enterprises to adopt an eco-sustainable model but the focus is now whole areas with an organic vocation. The aim, therefore, is to put forward a global model capable of giving concrete answers to: social needs for greater environmental quality, less densely populated rural areas, perennial financial crises, and climate emergencies, by promoting innovations in the field of research, production standards, alternative distribution channels, and in the sphere of certification.

Bio-districts can help face challenges in six main areas:

- Mix Farming, agriculture that mixes crop production with animal husbandry and the new frontiers of sustainability (energy, water, biodiversity, quality of life and work). This challenge cannot always be met by farms alone, especially when they are small, and so territorial projects and associations, such as bio-districts, should be promoted.
- Land access, which is increasingly difficult for those who do not have substantial economic resources and in particular for young people who wish to become farmers. Bio-districts can promote a veritable “agricultural renaissance”, marking a break with the past and using the organic model as a reference point for agriculture as a whole, such as to give a new lease of life to state-owned land and uncultivated land, making agricultural work once again a respectable and profitable occupation.

- Fairer relations in the supply chain, establishing direct relations between producers and consumers, adopting alternative distribution channels such as the short supply chain and fair trade groups, and urging public authorities to buy more local produce for canteens in schools, hospitals and other public facilities.
- Food sovereignty, granting local communities the right to decide for themselves what to produce and how to produce it. Public forums are periodically organised in bio-districts to give farmers, other economic stakeholders, public authorities, and the local community the opportunity to meet as equals, and having the same decision-making power, to define ways of meeting food needs.
- Simplified organic produce certification system, making it less bureaucratic, more effective and inclusive, making use of “group certification” and “participatory guarantee systems”. Since there is a high concentration of organic farms in bio-districts, control procedures are easier to implement, and often it is the whole community that helps to check and guarantee the proper application of organic production methods. Farmers, in turn, are given much more responsibility and are motivated by the public recognition of the important social role they play within the local community.
- Organic communication, this must also focus on the “short supply chain”, bringing the communicators and recipients closer together to highlight the ethical, social, and environmental values of organic production. Organic produce is good for producers and consumers alike, for society and the environment.



A particularly important qualitative aspect is the AIAB's work in the field of social agriculture, promoting and supporting cooperatives and farms which, in addition to producing food, perform the social activities of creating employment and offering a therapeutic service for the disadvantaged. Social agriculture has yet to be codified at national, European or international level. The term, though, refers to all the practices used in agriculture and in rural contexts to generate inclusive benefits, such as social inclusion and work placement for the disadvantaged and the marginalized. Social agriculture also involves providing services to people and communities that are “fragile”, generating territorial development and making up for the deficiencies of the centralized welfare state. However, although many private social and institutional actors have shown an interest in this scheme, there are many complex and objective difficulties to be surmounted if new social agricultural enterprises are to be created and the idea consolidated. In fact, different competences are involved and close cooperation required among actors and sectors that generally operate completely separately from each other (agriculture, health, social affairs and labour, education, justice.) In this context, bio-districts can foster new integrated forms of social farming.

Results of particular note have been achieved by the National Program for the Development and Promotion of Organic and Social Farms, which carried out a census in Italy of organic agricultural and social farms (221 in 2010) and promoted the creation of a national network of organic social farms, to facilitate exchange and joint initiatives to promote social inclusion and employment.

In 2013, an information desk will be activated in Italy offering social agriculture consultancy and planning, promoted within the European project Leonardo da Vinci MAIE - Multifunctional Agriculture in Europe, in which the AIAB works with other European partners to set up national social agriculture centres and an online transnational centre.

Bio-districts in practice

Bio-districts create a local network of natural, cultural, and productive resources, valorised by local policies oriented towards the protection of the environment, traditions and local knowledge. Generally, they result from the needs of organic farmers who are looking for local markets that can appreciate their produce, and the public, who are increasingly looking for healthy and environmentally friendly food at fair prices. However, many

other actors and organizations play a crucial role in the establishment and management of bio-districts, especially public authorities and schools which, with their increasingly green activities and purchases, can influence consumer habits and local markets. Tourist operators, in turn, are keen to offer new seasonally adjusted products such as eco-routes and rural tourism.

Commitments and advantages for bio-district stakeholders

Farmers

Farmers are bio-district's major stakeholders; they adhere to the rules of organic farming and are integrated in the local social and environmental context. The advantage they gain from being part of a bio-district is that they can market most of their produce locally, and are part of multifunctional tourist circuit (bio-farms, bio-routes, bio-educational farms, bio-social farms.) Another advantage is that they can promote their produce in the territorial marketing plans activated by bio-districts. In Italy, moreover, the AIAB Guarantee System (local, 100% Italian, GMO free), gives them even more opportunities to valorise and promote their produce.

