

AgrEcoMed

FOSTERING AGROECOLOGICAL TRANSITION

“New AGRoecological approach for soil fertility and biodiversity restoration to improve ECONomic and social resilience of MEDiterranean farming systems”

Deliverable 5.5
Protocols of methodologies to be applied to
network

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Acronym and abbreviations

AgrEcoMed	New AGROecological approach for soil fertility and biodiversity restoration to improve ECONomic and social resilience of MEDiterranean farming systems
PRIMA	Partnership for Research and Innovation in the Mediterranean Area
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning platform
WP	Work package

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Executive summary

The AgrEcoMed project, funded under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation program PRIMA and Grant Agreement PRIMA21_00018 is a research project aimed to fill the research gaps for implementing a biodiversity-based strategy for primary crops as cereal farming systems through an Agroecological approach adapted to environments in Mediterranean countries, efficient use of natural resources, reduction of pollution, circular economy. Such a goal will be achieved through innovative approaches to support the sustainable production of staple foods in the scenario of the present and future climate changes. To support the strategic coordination and overall management structure of this project, a project execution plan is essential. Women are the strongest supporters of agroecology in many Mediterranean states and play a critical and potentially transformative role in agricultural growth. In this direction, agroecology can be seen as a tool for the economic development and empowerment of rural women, becoming a response to the transformation of the food production and consumption system. CREA Policies and Bioeconomy intends to strengthen the system of knowledge and cooperation among farmers in the Mediterranean area, with particular attention to women and young people through the Establishment of a network of women in agroecological transition and the creation of a Policy brief on the agroecological approach.

Keywords: PRIMA, AgrEcoMed, agroecological policy, dissemination, network, young people, women

1. AgrEcoMed project

AgrEcoMed is a 36-month Research and Innovation Action (RIA) project under Grant Agreement No PRIMA21_00018 aiming to fill the research gaps for implementing a biodiversity-based strategy for primary crops as cereal farming systems through an Agroecological approach adapted to environments in Mediterranean countries, efficient use of natural resources, reduction of pollution, circular economy. The effective start of the project is 23/05/2022 and the project ends 36 months later, on 31/05/2025. The AgrEcoMed consortium consists of 8 partners from 4 countries (including two EU and non-EU countries). The project is coordinated by the University of Basilicata (UNIBAS, Italy). The list of Project Participants is included in the Grant Agreement, in the Consortium Agreement, and presented in Table 1. The project has an overall budget of 1,308,051.15 €. The budget detailed per beneficiary and the corresponding EU contribution of each beneficiary is detailed in Annex 2 to the Grant Agreement – Estimated budget of the action.

Table 1. Partners of the AgrEcoMed project and representatives.

Participant No *	PI name	Organization	Short name	Country	Type
P1	Michele Perniola	University of Basilicata	UNIBAS	Italy	Higher Education Institution
P2	Luigi Roselli	University of Bari	UNIBA	Italy	Higher Education Institution
P3	Maria Assunta D'Oronzio	Council for Agricultural Research and Economics	CREA	Italy	Public Research organization
P4	Ines Yacoubi	Centre of Biotechnology of Sfax	CBS	Tunisia	Public organization
P5	Hanine Hafida	University Sultan Moulay Slimane Beni Mellal	USMS	Morocco	Higher Education Institution
P6	Said Ennahli	National School of Agriculture	ENAM	Morocco	Public Research Organisation
P7	Julio Berbel	Universidad de Córdoba	UCO	Spain	Higher Education Institution
P8	Neus Sanjuan Pellicer	Universitat Politècnica de València	UPV	Spain	Higher Education Institution

This deliverable outlines the comprehensive protocols and methodologies designed to enhance collaboration and knowledge sharing within the AgrEcoMed network. It aims to establish standardized practices that facilitate effective communication, data exchange, and joint research efforts among the consortium partners. The protocols encompass various aspects, including data collection techniques, analytical methods, and best practices for stakeholder engagement. By implementing these methodologies, the project seeks to foster a cohesive network that leverages the diverse expertise of its members, ultimately contributing to the successful execution of agroecological initiatives. The deliverable serves as a foundational resource for ensuring consistency and quality in the collaborative processes, thereby enhancing the overall impact of the AgrEcoMed project on sustainable agricultural practices in the Mediterranean region.

