

COFARM



CASE STUDY: RETE QUALITÀ TOSCANA (RQT)

Introduction

RETE QUALITÀ TOSCANA (RQT) was founded in 2012, and currently includes 49 associated companies (farmers and cooperatives), involved in the management of chain of projects which are co-financed by RDP of Tuscany Regional Government. This entrepreneurial network was legally established through a contract, as a form of cooperation recognized by Italian National Legislation aims to improve direct selling system.

Basic information



Florence (I)

Name RETE QUALITÀ TOSCANA (RQT)

Year of establishment 2012

Kind of cooperation Association . Other types of cooperation

Number of farmers/ landowners/ entrepreneurs/ enterprises involved 49

Internet links
Web site address: www.retequalitatoscana.it
Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/retequalitatoscana/>



Farm Data

Description

The network includes 46 farmers, 2 cooperatives, Oleificio sociale Grevepesa and OTA – Associated olives producers, and 1 service company, GEAPROMO TOSCANA, promoted by Cia Toscana. The companies involved in the network collectively employ 67 individuals. All farmers are involved in certified processes for quality production, with a special emphasis on wine and olive oil production; and a majority of farmers have adopted organic farming systems and are also involved in agro-touristic activities. The cooperatives associated in RQT operate in the olive oil sector, transforming olives of their associated farmers into high quality and certified olive oil. The service company is in charge of administrative and management activities.



Cooperation Process Data

This entrepreneurs network, seeks to develop innovative solutions in order for farmers to reach the global market without administrative burdens and legal constraints. Many farmers are really interested in signing cooperation agreements, but they are discouraged by the eventual obligations and loss of independence of their companies. The RQT entrepreneurs' network allows its membership to reach some common objectives within the consortium without carrying out commercial activity, without VAT fees, and thereby significantly reducing the administrative and financial burden. Each company maintains its individual legal status and participates in the network only to attain common objectives. RQT was established with the objective to participate in regional calls for multi-actor chain projects co-financed by the Rural Development Program. RQT initially managed a project called QUALITOSCANA.NET (<http://www.retequalitatoscana.it>) in the period 2012-2014, realizing investments for €3,640,000 for the promotion of direct selling by farmers; and adopting a certified production system.

In 2015, RQT participated in a second call for chain projects with the project AGR-EAT (<http://www.retequalitatoscana.it/home/progetto-agr-eat/>.) The total value of this project was €7,700,000. This second project, currently underway, aims to create a network of agro-restaurants based on the products of local farmers. The project is

working in collaboration with High School S. Anna of Pisa in order to realize a selection of products for people with low tolerance to gluten.

RQT is an open network. All policies and key decision are discussed and agreed at shareholders meetings, which are convened 3-4 times per year. The daily management is overseen by a management committee composed of three members. The network does not employ its own staff, because the administrative management is very light: no official accountability, no enterprise obligation, only a single financial report approved by the assembly. Therefore the cost of management is very low and sustainable; another company not associated in the network manages the chain project and the cost of this activity is charged to the beneficiaries of the financial support received by Tuscany Regional Government.

The main knowledge requirements related for operating such an initiative include:

- Cooperation system in agriculture
- Rules regulating this form of cooperation (legal framework, administrative management),
- Principles of direct selling and short chain strategy

The main benefit for farmers participating in RQT is the opportunity to cooperate with a low cost in a common economic action aimed at implementing chain projects receiving the financial support from RDP for their own investments. Another advantage for being involved in the entrepreneurs' network is the marketing activity of RQT i.e the promotion of certified systems for quality production represents as an indirect form of valorization for the members of RQT.

The critical point is that many farmers consider obtaining financial support from the Rural Development Program (RDP) as the only scope of the network. Therefore, many farmers are not interested in investing in RQT as a means to strengthen its activities.

This form of cooperation can be a very interesting opportunity to bring a group of small farmers with collective interests in order to share production processes, equipment, tools or services (i.e. advisors, technical consultancy, other).

Possible advantages and disadvantages include:

Advantages:

- Low management costs and low administrative/contractual burdens.
- Limited financial risk.
- Possibility to leave the network at any time.
- Commercial promotion of its members through the actions aimed to promote certified systems for quality production.

Disadvantages:

- The structure (in terms of legal guarantees and administrative staff) is not suitable to manage large business activities.
- The composition of the network is unstable. The life of network require an high level of cohesion between participants.

Advice/Recommendation

Valentino Vannelli, President of RQT stated:

“ Cooperation can be a great opportunity for farmers, but is necessary a good balance between own interests and common interests. ”

“ In a cooperation process each participant must be involved in the decision making process. ”

“ The characteristics of Enterprises network suggest an approach based on the following assumptions:

1. Clear idea of the scope of network.
2. An adequate plan of activities and related costs to achieve the expected objectives.
3. A partnership with a good level of cohesion, awareness and sharing of ideas.
4. A contract indicating with clearness all the clauses defining activities, roles and responsibilities, conditions of internal life of network.”

Queries/Questions

- What do you think about the possibility of applying this form of cooperation in your locality ?



Key Words

Cooperation Key Words

Association
Other types of cooperation
Services

Farm Key Words

Direct sales/short supply chain
Organic/integrated/certified farming
Small/family farm(s)
Traditional products/farming practices

Partners



Limerick Institute of Technology:
(Ireland)
www.lit.ie/rdi



Hof und Leben GmbH
(Germany)
www.hofundleben.de



Asociace
soukromého
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Asociace Soukromeho Zemedelstvi
Ceske Republiky (Czech Republic)
www.asz.cz



On Projects Advising SL
(Spain)
www.onprojects.es



Union de Agricultores y Ganaderos-
Jovenes Agricultores de Jaén (Spain)
www.coagjaen.es



Biotehniški Center Naklo
(Slovenia)
www.bc-naklo.si



Confederazione Italiana Agricoltori Toscana
(Italy)
www.ciatoscana.eu



European Landowners' Organisation
(Belgium)
www.europeanlandowners.org

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Project Website

www.cofarm-erasmus.eu



Co-funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission. This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein. CO-FARM: Enhancing COoperation amongst FARMing entrepreneurs Project Number: 2016-1-IE01-KA202-016870