



Innovation  
award for  
**WOMEN**  
farmers  
2023

Organised by:

**copa\*cogeca**  
european farmers      european agri-cooperatives

Sponsored by:

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European Economic  
and Social Committee

# INTRODUCTION

Since the inception of the Women's Innovation Award, the political and practical landscape of European agriculture has continued to evolve. Political strategies such as the Farm to Fork strategy, biodiversity and the Long-Term Vision for Rural Areas are shaping policy at European level. Whilst factors such as climate change and the war in Ukraine continue to add increasing pressures on farmers and their families.

The agricultural and forestry sector need now more than ever, innovative, and entrepreneurial people in order to continue the transition to a more sustainable landscape and economy. Women farmers are key players in achieving this goal. Women represent 42% of the European Union's agricultural workforce, but only 30% assume managerial positions.

Despite significantly contributing to rural development, women farmers are still overlooked and their influence within the workforce often goes unnoticed. Over the years, the initiatives and businesses presented by these women have demonstrated their capacity in finding new solutions to the challenges faced in rural areas. The recognition, support and dissemination of positive initiatives is essential for the sector to be able to meet increasing societal expectations, climate, and political challenges.

The seventh edition of Copa-Cogeca's Innovation Award for Women Farmers is entitled "Women at the forefront of Sustainable Rural Areas". Whilst we talk about the need for a transition towards more sustainable food systems, it's not possible to reach sustainability objectives without looking at the three dimensions: economic, environmental, and social, as well as the requirement for financial and technological tools.

For that reason, for the 2023 edition of the award, Copa-Cogeca wishes to showcase the innovative and novel solutions implemented by women that are supporting all three pillars of sustainability. Whether that be on their farms, in their business decisions or to the benefit of the wider local community.

The seventh edition of Copa-Cogeca's Innovation Award for Women Farmers is sponsored by Corteva Agriscience.

## Programme

**Moderator:** **Mr. Damien O'Reilly**, EU Affairs Manager ICOS

**15h00** Welcoming Remarks by **Mr. Peter Schmidt**, President of NAT Section European Economic and Social Committee

**15h05** Opening Remarks by **Mrs. Lotta Folkesson**, Chair of Copa-Cogeca's Women's Committee

**15h10** Opening Address by **Ms. Maria Walsh**, Member of European Parliament

**15h15** Keynote Address by **Mr. Janusz Wojciechowski**, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development

**15h30** Presentations by the 5 shortlisted finalists:

- o **Desirée de la Caridad Nieves**
- o **Monika Lasoń**
- o **Marzia di Pastina**
- o **Justine Dewitte**
- o **Inês Dragão**

**16h30** Presentation by **Dr. Teresa Babuscio**, Head of Government and Industry Affairs EMEA Corteva Agriscience

**16h45** Announcement of the winner by **Mr. Janusz Wojciechowski**, EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development

**17h00** Announcement of the runner-up by **Mr. Peter Schmidt**, President of NAT Section European Economic and Social Committee