2.1 Relation of D5.5 with AgrEcoMed objectives

Deliverable 5.5 of the AgrEcoMed project is closely aligned with the overarching objectives of the initiative,

which focuses on promoting sustainable agricultural practices and enhancing the resilience of Mediterranean farming systems. The relationship can be outlined as follows:

- i. **Capacity Building:** One of the primary goals of AgrEcoMed is to empower farmers, particularly women and youth, by providing them with the necessary knowledge and skills to adopt innovative cropping systems and agroecological practices. Deliverable 5.5 supports this objective by offering structured methodologies and training protocols that enhance participants' capabilities, fostering a more knowledgeable and skilled farming community.
- ii. **Promotion of Agroecological Innovations:** The project aims to facilitate the adoption of innovative farming practices that increase biodiversity and improve environmental sustainability. Deliverable 5.5 contributes to this goal by equipping participants with the tools and knowledge required to implement these practices effectively, ensuring that the innovations developed within the project are understood and applied in real-world scenarios.
- iii. **Knowledge Transfer and Networking:** AgrEcoMed emphasizes the importance of knowledge sharing and collaboration among stakeholders. Deliverable 5.5 plays a crucial role in this by providing a framework for the transfer of knowledge and best practices among consortium members and participants, fostering a collaborative environment that encourages co-creation and the exchange of ideas.
- iv. **Dissemination of Results:** The project seeks to disseminate its findings to a broader audience, including stakeholders and the research community. The methodologies outlined in Deliverable 5.5 will be utilized in workshops and educational programs, directly supporting the dissemination objectives of the project and ensuring that the knowledge generated is accessible to all relevant parties.

In summary, Deliverable 5.5 is integral to achieving the objectives of the AgrEcoMed project by enhancing capacity building, promoting agroecological innovations, facilitating knowledge transfer, and supporting the dissemination of results, thereby addressing the challenges faced by Mediterranean farmers and contributing to sustainable agricultural development in the region.

2.2 Relation of D5.4 with other WP and deliverables

Deliverable D5.5, which focuses on the "Protocols of Methodologies to be Applied to Network," is intricately connected to several other work packages and deliverables within the AgrEcoMed project. Its collaborative nature ensures that it supports and enhances the objectives of the following WPs:

- i. **WP1 (Knowledge Transfer and Capacity Building):** D5.5 provides essential methodologies that facilitate the transfer of knowledge and skills among stakeholders, particularly in training sessions and workshops aimed at farmers and agricultural practitioners. The protocols outlined in D5.5 will be utilized in the educational digital lab (D5.2) to ensure effective learning outcomes.
- ii. **WP2 (Research and Innovation):** The methodologies established in D5.5 will guide the research activities in WP2, ensuring that data collection and analysis are conducted consistently across different studies. This alignment will enhance the reliability of findings and foster collaborative research efforts among partners.
- iii. **WP3 (Stakeholder Engagement):** D5.5 directly supports WP3 by providing frameworks for engaging stakeholders effectively. The protocols will be instrumental in organizing focus groups and workshops, ensuring that stakeholder input is systematically gathered and utilized in project decision-making.
- iv. **WP4 (Monitoring and Evaluation):** The methodologies in D5.5 will be critical for the monitoring and evaluation processes outlined in WP4. By establishing clear protocols for data collection and

reporting, D5.5 will help ensure that the project's progress is accurately assessed and that lessons learned are documented for future reference.

- v. **D5.6 (Workshops):** The protocols developed in D5.5 will be applied in the organization and execution of the two workshops (D5.6), ensuring that these events are structured, productive, and aligned with the overall goals of the AgrEcoMed project.
- vi. **D5.7 (Good Practices Collection):** The methodologies will also inform the collection of good practices (D5.7) by providing a systematic approach to documenting and sharing successful strategies and innovations within the network.