Consumers

Consumers can buy local organic products, preferably through short supply channels (organic markets, farm outlets, direct distribution, and fair trade groups). Thanks to bio-districts, consumers can count on well-sourced organic products that are traceable, easier to buy and which safeguard the natural resources of the area in which they live. In addition, citizens can benefit from the environmental quality that organic farming guarantees in production areas, and can establish direct relations of trust and mutual cooperation with the producers.





Public authorities

By being part of a bio-district, local and public authorities are committed to spreading the culture of organic food through a wide range of initiatives which:

- declare the area to be GMO-free, providing information and valorising the organic farming model in the local area and to a wider public: brochures of local products and services, calendars of bio-district events that valorise the local culture, tourism and typical produce;
- support green purchases, promoting organic food in the canteens of schools, public offices and health facilities;
- provide assistance to farms that want to change over to organic production;
- implement initiatives to valorise local organic produce: bio-district producers markets, holiday farms that produce and use organic products, organic food catering services, organic restaurants, organic food stores;
- promote the application of organic principles in other areas, such as public parks management, organic waste management, building regulations, and others;
- promote organic farming in state-owned land and collective properties, transforming them into organic farm incubators, with a view also to promoting social agriculture.



Industry

The food industry and the agricultural equipment industry can join bio-districts and benefit from the concentration of organic farms in the area, both for the supply of agricultural equipment and for the production of raw materials for food processing (pasta, animal feed). The tourism industry and catering industry can expand and offer new products, such as bio-menus and seasonally adjusted visits to the most significant agricultural realities, so that tourists can experience a mix of culture, education and fun. A multi-faceted product that attracts tourists and encourages them to prolong their stays.

Research and training centres

These organizations support bio-districts by carrying out trials and training initiatives to consolidate and improve the single initiatives of local stakeholders.

Associations

Environmental associations, agricultural associations, eco-tourism associations and others are all involved in promoting bio-district activities. In particular AIAB coordinates the activities of members, providing know-how and tools, such as standards and marketing brands, which are necessary for the success of an initiative. The AIAB also promotes agreements with organic food control bodies to simplify certification procedures and launch pilot group certification and participatory guarantee schemes. Tourist associations promote eco-tourism in bio-district areas (bio-routes for walkers, cyclists, and horse riders, rural tourism, self-catering holidays, study visits, summer camps for children, young people and families). Environmental associations work to safeguard the land and valorise its natural resources, which forms the basis of the organic agriculture model.



The stages involved in setting up a bio-district

It is of strategic importance, when setting up a bio-district, to get all potential actors involved from the very beginning. This allows the project to meet local needs, expectations, and interests, avoiding exclusions that could hinder the development of the initiative.

To set up and run a successful bio-district, experience shows that the following stages are required:

- Creation of a promotion committee to organize public forums to share objectives and establish project roadmaps. The committee conducts an initial analysis of the area's potential and problems, leading to the drafting of a programmatic document.
- Once interest in setting up a bio-district has been verified, territorial actors willing to support the process (public authorities, producer associations, etc.) are identified and progressively involved in the project. Depending on the actors involved, the perimeter of the bio-district is then defined.
- The participation of public authorities in the bio-district project and coordination activities should be done through official channels. All levels of local government should preferably be involved (municipalities, provinces, regions, park authorities).
- The bio-district's promotion committee then sets up an agreed program of activities to be carried out using existing resources (public and private) and through a communication strategy to find other resources and establish partnerships with local and national actors.
- Local social farming associations and cooperatives are identified to provide management services for bio-district activities (marketing, promotion, logistics, event management, etc).



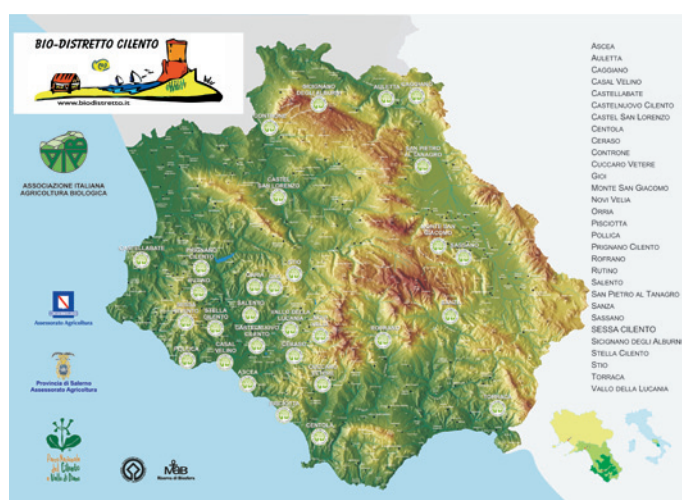
Results of the Cilento Bio-District

The Cilento Bio-district, the first in Italy, highlights the impact that can be created by this innovative solution.

