

## **Friuli Region's Solidarity economy best practices**

This excerpt is extracted from the research study of Lucia Piani, Matteo Carzedda & Nadia Carestiato "Food solidarity economy: evaluating transition community initiatives in Friuli Venezia Giulia region", and illustrates three best practices.

### **The Eastern Friuli Flour Pact**

The Patto della Farina del Friuli Orientale is a short food supply chain agreement which aims at changing social and market relationships between consumers and producers. The spatial dimension of the project covers some 2500 km<sup>2</sup> in the central and eastern areas of Friuli Venezia Giulia, namely, the provinces of Trieste and Gorizia, and part of the province of Udine. In 2014 the FBC supported the definition of an agreement between two local farmers, a miller, a baker, and a group of consumers concerned a baker, and a group of consumers concerned about the production and transformation of organic flour and bread from ancient wheat varieties.

At the beginning of every crop year, producers and consumers negotiate fair prices for the products, with the former transparently presenting production costs, and the latter committing to buy at least 10 kg of flour per family during the year; in this phase, consumers pay in 10% of their expected total expense, as a liquidity base for producers.

Throughout the year, consumers are periodically updated on the production process and get to visit the wheat fields and the participating businesses; they share the entrepreneurial risk and build relationships among them and with the producers. At present, 10 to 12 hectares of land are cultivated using conservation agriculture practices, including minimum tillage, soil mulching and genetic diversification through mixing ancient wheat varieties.

On the point of view of the consumers, the personal and economic commitment is counterbalanced by the warranty of high-quality products sold at competitive prices; conversely, committed entrepreneurs have access to an alternative and more remunerative market.

The ongoing attempt to organize and establish a participatory guarantee system (PGS) is likely to further enhance these aspects (Sacchi 2019). PGS is an institutional system based on mutual trust, through which consumers and producers negotiate and together define quality and ethical standards of production, and share responsibility on monitoring and compliance (Montefrio and Johnson 2019; Niederle et al. 2020).

In general terms, PGS potentially generates positive externalities in terms of opportunities for local development, protection of rural communities, biodiversity and landscape preservation, and overall contribution to community resilience (Home et al. 2017).

### **Bread and flour of the mid-Friuli**

The Bread and flour of the mid-Friuli is a short food supply chain initiative for the production of flour and bread. The Municipality of Mereto di Tomba first launched the experiment in 2014, as an attempt to boost and enlarge a small local commons management project over 5 hectares of common arable land of the San Marco hamlet community.

Three neighboring municipalities officially joined the project through a public agreement and, with the support of the FBC, started working together to establish a local solidarity economy district. The four predominantly rural townships extend over 138.11 km<sup>2</sup>, and count 12,943 inhabitants (Italian National Institute of Statistics, Istituto Nazionale di Statistica, ISTAT 2017).

The process started with the constitution of a joint commission in charge of drawing up a shared agricultural policy. Subsequently, the city councils convened public meetings to involve local farmers and check their willingness to participate in the initiative.

As of today, ten farms have joined the project, one of them being run by the organization in charge of the management of local commons, and produce organic wheat on about 25 hectares; moreover, they have organized themselves in an agricultural cooperative, established in December 2016. Bakeries from the project area and surrounding towns have also joined the supply chain project.

At present, local administrators have stepped aside, and participate as guarantors of the process and to provide institutional support. A new mill was activated in 2018 by a private party involved in the project.

### **Bread and flour of The Muzzana municipality**

Bread and flour of The Muzzana municipality is a short food supply chain initiative for the production of flour and bread. The territory of Muzzana, in Lower Friuli, counts 2660 inhabitants spread over 24.32 km<sup>2</sup> (ISTAT 2017), with common lands covering a surface area of 352 ha, among which 162 ha of lowland forest and 181 hectares of arable land.

In light of the positive experience of the Middle Friuli micro-supply chain, the Bread and flour of The Muzzana municipality initiative started out in 2014 as an attempt of the city council to innovate the management of local commons, in order to promote environmental protection and land development.

The first, necessary step to launch the supply chain initiative was the conversion to organic farming of 90 ha of common arable land, completed and certified in 2016, and the subsequent decision to allocate 20 ha to wheat and spelt (*Triticum spelta*) production. At present, only 100 quintals of the total wheat and spelt production enter the supply chain through sale to a partner social cooperative, which takes care of the milling and selling; the remaining share of production is sold through public tender.

The cooperative is also in charge of managing relationships with bakers and resellers in the area. Since 2017, the local administration has organized the local Feast of the Commons (Festa dei Beni comuni), an

annual celebration gathering to raise and increase awareness on commons, civic goods, and their management, and promote the local solidarity economy initiative.

Conferences and seminars on organic farming and short supply chains, as well as free and open bread-making workshops liven up the event.