In summary, D5.5 serves as a foundational element that interlinks various work packages and deliverables, promoting coherence and synergy across the AgrEcoMed project. Its implementation will enhance the overall effectiveness of the consortium's efforts in advancing agroecological practices in the Mediterranean region.

2. Premise

Agriculture, in addition to being a crucial productive sector for Italy, is one of the economic sectors with the highest rate of female participation, with women entrepreneurs who skillfully blend tradition and innovation. In 2023, there are 1,325 million women-owned businesses in Italy, accounting for 22.2% of the total national productive fabric. Specifically, according to Unioncamere data, as of December 2023, there are 196,759 women-owned agricultural enterprises, representing a 3% decrease compared to December 2022 (6,111 fewer businesses). Additionally, there are approximately 21,000 agricultural, forestry, and fishing enterprises run by young people. Among these, 7.5% of entrepreneurs are under 35, and two out of three have a university degree, which culturally predisposes them to introduce innovation into their businesses, including new production approaches.

In the relationship between production and food, women agricultural entrepreneurs are characterized by their attention to food safety and their tendency to combine tradition with innovation. Their businesses are more socially responsible, focused on sustainability, and have significant growth potential in terms of inclusivity and resilience.

The link between women and agriculture is therefore undeniable. Despite playing a significant role in the sustainable management of agricultural enterprises in many parts of the world and having a historical tradition of applying sustainable practices and protecting biodiversity, women face numerous challenges, including limited access to resources, funding, training, and markets.

In This Direction, The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) 2023-2027 reaffirms that the integration of the gender dimension is one of the fundamental principles of the Union and urges member states to make a particular effort to encourage and promote the role of women in agriculture. Within the framework of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), General Recommendation 34 promotes the agroecological approach as a model to ensure women's rights, their social and economic development, and to guarantee food security for all.

According to the UN, by 2050, the global population could reach 10 billion, making the contribution of women to sustainable production and food security essential. Reducing the gender gap in access to productive resources could increase the output of women-owned agricultural enterprises by 20%-30%, benefiting the economy and the entire population (OECD data).

Women are the strongest advocates of agroecology in many Mediterranean states and play a critical and

potentially transformative role in agricultural growth. In this direction, agroecology can be seen as a tool for economic development and empowerment of rural women, becoming a response to the transformation of the food production and consumption system (Bruil & al., 2020).

Multidisciplinarity and collaborative practices are fundamental for the development of agroecology, and these practices cannot develop without the establishment of networks. The multiple roles of agriculture in contemporary societies make the task of social interaction and coordination among various actors indispensable (Falkowski et al., 2017).

There are various reasons that have led to the adoption of the agroecological approach, which farmers promote through local networks, including:

- a) A propensity to promote understanding, inclusion, and collaboration. Its dissemination requires constant participation from farmers and a horizontal system of knowledge sharing;
- b) An approach based on traditional knowledge and the promotion of a dialogue of knowledge;
- c) The promotion of economically sustainable techniques that highlight the use of agro-biodiversity knowledge and local resources;
- d) Attention to not altering existing production systems, but optimizing their performance by promoting diversification, synergy, and efficiency.

Therefore, each territory and network can find its path by moving from conservation techniques (no-till farming, minimum tillage, use of cover crops and green manure), to organic farming, to the implementation of digital solutions, as well as crop diversification (indigenous breeds or varieties) and the sharing of production factors.

Agroecological practice is characterized by a high intensity of knowledge, which can be facilitated and supported by networks among farmers, promoting their participation.

Networks must utilize various tools (training, technology, etc.) to create a favorable environment where women and young people can thrive and contribute significantly to sustainable rural development.