The Cilento Biodistrict is located in the National Park of Cilento, Vallo di Diano and Alburni. It covers an area of 3,196 square kilometres and includes 30 municipalities, 400 organic farms and three major archaeological and cultural sites (Paestum, Padula and Elea-Velia). The Cilento is recognized as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO and by the Network of Biosphere Reserves. It was in the Cilento that Ancel Keys conducted his studies on the Mediterranean diet, which was later recognized by UNESCO as an intangible heritage of humanity. In this land, farmers, citizens and public administrators have formed a pact for the sustainable management of local resources.

In 2004, AIAB started to promote the creation of a bio-district, organising a number of forums and public meetings with agricultural associations, municipalities and other local actors interested in starting a new roadmap to sustainable resource management. In 2009, the Campania Region passed an act establishing the 1st multi-vocational European bio-district (agriculture, environment, social, eco-tourism, food and wine). In 2011 the non-profit association Bio-distretto Cilento was established, the concrete result of the great amount of work done over the years, coordinated by AIAB Campania and involving associations, public authorities, farmers and tourist operators, creating a permanent workshop of culturally significant ideas and initiatives for territorial development based on fair trade and the organic model.

Initial activities focused on creating a network of organic farms, producer associations, bio-city organizations, caterers, eco-tourism operators, and consumers, through short supply chain initiatives. In three years, the Cilento Bio-district had attracted a large number of local actors and produced results that had a great impact on the region.



Organic farms

The major stakeholders who promoted the creation of the bio-district were the local organic farmers, in search of markets that could appreciate their produce. About 400 organic farms took part (23% of the region's organic farms). Most are small farms, with an average agricultural area of five hectares. All together the usable agricultural area comes to approximately 2,000 acres, consisting of fruit trees (32%), seed crops/vegetables (22%), grassland (46%). The main tree crops are olives, widespread

in all areas, vines, fruit and figs, common in hilly areas. Livestock farms are very small: cattle (on average 14 animals per farm), sheep (25 animals), goats (9), and pigs (3). The exception is buffalo, with farms having about 85 animals on average.

The 400 organic farms are controlled, certified and registered in the Registro Regionale degli Operatori dell'Agricoltura Biologica (regional organic farm register). By joining the Patto per il Bio-distretto (bio-district pact), they guarantee that their produce is typical of the area, organic and GMO free, in accordance with the ethical and social principles on which organic agriculture is based.

The average turnover (including organic markets, fairs, and summer promotions in seaside resorts) has increased in the last two years by 20%. Today the entire produce, and not just a part, as before, is marketed as organic.

The participation of public authorities

The Cilento Bio-district includes 30 municipalities: Ascea, Auletta, Caggiano, Casal Velino, Castellabate, Castelnovo Cilento, Castel San Lorenzo, Centola, Ceraso, Controne, Cuccaro Vetere, Gioi, Monte San Giacomo, Novi Velia, Orria, Pisciotta, Pollica, Prignano Cilento, Rofrano, Rutino, Salento, San Pietro al Tanagro, Sanza, Sassano, Sessa Cilento, Sicignano degli Alburni, Stella Cilento, Stio, Torraca, Vallo della Lucania. They play a fundamental role by providing information, promoting organic farming and environmental protection, undertaking educational activities on proper nutrition in schools, as well as activating organic canteens and other green purchase initiatives. The Province of Salerno and the Campania Region also take part in the Bio-District's activities, providing funds and directing their own programs. Many other municipalities in the area, impressed by the results, have applied to join the initiative.

The municipality of Ceraso is the capital and headquarters of the Cilento Bio-District, a local, national and international rallying point for organic food, welcoming visitors and experts from around the world.

AIAB Campania coordinates all the activities of the Cilento Bio-District and the non-profit association responsible for managing it.



Tourist facilities

The bio-district has created a network of 20 restaurants and 10 bathing establishments, committed to promoting the produce of farms and farming associations. In this way, organic farming not only plays an important role in the protection and preservation of biodiversity and typical products but can also rely on a local market that can appreciate the excellence of the area's organic produce. Thanks to these short supply chain initiatives, the consumers can be sure of the origin of the produce and can establish direct relations with the farms that are part of the Bio-district Pact.

The short supply chain

In July 2009, with the participation of the Campania Region Councillor for Agriculture and the Province of Salerno Councilor, the bio-district's first Gruppo di Acquisto Solidale, GAS, (fair trade group) (www.corbezzolo.com) and several organic markets were inaugurated in coastal and inland tourists areas. The GAS is a consumer group that buys directly from local producers, and is committed to promoting fair trade centred on people and relations.

