

Potplant project

Rural businesses and native flora receive boost from demand-led research project



Summary

Italian nature conservation scientists joined forces with commercial horticultural growers in a cooperation project to promote a new range of garden shrubs and other plants that help to increase the sustainability of native flora in Lombardia. Result demonstrates the mutual benefits from EU scientist and rural businesses working closely together on demand-led rural development research.



Type of project

Cooperative research

Priority/focus area, measure

Knowledge transfer and innovation

Theme

Competitiveness of agriculture
Sustainable management of resources and climate action

Location

Galbiate, Lombardy region, Italy

Funding

Total project cost € 215 748
EAFRD contribution € 106 374

Type of beneficiary

Public education & research

Duration

May 2011 - November 2012

Website

www.parcobarro.lombardia.it/

Description

Official project title

Potplant project - Progetto Pot Plant:
Produzione ottimizzata di piante lombarde
autoctone certificate ad uso naturalistico e
ornamentale



Context and needs

Nature conservation commitments in Italy's Lombardia region led to an increase in demand for large volumes of potted native plants that could be used for 'restoring' vegetation in protected biodiversity areas. Horticultural scientists and commercial growers recognised that this demand also offered an opportunity to establish new ranges of ornamental plant species for the domestic market.

Objectives

Goals for the partners in this cooperative research project focused on establishing an on-going and large volume supply-chain for native plant species. These were to be certified with a quality label confirming their authenticity as native plants. Outcomes would:

- increase the availability of native species in Lombardia;
- provide an alternative to non-native species (and thereby reduce risks associated with outbreaks of potentially damaging invasive species);
- diversify horticultural business operations and thereby increase scope for improved competitiveness;
- raise awareness about the availability of native species in general;
- add to scientific knowledge about conservation techniques for the region's native flora.

At least 10 new commercial varieties of native species were expected to become available following the project's completion.

Activities

A partnership of public and private sector bodies implemented the project. They included the Centre of Autochthonous Flora (CFA), the University of Pavia, the Natural Park of Monte Barro (Lecco), the Foundation Minoprio (Como) and 10 plant nurseries. Initial work involved collecting native species to test reproduction systems. Some 40,000 plants were tested and findings led to a horticultural production process that was certified with an ISO 22005 standard. A promotion campaign followed to raise awareness about the new species. This included

carrying out market research at nurseries and horticultural exhibitions to determine demand for plants (as well as plant features) that customers found attractive.

Results

A total of 20 different certification procedures were developed and validated for native plants. Over 28,000 plant specimens were produced and branded as ‘Flora Autoctona®’ (certified origin). More than 12,000 of these had the environmental certification UNI EN ISO 14020 concerning native plants. Such positive results helped to encourage a consortium to become established to take the project actions further. This producer group included 60 members ranging from plant nurseries, consulting services, publishing bodies, greenhouse producers and exhibitors. Their work sustained the project results and focused on launching a full-scale production process for the native plants. This activity also secured RDP co-finance.

Lessons

A key lesson relates to the success of involving rural businesses in scientific research at an early stage of the project planning. This helped the research to be demand-led (rather than supply-led). Nurseries needed the research to help them choose the right species and to implement the best production methods. At the same time, the researchers needed the nurseries’ understanding of the needs and requirements of their customers in order to grow new products that were well adapted to the market. Technical lessons included how to overcome challenges associated with large stocks of ‘mother plants’ in a breeding programme of this scale. Other useful knowledge was gained about optimal time planning for different aspects of the ex-situ conservation procedures.

Quotes from beneficiaries/participants

“It was very useful for us to be involved in the research project from the beginning because this helped us to gain the result that we wanted.”

Francesca Beschi, Azienda Agricola Antica Pieve. Horticultural Nursery

“We shared our different perspectives and this led to the research being ‘demand-led’, and not simply and purely ‘supply-led’. This was good because it produced synergies that could not have been possible if the research had been purely supply-led.”

Roberta Ceriani, Native Flora Centre of Lombardy

“The Potplant project not only created new scientific knowledge and business benefits, but it also helps to conserve our regional biodiversity.”

Francesca Beschi, Azienda Agricola Antica Pieve. Horticultural Nursery

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Additional sources of information, links

- [Potplant Project Presentation](#)
- www.youtube.com/watch?v=cqsL-CgioCI