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Preparatory action on EU plant and animal genetic resources

The 'Farro' (*Triticum dicoccon* Schrank/ *dicoccum* Schubler) from Monteleone di Spoleto

Overview

1. Objectives

The objective of the case study "Farro" from Monteleone di Spoleto was to investigate the approach and initiatives that have been carried out in order to foster the economic revival of the Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer ("Il Farro"). The initiative is seen as successful as it also involved cooperation between farmers, researchers and the local government.



Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer. Picture: Renzo Torricelli.

The objective of the collaboration between farmers and the University of Perugia is the revival, conservation, and valorisation of the Emmer of Monteleone di Spoleto. The Monteleone Emmer, which had reached very low levels of consumption in the 1970s, has been subject to economic valorisation and obtained the protected designation of origin (PDO) label thanks to the involvement of farmers, the University of Perugia, and the municipality of Monteleone di Spoleto. The Emmer is now recognised as a quality niche product and has become a symbol of identity for the Monteleone di Spoleto inhabitants.

2. Description of the case

The Emmer of Monteleone di Spoleto was once considered as a food for the poorer classes belonging to subsistence farming. In the 1970s, it had reached the lowest level of consumption due to the fact that it was associated to a poor diet and because of changing eating habits and the adoption of modern life-styles¹, including the increased consumption of industrially processed foods. This is when the farmer Renato Cicchetti rediscovered this population and worked to maintain the production. He even developed specific machines to speed up polishing and increase production of the variety. However, it is not until the 1990s that the Monteleone Emmer started to develop significantly, thanks also to the collaboration of researchers from the University of Perugia and to the involvement of the local government.



Threshing of Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer. Picture: Renzo Torricelli.

The collaboration between farmers and the University of Perugia started in 1995 following a conference called “Emmer: knowledge, use and conservation of local varieties” organised by CEDRAV (Centre for Documentation and Anthropological Research in Valnerina (*Nera river valley*) and in the Apennines of Central-Umbria). The conference and the themes explored gained the attention of Professor Mario Falcinelli from the University of Perugia who,

¹ Papa, C. (1990), The “Farre de Montelione: landrace and representation”.

together with Renzo Torricelli, PhD, subsequently became involved in the characterisation and the conservation of the Emmer of Monteleone di Spoleto.

The genetic characterisation of the Emmer from Monteleone di Spoleto carried out by the Department of Agricultural, Food and Environmental Sciences² of the University of Perugia has shown that this population can be considered a composite variety originated by continuous on-farm conservation and that it is distinct from other landraces. Thanks to a long process of natural selection, human activities and conservation, the Emmer cultivation in the Valnerina area has never been interrupted in time³. Indeed, the Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer represents a truly local variety, which is well adapted to the area of cultivation.



Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer field. Picture: Renzo Torricelli

In October 2002, seven local farmers established themselves as the 'Association of Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer', with the specific objective to promote the procedure for the PDO label. The Association of agricultural associations and other local institutions, carried out the procedure for the PDO label with the collaboration of the University of Perugia. The PDO label was finally obtained in 2010 after a rather long process. The PDO label has given visibility to the product and contributed to the valorisation of the territory where it is produced. The certifying agency is the Parco Tecnologico Agroalimentare of the Umbria Region⁴.

In 2011, a new association called Ador S.r.l. was created with the aim to market and sell the Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer under a new label. The association brings together some of the biggest producers of the Monteleone Emmer.

² At the time called Department of Applied Biology.

³ R. Torricelli, L'identità genetica del farro di Monteleone di Spoleto quale primo strumento di salvaguardia.

⁴ <http://www.parco3a.org/>

The project also involved the characterisation of the nutritional value of the product. The increased success and demand for Emmer goes hand in hand with the growing trend of giving value to food of vegetable origin⁵. Thanks to the growing interest and demand for local quality products, the Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer is no longer considered as part of the diet of the poorer classes but a local quality product. Its importance and significance for the population has evolved over time, while remaining closely linked to the traditions of the local population. Yet, the Emmer also plays a central role in the Catholic ceremonies to honour St. Nicholas, the patron saint of the municipality of Monteleone di Spoleto. The respect for the territory and its resources is key for the economic and social valorisation of this geographic area in the region of Umbria.