**17h15** Closing remarks **Mr. Pekka Pesonen**, Secretary-General of Copa-Cogeca

**Followed by Networking Drinks at Hotel Thon, Rue de la Loi 75**

# THE 5 FINALISTS

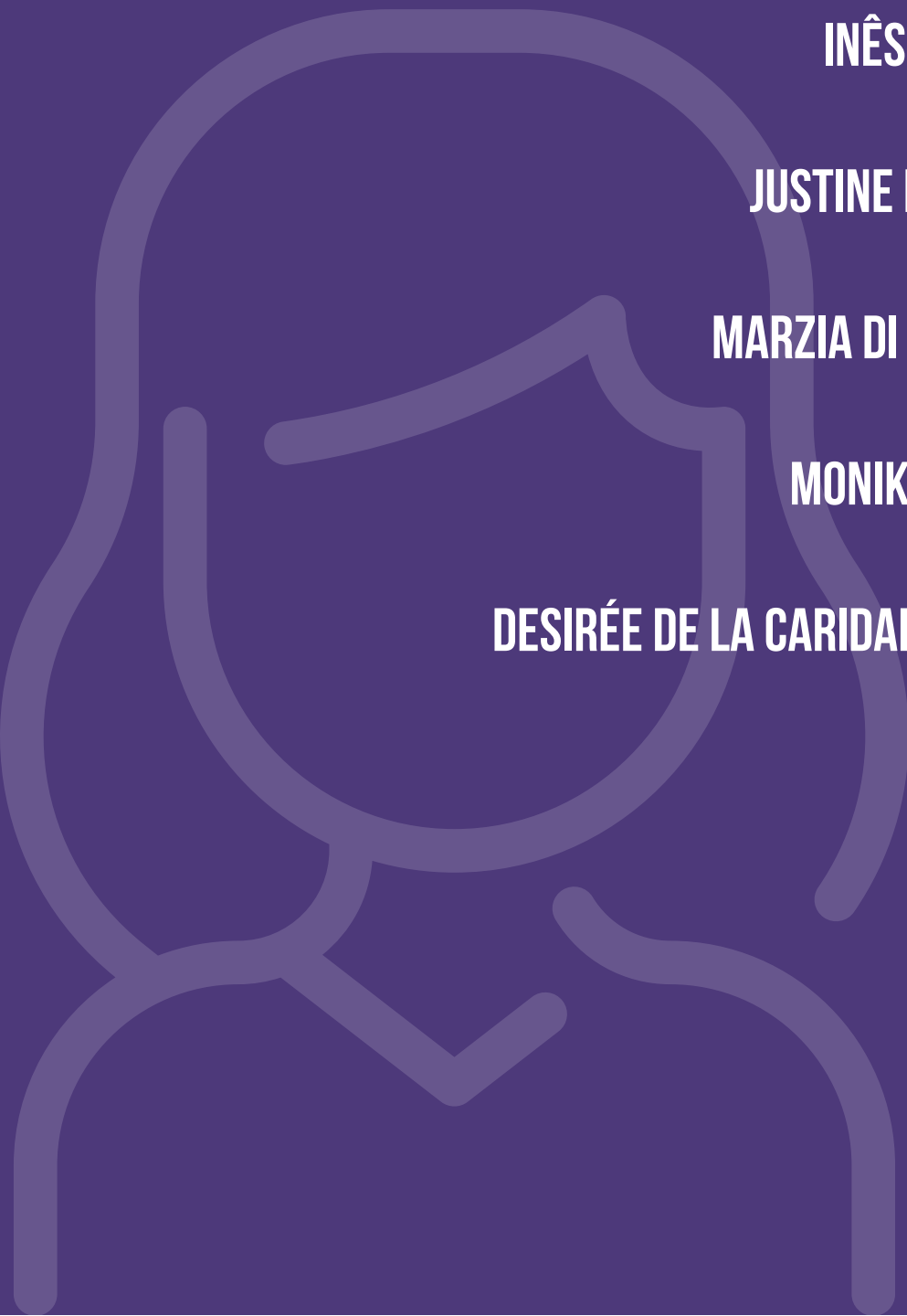
**INÊS DRAGAO**

**JUSTINE DEWITTE**

**MARZIA DI PASTINA**

**MONIKA LASOÑ**

**DESIRÉE DE LA CARIDAD NIEVES**





## INÊS DRAGÃO

PORTUGAL – CONFEDERAÇÃO DOS AGRICULTORES DE PORTUGAL

Herdade da Sancha is a sustainable and ecological family farm led by Inês Dragão and her three daughters. The farm, located on 300 hectares of land, focuses on breeding German and White Merino sheep. The transformation of the farm began in 2015, when Inês inherited the farm and decided to shift away from conventional cattle and cereal production to a more sustainable and women-led agricultural approach.

To ensure the well-being of their animals, the farm provides careful daily care to the ewes, offering them a tailored diet based on their nutritional needs at each stage of their life. The farm grows a variety of crops, including peas, oats, barley, corn, beans, to produce the animal feed. They also produce their own hay and silage, ensuring a year-round supply of high-quality feed.

Animal welfare is a top priority at Herdade da Sancha. The farm ensures that the animals have access to clean water, shelter, and a comfortable environment. They implement natural methods for pest and disease control.

The farm follows sustainable practices, including the conservation of soil, use of renewable energy, and waste reduction. They have transformed their cereal areas into biodiverse pastures and implemented a triennial rotation system to avoid using chemicals. They aim to improve biodiversity and protect water resources.

