

# THE BIO-DISTRICTS SYSTEM OF LAZIO REGION IN ITALY

## BUILDING SUSTAINABLE FOOD CHAINS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

By Kim Assaël

The innovative practice of raising Bio-districts is developing and consolidating the territories in Italy, particularly in the Lazio Region after the approval of the Regional Law *Provisions for the regulation and promotion of bio-districts* (n.11/2019). The Law, which is the result of a long process of political and technical exchanges concluded in 2019, adds a legal recognition to the bottom-up voluntary aggregation around the Bio-districts system of participative territorial governance and establishes regional financial and technical tools to support them.



Until 2019 the Bio-districts formally constituted in the Lazio Region were *Valle di Comino* in the Province of Frosinone and *Via Amerina e delle Forre* in the Province of Viterbo. From then on their spreading in the Region is indeed an incremental process. At present they have grown to six, including the Bio-districts *Etrusco Romano* (Roma Province), *Maremma Etrusca e Monti della Tolfa* (Viterbo/Roma Provinces), *Lago di Bolsena* (Viterbo Province) and *Castelli Romani* (Roma Province), formally constituted. Two more Bio-districts are on the process to be officially recognized in the Province of Rieti (*Amatrice Terra Viva* and *Sabino*).



Globally, the six Bio-districts have a population of 412.049 inhabitants, associate 68 Municipalities, represent a global organic agricultural surface of more than 40% of the agricultural surface available, involve about 1.300 small-medium size organic farms and operators, for progressively associating the large number of small producers into organized supply chains, too.

Lazio is the third region in Italy for the incidence of organic utilized agricultural area. In Lazio, 23% of agricultural land is cultivated organically, already very close to the objectives of the *Farm to Fork* strategy, at the heart of the European Green Deal, which sets at 25% the total agricultural land by 2030.

The Lazio Regional law makes a Bio-district a recognized subject, so it can become part of local and regional partnerships, participating in decision-making processes concerning the agricultural activity or in the orientation of policies that the Region shall plan and activate (rural development, infrastructure, energy, landscape, industry, etc.).

The Bio-districts of the Lazio Region are characterized by a high density of farms and by systems of cultivation, breeding, processing and food industrial preparation of products with the organic method. They are also marked by a homogeneous historical and territorial identity resulting from the integration of agricultural and other activities and from the great variety of typical agricultural and handicraft products. Other common and shared values among the communities of all six Bio-districts are:

- the high environmental quality of the territory, the conservation of biodiversity and the protection of the rich naturalistic and landscape heritage including monuments and protected natural areas.



### Bio-districts

A bio-district is a territory 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 territory and its special characteristics so that it can fully realise its economic, social and cultural potential.



- the environmental sustainability approach through the use of renewable energy resources promoting, as a matter of priority, self-consumption also in an associated form;
- the dissemination of organic farming methods and the enhancement of sustainable management of activities such as tourism, manufacturing and high-quality craftsmanship.
- the interest of associating efforts to create new linkages with cities by building commercial chains of high-quality local products and promoting greater decentralization of services in order to make rural areas attractive and liveable.



In September 2021 a call for proposal allocating regional budget resources was launched granting a first Fund for the promotion of Bio-districts. With this call the Lazio Region will finance projects for organic agriculture, for the rational use of raw materials and energy resources, for the reduction of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, and also projects to promote the whole agri-food chain.



In Italy, the trend of implementing the Bio-districts practices is growing from north to south of the country. Today 51 territories have already undertaken processes for the development of sustainable food systems through short supply chain, local purchasing groups, organic canteens in public offices and schools. According to the Italian *Council for Agricultural Research and Agricultural Economics* (CREA), today the Bio-districts represent 11% of the national territory and in it live the population of 646 Municipalities. Beside Lazio, other Italian Regions as Liguria, Sardinia, Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna have either deliberated or are proposing specific Legislations on Bio-Districts.



Since 2017, the Bio-districts have been recognized as an innovative approach within the rural development policies because multi-actor, transdisciplinary, capable of strengthening organic agriculture, agroecological methods and to contaminate even other sectors. In particular, the Bio-districts have been qualified as agroecology working methodology by [FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub](#), as one of the six best international "Good Practices on investments" in the framework of the FAO *Healthy Food Systems* policy and presented within the 44th Plenary Meeting on the Committee on World Food Security (CFS).



In March 2021, the territorial Bio-districts have been recognized by the European Union as good practices and new business models in the framework of the [EU Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production](#). In June 2021, the territorial Bio-districts approach have been recognized as a promising concept for rural development in the [Long-term Vision for the EU's Rural Areas -Towards stronger, connected, resilient and prosperous rural areas by 2040](#) launched by the European Union. This vision highlights the role rural areas have as providers of services that protect ecosystems and solutions for carbon neutrality, with an increasingly role to play in climate change mitigation and the sustainable bio and circular economy.



In this framework, by joining their respective purposes, competences and commitments, the Lazio Region and the six Bio-districts are building an organic system which recognizes either the indications of the international debate about common challenges of the 2030 UN Agenda and those of the EU Green Deal, together with the new demand from the territories for a revitalization of the rural areas role and for healthier and environmentally friendly food systems.

The Bio-districts are engaged in a work of coordination of their experiences and actions, to share information and exchange common practical aspects and services, to dialogue with the regional administration on the necessary measures to support the development



of their work, and to provide technical assistance to the actors interested in establishing new Bio-districts in other areas of the regional territory.

### **To know more**

[Lazio Regional Law 2019](#)

[Agricoltura Biologica Lazio](#)

[Regional call for projects](#)

[News in Regione Lazio website](#)

[Bio-districts in FAO Agroecology Knowledge Hub website](#)

[Biodistricts brochure in FAO website](#)

[Biodistricts in Agroecology 44 Good Practices CFS FAO](#)

[European Green Deal](#)

[EU Action Plan for the Development of Organic Production](#)

[EU Biodiversity Strategy](#)

[EU Farm to Fork Strategy](#)

[Long-term Vision for EU Rural Areas by 2040](#)

[Long term Vision for EU Rural Areas in ec.europa.eu](#)

[European Network for Rural Development](#)

[Article - Biodistricts and EU Action Plan for Organic Production](#)

[Article - Biodistricts and EU Rural Areas](#)

[IDEASS Bio-districts brochure](#)

