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Feedback from our participants: workshop in Lublin (Poland)



European Circular
Farmers Network





EUROPEAN NETWORK CIRCULAR FARMERS

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Programme: Erasmus+

Action Type: Small-scale partnerships in vocational education and training

Countries covered: 3

WEBSITE: <https://www.piattaformaprogetti.eu/european-circular-farmers-network/>



Objectives

The fundamental objective of the project is to create an open European network, formed by young aspiring farmers, for the promotion of circular agriculture, through cooperation with local institutions, media, associations and training centers; the will is also to keep this network active even after the end of the project activities, thanks to targeted fundraising campaigns and crowdsourcing platforms on the web.

Activities

The activities consist of 4 phases: 1) planning and preparation activities; 2) implementation of local activities and transnational mobility (within which there will be 3 mobility to be held in Lublin, Drama and Rome); 3) implementation of measures to ensure the management, effectiveness and quality of the project; 4) activities to evaluate and share the final results of the project.

Impact

The expected results are: A) a manual of good practices for aspiring circular farmers called "The Green Circle" to be made available as an open educational resource; B) creation of a motivational story video on the web to spread the principles of circular agriculture and encourage young people to undertake this profession, through a collection of short video tutorials, demonstrative of some sustainable agricultural practices, entitled "How to be a circular farmer".



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Participants feedback

The purpose of this document is to provide a detailed analysis of the feedback given by three Italian participants at the workshop of the *European Network Circular Farmers* project, held on 22 October 2023 in Lublin, Poland. This project, jointly funded by the European Commission under the Erasmus+ VET strand, saw the active participation of various partner organisations from Italy (EuroAgricoltori and SOS Europe), Poland (Green Elephant Foundation) and Greece (Bio Farmers.gr).

This paper will focus on analysing the feedback received from Italian participants, which turned out to be extremely positive. These reports are a testimony to the effectiveness and value of the workshop within the *European Network Circular Farmers* project, offering a clear view of the positive impact this initiative has had on the Italian farming community and the international partnership involved.

Marta Ciampechini, an Italian participant in the *European Circular Farmers Network* project, shared an enthusiastic and enlightening perspective on her experience. Marta viewed the event as a unique and enriching experience. She emphasised the value of interacting with a diverse group of specialists who shared a common interest in circular agriculture and water management. recognised that the essence of an international event lies in the exchange of knowledge and the opportunity to connect with a network that can lead to future opportunities and collaborations.

The event broadened her perspective, bringing together minds from Poland, Italy, and Greece to discuss circular economy and wastewater. This multidimensional discourse enriched her understanding of these critical topics. Marta appreciated how the event combined academic, social, and cultural elements. It explored circular agriculture as an innovative and sustainable approach, emphasising waste reduction, environmental impact, and resource recycling.

Marta highlighted the exciting experience of collaborative teamwork in developing solutions for real-world scenarios, particularly regarding wastewater management. She expressed gratitude for the facilitators who skilfully guided discussions and promoted social interaction. The event fostered a sense of unity and connection among participants, transcending geographical boundaries. Lastly, emphasised that the event went beyond brainstorming; it was about becoming a European citizen and embracing diversity, leading to lasting friendships and collaborations.

In conclusion, Marta's feedback emphasise the importance of international knowledge exchange, the power of collaboration, and the creation of lasting connections in fostering a sense of unity and enriching understanding in a diverse, global context.



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Italo Gigli, another Italian participant, had a highly positive experience. He found value in the diversity of perspectives on global issues like the Circular Economy and wastewater management, emphasising the educational aspects of the project. Italo's key points include:

- **Broadened Perspective:** Appreciation for alternative viewpoints on common issues in Italy, Europe, and the world.
- **Diverse Insights:** Recognition of the significance of diverse backgrounds in evaluating complex problems.
- **Wastewater Management:** A strong interest in techniques for wastewater management, ranging from nationwide projects to local solutions.
- **Sustainability and Resilience:** Acknowledgment of the need for concrete ideas for sustainability and resilience, especially in urban areas.
- **Circular Economy:** Emphasis on the importance of waste reuse for a truly circular economy.
- **Personal Growth:** Personal and academic development through interactions with participants from diverse backgrounds.

Italo's feedback underscores the value of international collaboration and diverse perspectives in addressing global challenges.

Our third feedback is also from an Italian participant, **Sabina Motzo**. Her feedback describes a promising initiative in the field of circular agriculture and sustainable use of resources. Sabina says that the first meeting was well managed, fostering a smooth and enriching discussion between the partners, each bringing a different approach and professional background to the project. The shared definition of 'Circular Farming' was an important achievement, demonstrating the group's ability to synthesise different perspectives into a common vision.

Sabina points out the Greek partner's contribution in illustrating abstract concepts with practical examples was relevant. Furthermore, the focus on the importance of rainwater harvesting, reuse of animal and plant waste, self-sufficiency in production and respect for seasonality reflects a comprehensive approach to circular agriculture.

The discussion on wastewater poses a challenge, emphasising the need to promote the adoption of resource reuse concepts, despite the current difficulties. Sabina shows a strong enthusiasm and she express a rewarding feeling as the group showed strong motivation and interest from the beginning, a promising sign for the continued success of the project.



