



Climate change mitigation & Environmental care

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United we stand for the environment! Context-sensitive training of advisors to boost ecological transitions.



Keywords/Tags



Peer-to-peer learning



Demo-farms



Climate change



Potential users



Managing authorities of the CAP strategic Plans



Advisors and advisory organizations



Vocational training bodies

RATIONALE



To support the ecological transitions outlined in the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), it is essential to enhance the capacities of farm advisors. The CAP aims to address climate change, protect natural resources, and enhance biodiversity in a socially and economically sustainable manner.

Key measures, such as conditionality standards, eco-schemes, and rural development interventions, emphasize the importance of green farming practices.

Farm advisory services play a critical role in guiding farmers through these transitions by:

- Keeping them informed about new research, methods, and technologies for environmentally friendly farming.
- Helping them understand and comply with EU environmental and health regulations.
- Providing information on statutory management requirements and best practices for land management.
- Supporting the adoption of climate-beneficial agricultural practices and modernisation measures.
- As transitions require locally adapted solutions that enhance economic viability and social conditions in rural areas, training should focus on developing advisors who take a systemic and holistic approach, with a deep understanding of agricultural sustainability and the dynamics of modern agri-food systems.



The "Course for Environmental Trainer" addresses the gap of local expertise and professionalization about the environmental and social challenges posed by the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy. Following the idea of Casa dell'Agricoltura, a local NGO, this has been designed based on a thorough understanding of the local context, awareness of agricultural and environmental issues, and collaboration among key actors in the local Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System (AKIS). These latter, equipped with relevant transdisciplinary skills, have come together to organize, fund, and implement this course (box 1).

The "Course for Environmental Trainer" is a postgraduate specialization program aimed at training professional advisors who can support farms in their ecological transition through a holistic approach that aligns sustainable farming practices with business and territorial development.

Box 1: Promoters of the course

- Casa dell'Agricoltura is an NGO pursuing cultural and social goals relating to the valorisation of agriculture and of its workers in urban areas.
- Fondazione CARIPO is a philanthropic entity devoted to combating inequalities and promoting the economic and social growth of the territory.
- University of Milan, Department of Environmental Sciences and Policies and the Department of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences
- CREA - Council for Agricultural Research and Economics.
- Italian National Rural Network, that includes specific actions to disseminate knowledge on the CAP and its objectives.
- ODAF – the provincial order of the agronomists and foresters.
- Fondazione Cascina Cotica, an NGO devoted to favoring the sense of community as a value for social relations.

Specific capacity building goals pursued through this training course are:

- Understanding agricultural issues related to business profitability, agricultural production, and livestock, while also aligning with the necessity of environmental conservation and the associated policies.
- Supporting farms in their transition to sustainability, particularly regarding agricultural spending and the definition of technological and production processes.
- Serving as a point of reference, dialogue, and collaboration with public administration to ensure smoother operations, greater alignment with reality, and more effective outcomes.

The course is free of charge and the participation includes training material, on field visits and lunches.

Most of the trainees are young students and farmers from marginal areas.

The course is completely free for the attendances and admits a maximum of 15 participants.



Participants are selected through a public call for applications and 2/3 of the seats are reserved to recent graduates. The training programme is defined in collaboration with all the supporters that also provide the trainers and infrastructures. Every year the modules and methods are revised to be better aligned to the observed issues and the needs of the potential trainees.

A scientific committee, composed by their representatives, steers the whole training course and defines selection criteria of candidates and valuations of the trainees.

The training course is structured around topic-related modules (Table 1) and 80 in presence training hours distributed over 5 months, by including classroom (80 hours) and on field (4/5 visits on farms, research centres, universities, ...) lessons, and critical reflection exercises (15 hours).

The lessons are held during the weekends (6 hours on Friday and 4 hours on Saturday), to facilitate access by workers (e.g. advisors, farmers).

The critical reflection exercise consists of a 3-hour discussion between 2 farmers generally with different ideas regarding the topic of each module of the course (e.g. organic and agro-ecological farming). This creates an interesting dialogue among the students.

An evaluation of the students is provided at the end of each teaching module and the course is successfully passed with 75% attendance of the lessons and following a final test.

Table 1: Exemplary training modules

Module	Content
Sustainable economy and Sustainability policies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • General principles. • Short supply chain markets/Local markets/Supply chain contracts. • Circular economy LCA sustainability certifications. • EU strategies for sustainable development: the Green New Deal, the Farm to Fork strategy, the European Strategy for Biodiversity. • Integration between production and consumers (Systems of sustainable certification, traceability systems, information of consumers)
Ecology and sustainable agriculture	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agriculture and climate change. • Conservation and increase of fertility and biodiversity of soils. • Sustainable management of plant protection (parasites, pathogens, weeds). • Use and management of water. • Agroecology. • Regenerative agriculture. • The agroecological approach from theory to practice. • Organic: opportunities and problems in production plants and livestock. • Plant genetics and natural seeds.
Sustainable animal husbandry	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainable management of livestock (genetics, nutrition, emissions). • Organic animal husbandry. • Management and valorisation of livestock waste.

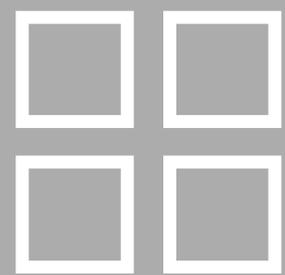
Module	Contents
Precision farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Precision agriculture and innovation for sustainable use of water resources, pesticide treatments and fertilizers. • Drones, satellite, digitalisation • Availability and use of data.
Rural territory, multifunctionality and ecosystemic services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Territorial planning tools, agri-environmental policies and local development. • Agroforestry system and ecosystem services. • Economic evaluation of ecosystem services. • Value of multifunctionality in agriculture. • Multifunctionality and local development. • Social agriculture.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR REPLICABILITY



This practice can be promoted as training intervention type under the condition of:

- Budget availability to cover organizational (e.g. infrastructures, training materials, on field visits) and training costs (trainers).
- Availability of topic-specific experts as trainers.
- Conduction of timing context analysis and needs assessment of farmers for support over the ecological transitions.
- Establishment of mechanisms for periodic assessment of the performances of trainees.
- Availability of capacities to promote wide access.
- Protocols with local AKIS actors that are relevant during the design, organization and implementation of the course.



BENEFITS



- The course addresses specific needs for professional advisors that regards both the farms and the public administrations.
- Boosting young advisors to acquire specialized competences for ecological transitions.
- Weekend scheduling of the trainings favors participation by workers.
- Modular approach to training allows trainees taking control of their education and assuming greater responsibility for their own learning.
- The promotion by a network of local AKIS actors helps creating an enable environment for new relationships and trust among the participants.
- The engagement of peer-to-peer reflection exercise by farms helps them acquiring major awareness and learnings about the different perspectives on green transitions and respective farm-level implications.

FURTHER SOURCES OF INFORMATION



Casa dell'Agricoltura: <https://casagricoltura.org/formatore-agricolo-ambientale/>



Italy, Lombardia Region



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