3. Output/s

Within the project “New AGRoecological approach for soil fertility and biodiversity restoration to improve ECONomic and social resilience of MEDiterranean farming systems - AgrEcoMed”, CREA Politiche e Bioeconomia will handle activities related to strengthening the knowledge system and cooperation among Mediterranean area farmers, particularly focusing on women and young people. Specifically, Task 5.4 of AgrEcoMed, “Women Network,” includes the following outputs:

Establishment of a network of women in agroecological transition;

Policy brief on the agroecological approach.

The creation of a network of women who apply the agroecological approach aims not only to strengthen their role as entrepreneurs but also to promote greater gender equity, environmental sustainability, and food security. Joining the network is also aimed at promoting the agroecological approach and transition. Networks serve as spaces for mutual learning, fostering interaction and knowledge sharing, and creating an

inclusive community in the field of agroecology. This allows for: exchanging ideas, networking with other members, engaging with current developments in the agroecology landscape, supporting project activities, and shaping the group's positions on policy issues through joint efforts.

The women's agroecology network can represent a place—virtual as well—for meeting, debate, and exchange among the diverse cultures of the Mediterranean. It can trigger mechanisms of learning, exchange, and mutual support among the involved parties, aiming to strengthen knowledge, transfer innovation, and improve the organization of common work processes (including through the use of exchange platforms). Promoting a collective and shared path of actions and interventions, with the explicit goal of valuing the various agroecology pathways and triggering change processes based on values of equity, respect, and openness, will benefit everyone involved.

4. Methodology for Establishing the Network

The methodology was developed in close collaboration with the activities and methodologies adopted in other tasks of WP5, ensuring appropriate synergies. The companies from the Bradano and Murge Agroecological Districts, which represent the core of the network, were invited to participate in all project activities, beginning with the survey described in the report *"Interviews: The Perception of Changes in the Mediterranean Landscape in the Ecological Transition System,"* October 2023.

Contacts established with several existing networks allowed for the sharing of project objectives and activities. This was notably demonstrated during the event held for International Women's Day 2024 (March 8, 2024) at the Municipal Library of Castronuovo di Sant'Andrea (Potenza). At this event, Assunta D'Oronzio, head of CREA – Research Center for Agricultural Policies and Bioeconomy, Basilicata Region, presented the AgrEcoMed project during an interview with Beatrice Volpe. She emphasized the importance of women's contributions to agriculture. [More details can be found here.](#)

The *PRIMA Women Greening Food Systems Award*, promoted through the National Rural Network, MASAF, CREA, and the AgrEcoMed website, aims to recognize the contributions of women at the forefront of promoting positive changes in the agricultural sector across the Mediterranean. This EU-funded initiative, launched on March 8, 2024, highlights the indispensable role of women in cultivating sustainable food systems in the region. [Further information is available here.](#)

The nomination for the Woman Greening Food Systems Award – PRIMA – featured a notable Lucanian experience, which was identified as a best practice for women and young people within the AgrEcoMed project. This nomination involved a woman managing a farm and a plastic-free home restaurant in the Pollino National Park. She has successfully built inclusive networks with other women to enhance the region's tourism, food, and cultural sectors.

Participation in local agroecology meetings further supported networking and collaboration:

- *Diversification for Water Management and Climate Change Mitigation* – A multi-stakeholder meeting under the ALL-ORGANIC AGROFOREST Project: Agroforestry System Living Lab, held on March 14, 2024, in Metaponto (MT).
- *Field Study Day on the Cultivation of Heterogeneous Biological Material (MEB) of Durum Wheat* – Held on June 7, 2024, in Palazzo San Gervasio (PZ).

The analysis of good agroecological practices, conducted under Task 5.3, focused on identifying Mediterranean enterprises involving women and young people to engage in network activities and contribute to policy briefs on the agroecological approach.

"Networking" thus represents the action of joining, connecting, and collaborating with individuals who share similar interests, goals, and ideals. In the context of women and female associations, networking becomes a powerful tool to amplify gender issues and promote positive social change. By identifying, designing, and implementing responses to common needs, including advocating for norms and action plans from a gender and intersectional perspective, networking contributes to the development of national and local policies. This approach also enables advocacy within national and European bodies.