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Original participants feedback

1. Marta Ciampechini

European Circular Farmers Network was a unique and enriching experience. I had the chance to meet a diversity of specialist sharing interest about circular agriculture and water management. This is the essence of an international event: exchanging knowledges and connecting with a network that can become a wellspring of future opportunities and collaborations. Gathered minds from Poland, Italy and Greece discussed circular economy and waste water amidst a treasure trove of knowledge, ideas, and innovation that contributed to make me see the world from a broader perspective. This event has been a fusion of academic, social, and cultural elements: we explored the dimensions of circular agriculture as an innovative and sustainable approach to farming that seeks to minimize waste, reduce environmental impact, and create a closed-loop system where resources are reused and recycled. Besides that, we shared our personal experiences by providing examples of how the concept of circularity has been implemented in our communities and its potential applications. We were challenged with a in-depth discussion of wastewater, a primary byproduct of production systems, and through collaborative teamwork we had the task to develop a solution applicable to a real-world scenario. It was exhilarating to witness the evolution of shared opinions into a constructive outcome that may serve as an inspiration for our future professional endeavors. From the outset, I experienced a sense of ease and motivation when it came to expressing my perspective, even when it differed from the opinions of others. Thanks to the facilitators that adeptly led us through each subject, promoting social interaction and a sense of unity within the group, it feels as though the friendships and connections made go beyond geographical boundaries and last a lifetime. We have established a network of individuals throughout Europe who share similar interests and enthusiasms, thereby creating opportunities for enduring friendships and collaborations. For me, this event was much more than a brainstorming, It was about becoming an European citizen and embracing our diversity as an inclusive learning environment.

2. Italo Gigli

The experience of the European Circular Farmers Network has been very positive for me, very useful to have alternative points of view on what are common issues both in my country, Italy, and in Europe and, of course, the World.

Talking about such topical subjects as the Circular Economy, Wasted Water and its management, good practices and strategies to reuse and recycle water, and learning about major international projects for this purpose and discussing how some good practices have had an impact in small realities, in small countries, was really interesting and very educational.

There were many different points of view from different academic, social and cultural backgrounds, so we were able to identify many different facets of the same problem, which otherwise could not be evaluated.



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The topic that was of most interest to me was the various techniques and best practices for wastewater management: here too, we went from nationwide projects, such as in Singapore with the “NEWater Singapore” programme, to methods implemented in small realities such as villages or small towns, made resilient by rainwater regulation works and reuse of water used in agriculture, especially for use in the livestock sector.

The issue of sustainability and resilience to climate change in cities and smaller urban agglomerations is very topical and needs many concrete ideas to be both communicated to the various actors in the agricultural sector and implemented at an institutional level.

Also very interesting was the discourse on the reuse of waste from agricultural and livestock processing, which is fundamental for a truly circular economy, in which the outputs of certain processes become the inputs for new processes at a local level, making the small reality that implements these solutions de facto independent from the outside world.

As far as I’m concerned, this event was very educational. Getting to know other people, from different parts of Europe, with a common goal was also really important for my academic training, also as a UE citizen, and also personally, and every single person who attended the meeting contributed to making this event rich in knowledge and new experiences.

3. Sabina Motzo

Ospitati a Lublin, città europea della gioventù 2023, dal partner polacco Fundacja Zielony Słoń nella cornice del Grand Hotel Lublin, lo scorso 21 ottobre 2023 si è dato il via ai lavori con il primo primo transnational meeting del progetto European Circular Farmer.

La giornata è stata l’occasione per incontrare tutti i partner di progetto e conoscere di ognuno l’esperienza nel settore dell’agricoltura circolare e le aspettative derivanti dal progetto.

E’ stato davvero arricchente poter lavorare con un gruppo dal profilo professionale alto seppure collegato al settore/argomento del progetto in modo differente.

La giornata di lavoro, ricca e impegnativa nei suoi contenuti, è stata in realtà molto fluida grazie all’ottima gestione delle attività e criticità, unita alla forte motivazione e interesse che il gruppo ha mostrato avere sin da subito.

Dopo un primo momento rompighiaccio, si è passati al concetto di “Agricoltura Circolare”. Dalle idee espresse dai due gruppi si è arrivati a un’unica definizione che, efficacemente, esprimesse la visione di tutti.

Nei rispettivi cerchi ci siamo confrontati sugli elementi essenziali che caratterizzano l’agricoltura circolare, dove l’apporto del partner greco è stato decisamente importante per trasporre in esempi pratici alcuni concetti astratti. E’ emerso il concetto del riutilizzo degli scarti animali e vegetali, della raccolta dell’acqua piovana, dell’autosufficienza produttiva, del rispetto della stagionalità.



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Si è passati poi a lavorare su una delle risorse che in agricoltura è essenziale: l'acqua. In modo particolare le acque reflue (wastewater). Quindi del loro uso e soprattutto del loro riuso.

Non è stato facile trovare esempi di acque "usate" che possano divenire da scarto a risorsa, il che evidenzia la mancanza di abitudine e attitudine a fare proprio questo concetto.

Dopo svariati tentativi si è riusciti a darne una definizione comune: "l'acqua che non può essere riutilizzata se non dopo essere stata processata".

Da questo brainstorming è stato stilato un elenco di acque reflue che nel quotidiano produciamo in svariati modi, partendo dal quale si è andati alla ricerca delle best practice che a livello locale/internazionale sono utilizzate per non perdere questo elemento prezioso.

Si è parlato di desalinizzazione, di idroponica, di pacciamatura e food forest e della Water Reuse Regulation europea. Trattandosi di agricoltura circolare, strettamente collegata alla sostenibilità ambientale, è stata fatta una riflessione su quanto (e soprattutto necessariamente) debbano essere sostenibili anche i processi con i quali tali acque vengano ripulite.

Sul finire del training, tutti questi concetti sono stati trasposti in materiale audio video, occasione per lavorare nuovamente in piccoli gruppi, conoscersi meglio e ulteriormente approfondire le reciproche esperienze.

Questa giornata è la prima occasione per dare il via a quel network, creare un ponte per collaborazioni future e confrontarsi su cosa nella pratica voglia dire lavorare con la terra nel rispetto della natura.



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