The shopping basket

The best organic farm products in the Cilento are added to a shopping basket which includes Controne beans, Cicerale chickpeas, Cilento white figs, chestnuts, olive oil, mozzarella, honey, Gioi soppressata, Cilento DOC wine, goat cheese, Silane cheese, Pertosa white artichokes, Paestum round artichokes and many other excellent seasonal organic products.

Bio-routes

These eco-tourist routes take you to farms, holiday farms, bio-cities, organic state-owned land, environmental sites important for their biodiversity and local traditions), linking inland rural areas and coastal tourist areas. All sites along the bio-routes are classified by AIAB Campania on the basis of the Carta dei principi per un turismo sostenibile nelle aree rurali (charter of principles for sustainable tourism in rural areas), which selects tourism activities that are ecologically sustainable in the long term, economically viable and acceptable from the ethical and social points of view.

Bio-beaches

The beautiful beaches of the Cilento, which attract tourists from all over the world, are an ideal place to promote rural areas and local organic produce. With the collaboration of bathing establishments and coastal municipalities, territorial marketing initiatives are carried out on the beaches to present the best organic products and bio-routes; the website www.biospiagge.it, also helps to create widespread consensus among producers and consumers. As of 2009, the Bio-District also organises boat trips to explore other beaches. Specially trained personnel promote organic products – Bio-lifeguards and Bio-recreation workers – who set up stands to give bathers a taste of local food, an activity that has proved successful beyond all expectations.

Technical assistance and funding

AIAB Campania provides all organic farms in the Bio-District with free technical support, if requested, thanks to projects funded by the Campania Region. Many enterprises, driven also by the increase in demand for local produce, have presented structural modernization projects to the Campania Region to: reduce costs, raise quality by converting to organic agricultural production, promote diversification (processing agricultural products), protect and improve the natural environment, strengthen the contractual capacity of the primary sector, create greater added value, develop and disseminate advanced farming technology. All bio-district actors participate in a round table to identify sources of available funds for annually programmed activities.



Future prospects

An assessment of the socio - economic and environmental impact of the bio-district shows that prospects are very encouraging. Demand for organic products is growing, and the overall shortening of the supply chain has generated loyal customers, boosting development in the sector, with more and more farms becoming multifunctional and converting to organic produce. Further impetus is expected from the future application of new simplified organic certification procedures, developed and tested by AIAB as part of a nationwide project. The bio-district has encouraged tourists to try typical local products and explore the local culture, increasing tourist flows throughout the year and not just in the summer months.

Many state-owned lands have switched to organic farming. From an environmental perspective, a number of initiatives have been implemented to protect and valorise the landscape and natural features of rural areas. The conversion of new agricultural enterprises to organic farming will also help reduce the negative impacts of production on the environment.

National and international interest

The Italian Association for Organic Agriculture is committed to the promotion and coordination of bio-districts on a national scale, using the experience of the Cilento Bio-District as a workshop of replicable practices. Already operating are the Grecanico Bio-District in the Calabria Region, the bio-district of Via Amerina e delle Forre in the Lazio Region and the bio-district of Greve in Chianti in Tuscany. Activities are also carried out to identify initiatives at national level that help consolidate the practices of organic production. For example, in the framework of projects funded by the Ministry of Agriculture, AIAB coordinates pilot group certification and participatory guarantee schemes to make organic farming more attractive to farmers discouraged by red tape and the complications of third party organic certification. AIAB participates in ministerial organic agriculture committees and regional IFOAM groups (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements), which represents organic producers and consumers.

National bio-district marketing activities also aim to get new areas involved in the bio-district scheme. For example, in 2012, the Cilento Bio-District set up a coffee shop in the centre of Rome to spread the area's culture, traditions and organic products. Bio-district producers directly supply the wellness restaurant and bio-bar, which acts as a sort of "Bio-District Embassy" where you can find all the aromas, flavours and knowledge of the land of Cilento.

AIAB also launched the establishment of the European Network and Mediterranean Bio-Districts, presented at organic food conferences held in Nuremberg and in the Republic of Korea. The aim is to create a network of areas that have chosen the organic model, promoting new experiences and the

sustainable management European and Mediterranean areas. Exchanges have been organised, as well as visits to similar initiatives in France, Austria and Germany, and cooperation agreements have been signed with other organic associations operating in Mediterranean countries. AMABIO, in Morocco, is one of the organisations with which AIAB has established structural collaboration.

For more information

The AIAB (Italian association for organic agriculture), which for years has been promoting the organic culture in Italy and internationally, can provide information on how to set up and manage bio-districts.

To learn about AIAB experiences in Italy, please visit the following websites:

www.biodistretto.it

www.aiab.it

www.aiabcampania.it

www.aiabcalabria.it



Contacts

The Italian Association for Organic Agriculture provides information and technical assistance to countries interested in starting up and managing bio-districts. Please contact:

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Innovation for Development and South-South Cooperation

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