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## **Results and discussion**

As already mentioned, the core of the three case studies here presented is the establishment of a local, short supply chain for the production and transformation of wheat and flour. Short supply chains characterize different production and consumption models, such as on-farm direct sales, farmers' markets, SPGs. The common traits of these models are: the disintermediation of the supply chain; the emergence of direct relationships between producers and consumers; the local extent of the initiative, intended as the possibility for the actors within a specific territory to act and self-organize.

In light of these considerations, a short supply chain is based on closeness between producers and consumers, in terms of geographical proximity, social interaction and communication, and circulation of the economic value within the territory.

The different approaches and principles followed by each initiative and its community also determine the evolution and future perspectives. The Pan e farine di Muçane and Pan e farine dal Friûl di Mieç, in which institutional participation has played a major role since the beginning, foresee further structurization and physical expansion through the establishment of new facilities (mill, packing plant, direct selling points) and formalization of the activities (i.e., foundation of project cooperatives and citizen associations). Conversely, the actors involved in the Patto della Farina aim at enhancing trust in their relationships (PGS initiative) and expanding a community based on shared values, rather than specific territorial borders

about the production and transformation of organic flour and bread from ancient wheat varieties.

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the production process and get to visit the wheat fields and the participating businesses; they share the entrepreneurial risk and build relationships among them and with the producers.

At present, 10 to 12 hectares of land are cultivated using conservation agriculture practices, including minimum tillage, soil mulching and genetic diversification through mixing ancient wheat varieties. On the point of view of the consumers, the personal and economic commitment is counterbalanced by the warranty of high-quality products sold at competitive prices; conversely, committed entrepreneurs have access to an alternative and more remunerative market.

The ongoing attempt to organize and establish a participatory guarantee system (PGS) is likely to further enhance these aspects. PGS is an institutional system based on mutual trust, through which consumers and producers negotiate and together define quality and ethical standards of production, and share responsibility on monitoring and compliance. In general terms, PGS potentially generates positive externalities in terms of opportunities for local development, protection of rural communities, biodiversity and landscape preservation, and overall contribution to community resilience.

Each initiative is based on a local community that is a group of individuals who identify themselves with respect to territorial belonging, whose spatial extent may vary from village boundaries, as in the case of Muzzana, to broader though defined and recognizable territories. In addition to local identity, communities are based on and defined by the sharing of common values, which reflects the concept of 'project identities'. The sense of identity built upon a shared initiative is the core element of elective communities. This process is clearly identifiable in the Patto della Farina initiative, whose community groups pre-existing communities characterized by close adherence to strong ethics and values. The Medio Friuli experience pairs the pre-existing local community with a broader community project which crosses the geographical borders of the municipality. In Muzzana, on the contrary, local administrators have been more effective in involving outsiders rather than their own fellow citizens, and the community composition reflects the cooperative's ability to engage different stakeholders from the lowlands of Friuli.

Regarding the spatial extent, the three supply chain initiatives vary in size, even though they are all based on proximity. The Patto della Farina is rooted in Eastern Friuli and the main eastern cities of the region; moreover, the PGS project is likely to attract producers from across the region. The Medio Friuli supply chain is expanding among producers, resellers and consumers, outside, and around the Medio Friuli district. The actors of the Muzzana initiative, bakers, resellers and producers, are distributed in a patchy way all over the region lowlands. While the spatial extent conventionally associated with farm-to-fork models is usually bidimensional and centered on the actual geographical distance between producer and consumer, the three supply chains presented in this paper have created bioregions (Berg and Dassman 1977), which embed territorial, social, and cultural elements in relational spaces (Harvey 2006; Tecco et al. 2017).

If analyzed under the framework of regional law n. 4/2017, the three projects mostly comply with legal provision, even though, once again, following unique paths (Table 5). The principles of solidarity

economy identified by the law are explicitly incorporated in the initiatives. Solidarity and reciprocity are embedded in the initiatives, either through formal regulations (the Regulation on Civic uses in Muzzana), legal acts (the Constitutive Act of the Community Cooperative in Medio Friuli), or informal agreements (as in the Patto della Farina case). The main focus on environment and landscape protection is expressed through the adoption of conservation and organic agriculture, even though the Patto della Farina community rejected the certification proposal.

The communities gravitating around the three projects are defined and identified according to different criteria, either territorial (Pan e farine dal Friûl di Mieç), institutional (Pan e farine di Muçane) or based on the commonality of interests and values (Patto della Farina): this heterogeneity is partly in contrast with the law, whose definition of solidarity economy community includes specific spatial and administrative boundaries. The principle of social cohesion, described in Article 1 of the regional law, is not formally addressed in any project. One of the key elements of the two institutionalized projects is the management of common goods (common properties and civic uses in both cases), while this aspect is lacking in the Patto della Farina case.

This also impacts the capacity of the initiatives to create actual solidarity economy business and promote social entrepreneurship: while the experiences of Pan e farine di Muçane and Pan e farine dal Friûl di Mieç fostered the constitution of social and community cooperatives, the businesses involved in the Patto della Farina were already existing, and they have decided to integrate solidarity economy principles in their conventional entrepreneurial and market activities