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MEMBER

Resilient Rice

Living Lab LL_RIRE | Italy



Rete Semi Rurali

The RISO RESILIENTE (Resilient Rice) Living Lab (LL) promotes the transition of the Italian rice-growing system toward an agroecological cultivation model based on diversification. The LL brings together stakeholders in the organic rice sector, including producers, technicians, processors, and researchers, who are interested in finding solutions for the agroecological transition of rice production systems and wetland farming. The overall objective of the Resilient Rice LL is to foster connections between farmers and practitioners, and between science and practice.

The activities of the LL are centered in the Piedmont and Lombardy regions of Italy.

Aim

- Promote the circulation of information, knowledge and skills in the field of agroecological rice cultivation.
- Experiment with solutions for weed management without the use of chemical products.
- Promote research and experimentation with plant varieties useful for organic production.
- Ensure the integrity of processes from seed to plate through the active involvement of producers and consumers.

Background information

The LL is a joint project between the RSR and the Piedmontese Biodistrict of Rice Growers, aims to transition Italian rice farming towards a more ecologically sustainable and diversified model. The project's medium-term goal is to make a wider range of rice varieties available, which are more diverse than the current commercial options, and to help these varieties adapt to specific local conditions. This involves developing site-specific seed material, known as Heterogeneous Organic Material (HOB), and adapting farming techniques accordingly.

The LL began as an initiative of a few rice farmers, starting with small trial plots and then scaling up to farm level, and then to the organic district level, which involves several rice farms.

Through collaborative, on-farm research involving stakeholders, including consumers, the LL has identified the most suitable rice varieties for organic and biodynamic farming and the market. Various agricultural techniques related to weed control and fertility enhancement under agroecological conditions have also been explored. Furthermore, the project has begun experimenting with blends of different rice varieties and 'evolutionary populations' (naturally evolving mixtures of seeds) and has been evaluating their performance in rice mills and consumer acceptance.

Funding structure

The activities of the LL are based on voluntary facilitation work. One component of the LL was financed by CAP funds linked to operational groups. The research activities were incorporated into Horizon and Life projects.

Activities

- Organising activities that facilitate connections between research and real-life contexts of organic rice production.
- Circulating knowledge in the fields of varietal diversity, water quality management, soil health, and weed control in wetland crops.
- Organising field days based on the 'classe verte' model to improve farmers' knowledge of agroecological practices through peer-to-peer exchange.
- Identifying critical issues related to agroecology and organic rice farming.

Methods, stakeholder engagements and tools

Since its inception, the LL has adopted a participatory approach based on LL principles. This approach integrates systems thinking and combines scientific knowledge with practical know-how. Strong stakeholder involvement is considered essential for agroecological innovation.

Operational priorities are defined collaboratively with key stakeholders through interactive workshops. Temporary working groups are set up to develop activities on specific topics, composed of volunteers based on their skills and interests. Tools and methodologies (e.g. field visits, peer-learning sessions and technical round tables) are selected according to the objectives and target audience.

- Farmers (conventional and organic).
- Processors and small mills.
- Researchers (agronomy, ecology and social sciences).
- Local and regional authorities and educational institutions.
- Consumers.
- NGOs (e.g. Rete Semi Rurali).
- SMEs.

All actors in the supply chain are welcome to participate in the activities, which focus on experimentation in real contexts (i.e. on-farm testing) and co-design of solutions. The governance structure is horizontal and democratic, ensuring gender equality and the inclusion of young farmers.

In addition to structured pathways, the LL is accessible through:

- Annual events (e.g. bioblitzes in the field).
- Digital channels (e.g. SeedLinked platforms for participatory plant selection).
- Collaborations with research institutes (e.g. joint publications).

Concrete examples:

- Green manuring and crop rotations co-developed with farmers.
- Testing HOM rice varieties (heterogeneous material) with processors and consumers.
- Landscape impact assessment through multi-stakeholder workshops.

This model ensures the circulation of knowledge, the local adaptation of innovations, and their scalability.

Achievements

Knowledge sharing and network building

- LL involved small rice mills in the first phase to test the possibility of processing the material and then to produce and commercialise the first HOM rice in Europe.
- LL also involved informed consumers in the evaluation of the cooked material through on-farm panel tests with the collaboration of chefs, hotel, and restaurant management schools.

- The main achievement of the LL community of practice is the elimination of chemicals for weed and blast control - the main limiting factor for rice production in organic management. This has been achieved through the experimentation and dissemination of intrasowing, green manuring, submergence, and early arrowing techniques.

Facilitation of innovative research

- Supporting the development of research projects by facilitating connections between research institutions and stakeholders.
- Funding opportunities: Scouting of regional, national and European funding programmes to identify funds dedicated to new research projects and sharing these opportunities with the LL network.
- Training materials: Creation of a shared PowerPoint presentation on the scientific fundamentals of agroecology for rice cultivation and wetland management to disseminate knowledge.
- Co-design of priorities: Organisation of round tables to jointly define strategic research priorities with the organic rice sector.

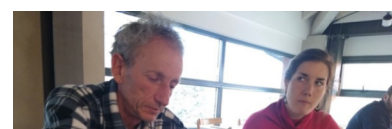
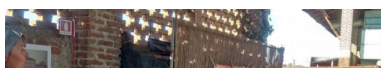
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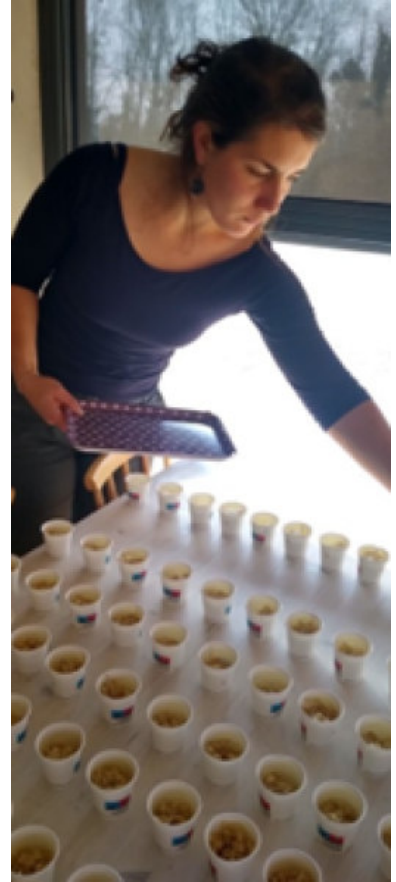


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