



Training for Women Innovating in Farming and Rural Areas

Policy Brief Italy

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“Facilitating trainings for women leading innovative projects favour sustainable change in rural communities.”

Executive Summary

Women leading innovative projects in farming or in rural entrepreneurship in Italy often have to rely on self-financed courses and trainings, most frequently promoted by informal groups and networks, in order to acquire specific skills and knowledge. Policy makers should support the creation of regional platforms where information on free and public training courses can be easily found. Besides, the creation of “Learning Centres for Rural and Farming Entrepreneurship” where courses tailored to women’s needs can be offered should be supported.

The Challenge

- 🏠 European as well as national public agricultural training programmes mostly target large conventional agriculture rather than “alternative” forms of agriculture.
- 🏠 Women tend to lead small-scale farms, multifunctional farms, or environmentally sustainable farms (organic, agro-ecological, etc.). They therefore need to acquire specific knowledge and skills related to these models of agriculture.
- 🏠 Training courses about sustainable farming techniques (e.g., organic, regenerative, permaculture, etc.) are often not available through public institutions/public educational system. Training on specific competences such as those needed to run an agri-kindergarten, or a social farm are also limited.
- 🏠 Digital and entrepreneurship skills are required to manage a rural entrepreneurship as well as a farm. Currently, these skills are acquired mainly through paid courses run by associations, NGOs, or private individuals.
- 🏠 It is difficult to access information on available training courses in a specific region.



- 🏠 When available, training courses are usually offered during weekdays and normal working hours, or in central locations limiting the capacity of women managing a farm or a rural business to attend them.

Policy Solutions

We propose to:

- 🏠 Support the creation of a regional platform where information on training courses available at regional level can be found. The platform may also be managed by the “Learning Centre for rural and farming entrepreneurship”.

- 🏠 Support the creation of “Learning Centres for rural and farming entrepreneurship” in each Region. These Centres shall offer free training courses and specific courses tailored to women’s needs. Public plots of land for the implementation of practical activities should also be available.

Practical Tips

- 🏠 Contact public agricultural institutes, high schools, universities, and training associations at the regional level to inquire about their offer on sustainable farming techniques and on rural business/farm management.
- 🏠 Make a regional inventory of public courses and trainings available to feed regional platforms and ensure its systematic updating.
- 🏠 Get inspiration from best practices based in Italy and in other European countries to organize the training offer of Learning Centres.
- 🏠 Training courses need to be flexible and adapted to women's needs. Therefore, specific courses should be organised according to their requests.
- 🏠 To gather information on specific interests and needs (both in terms of content and logistics), it is necessary to conduct a regional survey among women farm managers and rural entrepreneurs, involving local women farmers' and rural women's associations.

- 🏠 Courses could be organized both in-person and online (to facilitate the engagement of women living in remote rural areas). Include both theoretical and more practical and interactive modules.
- 🏠 Looking at the results of the FLIARA project, some possible training courses are: organic, regenerative, agro-ecological farming; agri-kindergarten; social farms; digital skills; web marketing, farm escape rooms.
- 🏠 Mentorships and peer to peer programme should also be offered.
- 🏠 Design programs that offer potential or existing female entrepreneurs the opportunity to move for periods of time to do training (for instance by providing assistance to manage their farm/business while they are away).
- 🏠 Advertise the courses through regional and local farmers organizations, LAGs and other rural networks, making sure to reach out women.
- 🏠 The Learning Centres could be opened within agriculture schools.

Supporting Evidence & Best Practices






Training has been a challenge for Italian women innovators. Most of them had difficulty in finding appropriate courses, which in most cases were offered by non-governmental organizations, associations, informal groups and networks and they have to self-finance these courses. Some of the Italian women innovators selected by the FLIARA project attended business start-up courses such as EWA (Empowering woman in Agrifood) which they found useful to acquire the basic skills for running a business. Best practices identified by the FLIARA project are the: **Warmonderhof Foundation** in the Netherland which manages a small-scale vocational school training on biodynamic and sustainable agriculture. The school provides training, education, teaching facilities, internships, and practical testing. The **Business Incubator** created at the Polytechnic Secondary School of Technology in Kyjov (Czechia). The purpose is to keep high school graduates in the region through the development of the local business environment utilizing start-ups, a coworking centre, the involvement of companies from the region and the Chamber of Commerce. The school also focuses on adult education. The **Irish CAP Strategic Plan** offers female focused knowledge transfer groups for women to influence peer-to-peer learning while addressing shared challenges and gender balance. In Spain, the **Rural Women's Advancement Program** supports women through training, mentoring and finance, also including a focus on entrepreneurship and innovation. The **ACORNS** programme in Ireland, established under the Rural Innovation and Development Fund, support early-stage female entrepreneurs living in rural Ireland through interactive round table sessions that are facilitated by female entrepreneurs, known as 'Lead Entrepreneurs', who have started and successfully grown businesses in rural Ireland.

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Conclusion & Call to Action

Training rural women strengthens agricultural sustainability and fosters inclusive development of rural areas.

CALL TO ACTION:

-  The training must be designed to meet women's demands and needs.
-  Women farmers' and rural women's associations should be involved in designing appropriate training courses.
-  Policymakers should fund localized training programmes tailored to women's needs.
-  A regional coordination among organizations, stakeholders and public institutions offering different types of training courses would be useful and important.
-  Stakeholders should facilitate mentorship, trainings, and visibility opportunities.

By investing in these strategies, women's innovations in farming and in rural areas in general can be enhanced by favouring sustainable change in rural communities.



Further Reading

Murthag A., Farrell M., Weir L. (2024). D1.3 Assessment of Rural and Farming Policy and Legal Frameworks in relation to Women-led Innovation. Zenodo. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.14045163>, accessed 20 June 2025

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About FLIARA

The project is on a mission to create a more sustainable future by highlighting the role of women in agriculture and rural areas. FLIARA will boost understanding of the needs and challenges facing women leading innovative environmental and rural development practices in EU farming and rural areas.

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Female-Led Innovation in Agriculture and Rural Areas

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