Analysis

3. Funding and support

The project has been carried out thanks to funding received over time. This includes funds from the Foundation Cassa di Risparmio of Perugia, the Chamber of Commerce of Perugia, the Umbria Region, and the Rural Development Plan 2000-2006.

The University of Perugia received funding for the characterisation of the Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer from the Chamber of Commerce of Perugia between 2000 and 2005. The University also received funding from the regional government for a project on the conservation of biodiversity in the Umbria region.

Under the current rural development plan, Emmer “PDO” produce will receive incentives for the cultivation of the Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer. Whereas the funding received is seen as fundamental to carry out the above-mentioned activities, a problem regarding administrative burden was highlighted by some farmers. In addition, a lack of clarity as regards the type of funding to which farmers have access to (under the new RDP) emerged from the field visit.

4. Positioning at local or regional level

The Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer is sold at local events and fairs or directly to consumers mainly in Umbria and in the neighbouring Lazio region. In order to increase the volume of activities, the farmers involved in the project have as an objective to promote their product also in Northern Italy and possibly abroad.

Farmers also have contacts with supermarkets. However, it has proven difficult to compete with other varieties of Emmer, sold at lower prices. Today, emphasis is put on the nutritional values of the Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer, which have become an important marketing

⁵ Papa, C. (1990), The “Farre de Montelione: landrace and representation”.

tool, proven by growing consumer interest. In addition, the actors involved in the project emphasise the establishment of strong links with the territory in which it is produced.

One of the main challenges encountered by the participants of the initiative is represented by the fact that the Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer is not as well-known as the Garfagnana Emmer (Lucca province), in the region of Tuscany. The Garfagnana Emmer started to be produced and marketed well before the Monteleone Emmer which gives its producers a competitive advantage on the market⁶. In addition, the Garfagnana is produced in much bigger quantities.



Monteleone di Spoleto. Picture: Renzo Torricelli.

5. Partnerships and networking

The University of Perugia has been involved in ECPGR and other research projects with other European research institutions. In addition, the University is also involved in the characterisation of other plant varieties in the Umbria region.

The involvement of farmers in the initiative is seen as the essential component in the development of the project. Yet, the actors involved have not built specific and/or stable partnerships with other similar initiatives. This is due to lack of funding and organisational capacity. However, the Monteleone di Spoleto municipality holds bi-annual events and fairs

⁶ Collection of germplasm, characterisation and conservation in the Tuscany region started in 1986, with the collaboration of the Department of Agronomy and Crop Science of the Agricultural Faculty of Florence University. Emmer is one of the many species conserved *ex situ* at the Regional gene bank and maintained *in situ* by few farmers under regional supervision.

where the Monteleone farro, as well as other local products are marketed. Such events provide for networking opportunities with similar projects.

6. Communication

Online communication is an essential part of the communication strategy for the Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer and related events. The Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer is advertised especially through the website “Monteleone di Spoleto Eventi”⁷. Farmers have also set up their own websites where they market their products.

The main challenges are represented by the lack of funding, for example, to translate the website in English. When the municipality receives funding for a project, only a certain percentage of the budget can be destined to improving communication activities. In addition, for such a small municipality, having to pay upfront for the implementation of the project and being reimbursed at a later stage represents a significant challenge.

The municipality is also involved in the organisation of bi-annual events where the Emmer is marketed. As highlighted above, the Emmer plays a central role in the Catholic ceremonies to honour St. Nicholas, the patron saint of the municipality, which also becomes a way of communicating the traditional and regional importance of the Emmer variety.

The target population for the communication activities implemented is mainly national. In particular, the main targets are consumers as well as people who live in Umbria and in the neighbouring Lazio region. Farmers from Montelone di Spoleto have recently participated in Expo 2015, held in Milan, with stands marketing the Montelone Emmer.



Monteleone di Spoleto. Picture: Marisa Angelini

⁷ <http://www.monteleonedispoletoeventi.it/>

7. Outputs and added value

The revival of the Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer is seen as of utmost importance also for the conservation of the territory where it is cultivated. Over time, the promotion of events where the Emmer is marketed, has also become a way to attract tourists to the municipality, which is geographically isolated and not well connected to major towns in central Italy. The inhabitants of Monteleone di Spoleto identify themselves with the Emmer and the activities revolving around its conservation, including the production and marketing of Emmer flour, bread and other products, which have promoted a true sense of community. Indeed, the participants of the initiative are satisfied with the outcome of the actions.