To establish the network, it will be essential, following preliminary discussions and formalized written requests, to engage with agricultural industry associations. The aim is to identify two enterprises led by women and young people who are sensitive to agroecological issues and willing to participate in project activities. Similarly, requests will be sent to agroecology experts at universities, research institutions, and foreign partners (in Spain, Tunisia, and Morocco) for the same purpose.

Key stakeholders for this phase include:

- Agricultural Confederations (CIA, Confagricoltura, Coldiretti) and their Women Farmers' Associations
- UNIDO
- States General of Women (permanent coordination)
- Women's Associations: Rural Women Farmers Forum, Women on Boards
- Women's rural movement in Spain
- Women entrepreneurs involved in the Meplusus project on medicinal plants
- Enterprises led by women and young people identified through other tasks (Task 5.2 – workshop participants; Task 5.3 – desk analysis of good agroecological practices in the Mediterranean, Call for Best Practices Selection, and the report "*Availability of Field Data for Agroecological Practices Selection*" conducted in October 2023)
- Producer Organizations and Associations of Producer Organizations involving women (OOPP and AOP)
- Relevant projects such as SELMA, TAMAT, and Avaclim

Supporting the establishment of this network will involve collaboration among women entrepreneurs and sector stakeholders. This collaboration will be fostered through project activities, including participation in online meetings (5.1), educational labs (5.2) to develop knowledge and networks, and access to the Platform Lab (5.2). Additionally, online meetings dedicated to promoting collaboration and communication among network participants are scheduled.

5. Methodology for drafting the Policy Brief

The Policy Brief will be developed in collaboration with the agricultural enterprises involved in the network activities. These enterprises will be provided with a concise framework on the topic, supported by a statistical analysis of female-led businesses and their agro-ecological orientation (e.g., organic production, diversification, recycling etc.). Additionally, a SWOT analysis will highlight the critical challenges and opportunities associated with adopting these approaches.

To achieve this, data and information from multiple sources will be utilized to represent and examine the evolution of agroecological approaches within the Mediterranean region, with specific reference to the national context. The data will be drawn from major statistical sources (e.g., ISTAT, Unioncamere), sector literature, regulations, and key programming and implementation documents related to the project.

The needs of entrepreneurs will be directly expressed during focus groups organized as part of Task 5.3, "*Gender Equality through the Analysis of Women's Ecological Transition Good Practices.*" These focus groups will shed light on the main challenges facing the entrepreneurial world and help identify potential tools (regulatory, methodological, managerial) that could support enterprises in their agroecological transition. Based on these discussions, specific recommendations will be suggested to guide policymakers' decision-making processes in the near future. The Policy Brief aims to serve as a valuable tool for shaping policy direction and development agendas, with the ultimate goal of overcoming key barriers to the dissemination of agroecological practices.

6. Conclusions

The AgrEcoMed project is pivotal in promoting sustainable agricultural practices across the Mediterranean region, addressing the pressing challenges faced by local farmers. By fostering collaboration among diverse stakeholders, including researchers, policymakers, and agricultural practitioners, the project aims to create a robust network that supports the adoption of agroecological innovations. Deliverable D5.5 outlines essential protocols and methodologies that enhance the project's capacity-building efforts, ensuring effective monitoring, evaluation, and dissemination of knowledge.

Through targeted workshops and the development of a comprehensive Policy Brief, the project seeks to empower farmers, particularly women-led enterprises, by equipping them with the necessary skills and resources to implement sustainable practices. Furthermore, the insights gained from these initiatives will guide policymakers in crafting supportive frameworks that facilitate agroecological transitions, ultimately contributing to the resilience and sustainability of the Mediterranean agricultural landscape. By prioritizing knowledge transfer and best practices, AgrEcoMed is set to make a lasting impact on the region's agricultural development and environmental stewardship.

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