In terms of neonatal management, the farm employs the Healthy Lamb Technique, which involves careful handling of newborn lambs, disinfection of the umbilical cord, and ensuring sufficient colostrum intake. They also practice early weaning at 45 days old to increase the economic profitability of the farm.

Herdade da Sancha is committed to gender equality and providing job opportunities for women in agriculture. Besides Inês and her daughters, the only other employee is also a woman. They plan to add another job position in the future to further support women in the agricultural industry.

Future objectives of the farm include building a new sheepfold to enhance animal welfare and continuing to invest in improving sustainable practices. The farm aims to contribute to the production of high-quality and sustainable food by providing a healthy and natural environment for their animals.



## JUSTINE DEWITTE

BELGIUM– BOERENBOND

Justine Dewitte is the successor to her grandparents' farm, which she has transformed into an organic mixed farm focused on short supply chains. With extensive experience working as a researcher and advisor in organic crops and herbs at a Flemish research centre, Justine aims to expand the farm and provide customers with an enjoyable experience. Additionally, she serves as a lecturer in organic agriculture.

't Goed Ter Heule is a short-chain organic mixed farm with 4 hectares of cultivable land and pasture. The farm cultivates a diverse range of vegetables, fruits, and animals and sells its products through self-picking gardens, a farm shop, and local retailers. This includes 80 different kinds of vegetables, small fruits, herbs, flowers, as well as 70 varieties of pumpkins and potatoes. Moreover, the farm breeds sheep, broilers, pigs, laying hens, guinea fowls, and ducks.

Recently, Justine renovated the farmhouse, which now includes an eatery and a hall for seasonal dishes. She also engages in various awareness-raising activities.

In terms of sustainability, the farm strives for a closed cycle, minimal waste, and limited food miles. The farm has organic certification and adheres to strict standards, often going beyond legal requirements while promoting biodiversity both above and below ground. Animal manure is used as fertiliser, surplus produce is processed in their kitchen, and food leftovers are returned to the animals, effectively closing the circle. Direct customers are the primary focus, reducing food miles.

Socially, 't Goed Ter Heule aims to be inclusive and reclaim the traditional role of a farm as a place for everyone. Visitors are encouraged to explore the fields and stalls, promoting transparency in cultivation practices. The farm welcomes guided visits from various groups, including kindergartens, universities, special education institutions, and foreign schools. Justine also offers customised care and shares knowledge with high school and adult education trainees. Additionally, the farm employs people on permanent contracts and fosters a sense of togetherness by cooking and enjoying meals together.

Economically, the farm operates as a private initiative without additional subsidies from the municipality or province. Each branch of the farm is expected to be profitable, with a primary focus on farming. By diversifying the crops and animals, Justine mitigates risks and reduces dependence on larger market players. Striving for efficiency, Justine aims to provide fair wages to her employees and ensure a sustainable income.



## MARZIA DI PASTINA

ITALY - ALLEANZA DELLE COOPERATIVE ITALIANE AGROALIMENTARE

Marzia Di Pastina took on the challenge of revolutionizing her family's agricultural business and making it more sustainable. She then embarked on her journey by establishing her own farm, putting her innovative ideas into practice and engaging in post-farm activities as well as becoming a member of the Cooperative San Lidano.

The farm, known as LID.MAR., spans over 20 hectares, with 7 hectares covered by multi-tunnel greenhouses. It specialises in cultivating a variety of produce, including leafy vegetables, baby leaf, endive, cabbages, savoy cabbage, leafy cabbage, turnip tops, watermelons, and pumpkins. To ensure the safety and healthiness of its products, the farm adheres to strict food safety standards and implements continuous monitoring of both products and processes. Marzia has introduced a novel approach to vegetable production for fresh-cut products, incorporating feedback from retailers and consumers. Despite the challenges posed by climate change, Marzia is pioneering sustainable growing systems, employing modern equipment, implementing drip irrigation, reducing chemical usage and fertilizers, and actively promoting biodiversity.