In addition, the Emmer is produced in a sustainable way with great attention paid to the respect for the environment and the conservation of biodiversity.

8. Sustainability

The long term survival of the initiative depends on whether the climatic conditions required for the cultivation of the Monteleone Emmer remain the same over the next decades.

From an organisational/operational point of view, the University of Perugia has provided valuable support for the initiative and the links that have been established over the years between the actors involved in the project are very strong and of both a professional and personal nature. Yet, coordination between actors has proved to be difficult in certain cases also due to competition between farmers.

Whereas farmers have not reported a particularly heavy administrative burden, at institutional level the administrative burden is represented by the high price the municipality has to pay upfront for preparing the projects/events that have been funded (including the set-up of the website), anticipating the money and accounting.

9. Upscaling and out-scaling

There is limited room for upscaling the initiative as the Monteleone Emmer can only be produced up to a certain quantity and in a limited geographic area. Yet, coordination between the farmers involved could be improved and marketing and communication actions would benefit from additional funds.



Field visit in Monteleone di Spoleto – September 2015.

The project could be duplicated in other regions/countries with similar products. Yet, economic valorisation of a neglected and/or underused variety is a lengthy process that requires cooperation between different actors. Such projects would need to be coordinated at national level to avoid competition and marketing problems.

Conclusions

| STRENGTHS | WEAKNESSES |
|--|---|
| <p>The current local government is very active and their involvement has been crucial for the success of this project, in particular for the promotion and communication aspect of the initiative;</p> <p>Various types of actors and especially farmers are involved in the project;</p> <p>Successful cooperation between farmers and researchers;</p> <p>Personal involvement of researchers and strong relationships built over time between different actors.</p> | <p>Lack of funding and resources;</p> <p>Time required for the production of Emmer compared to commercial varieties;</p> <p>Higher price compared to commercial varieties;</p> <p>Geographical location (not well connected to major Italian cities);</p> <p>Communication and coordination between members can be difficult.</p> |
| OPPORTUNITIES | THREATS |
| <p>There is a growing interest and demand for local quality products;</p> <p>Reaching markets outside of the local areas (e.g. North of Italy and abroad);</p> <p>Development of tourism activities.</p> | <p>The impact of the food industry and big retailers (supermarkets) influencing long supply chains and favouring non local products/cheaper products;</p> <p>The market space already occupied by the Garfagnana Emmer.</p> |

The Monteleone di Spoleto Emmer shows a number of features which make it an interesting case study in the field of the conservation and use of genetic resources in agriculture.

The involvement of farmers and the exchange with the research sector have appeared to be the force behind the success of the initiative. In addition, the involvement of the local government in the initiative appears to be of utmost importance for the successful economic valorisation of the Emmer and its products, in particular when it comes to the organisation and promotion of fairs and events revolving around the Monteleone Emmer.

It has emerged that the lack of funding to carry out specific activities and communication activities is perceived as a limiting factor for the development of the initiative, in particular as regards communication and marketing activities. This is coupled with issues in the communication and coordination between the actors involved, also due to competition between farmers and producers.

The success of the initiative has been facilitated by a growing interest and demand for local quality products, which appears to be a widespread trend thanks to a renewed interest for vegetable and natural products. Opportunities to market the Montelone Emmer in the North of Italy and possibly abroad are being explored, although for the time being the Emmer has been sold and marketed mainly in the Umbria region, also in the framework of tourist activities.

Whereas a strong mismatch between supply and demand was not detected, the higher price of the Monteleone Emmer compared to commercial varieties and the competitive advantage and market space already occupied by the Garfagnana Emmer represent significant challenges. Moreover, the success of the initiative is hampered by the impact of the food industry and big retailers (supermarkets), influence long supply chains and favour non local products and cheaper products.

Annex 1 – List of interviewees

- Marisa Angelini, Mayor of Monteleone di Spoleto
- Renzo Torricelli, PhD, University of Perugia
- Professor Mario Falcinelli, University of Perugia
- Luca Cicchetti, Azienda Cicchetti <http://www.farrocicchetti.it/>
- Angelini Domenico, Azienda Dolci <http://www.farrodimonteleone.it/>
- Professor Isidoro Peroni, ADOR <http://www.adoronline.it/chiamo.php>
- Paolo Peroni, chairman of Association Emmer of Monteleone di Spoleto

Annex 2 – List of references

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