In terms of sustainability, LID.MAR. is registered in the National "Rete del Lavoro Agricolo di Qualità" (Quality Agricultural Work Network) and has obtained Global G.A.P. certification, in addition to the G.R.A.S.P. Social Responsibility add-on module. By integrating Integrated Pest Management (IPM) systems and biotechnics like *Bacillus* and *Trichoderma* spp., as well as practicing minimum tillage, the farm has successfully reduced its synthetic inputs by 40%. Environmental monitoring conducted over the first three years of operation has revealed significant achievements, including over 60% energy savings, a 30% reduction in CO2 emissions, a 57% decrease in water consumption thanks to micro-irrigation systems, and a 60% reduction in waste through the reuse of vegetal waste as feed for local buffalo farms. These accomplishments have earned LID.MAR. certification as a Biodiversity Friend by the World Biodiversity Association.

Marzia actively participates in the San Lidano Cooperative Chain, which is ISO22005 certified. This cooperative initiative prioritizes local production in its sourcing criteria, aiming to enhance the economic value of its members' products and the surrounding territory. Within the cooperative, Marzia has initiated several projects, including "ORTI LAZIALI," a label that combines tradition and quality in horticulture, and "Cuore Rosso il Cocomero," a premium brand for high-quality watermelons. Additionally, the cooperative has achieved BRCETRS (Ethical trade and responsible sourcing) certification, making it the world's first fresh-cut company and food chain to attain this prestigious recognition.



## MONIKA LASOŃ

POLAND – KRAJOWA RADA IZB ROLNICZYCH

Monika Lason graduated from Warsaw Life Science University and gained valuable experience working in cheese dairies across Europe before embarking on her own entrepreneurial journey in the world of goat farming. In 2011, she began producing goat's milk and, through trial and error, has successfully developed a unique range of cheeses sourced from her Alpine and Saanen goat breeds.

Monika employs state-of-the-art machinery and maintains a short milk supply chain, processing fresh raw materials with minimal additives. She blends bacterial cultures to craft innovative flavours and cheeses, drawing inspiration from both Dutch and Swiss cheese-making traditions. Her artisanal cheeses have garnered acclaim from customers and restaurateurs alike. Monika's commitment to promoting wholesome, preservative-free foods was particularly evident during the pandemic when she increased her online cheese sales, reducing her food supply chain and a commitment to healthy eating.

The cheeses are naturally cared for and packaged in biodegradable materials to reduce the carbon footprint. Monika takes pride in her ability to shape the unique flavours of her cheeses and share them with her consumers. In Poland, goat and sheep cheeses are not yet widely popular, making Monika's artisanal offerings a novelty.

Her sustainable farming model revolves around responsible animal feeding practices, ensuring high-quality milk production while minimizing environmental impact. Operating within a short food supply chain further underscores her commitment to sustainability and customer satisfaction.

Monika actively participates in fairs, collaborates with restaurants, and supplies slow-food shops, valuing direct interactions with customers to exchange knowledge and understand their preferences. She invites cheese enthusiasts to visit her farm, providing a behind-the-scenes glimpse into her cheese-making process, complete with tastings paired with carefully selected wines, oils, and preserves. Monika enjoys the creative aspects, independence, and challenges of her work, continuously innovating, even crafting delightful goat's milk ice cream.

Despite the demanding nature of agricultural work, she finds great satisfaction in creating and selling her own products, with customer happiness serving as her motivation for future growth.





## DESIRÉE DE LA CARIDAD NIEVES

ITALY – CONFEDERAZIONE GENERALE DELL'AGRICOLTURA ITALIANA

Desiree Nieves is the head of her family business located near Lake Bolsena in the Viterbo province. Since taking over in 2015, Desiree has transformed the farm into an entirely organic operation, prioritising sustainability and eco-friendliness. Her commitment to quality, coupled with ongoing training, has led Desiree to attain certification as an oil sommelier and a professional taster.

Beyond her role as a businesswoman, she actively champions female entrepreneurship in the agricultural sector, advocating for representation and collaborative growth.

The farm encompasses 22 hectares, with 7 dedicated to hazelnut groves, 2 to olive groves, and the remainder used for cereal production. The cultivation follows strict organic practices, certified and carried out with a deep respect for the environment. An underground irrigation system with driplines helps conserve water and is connected to a weather station to optimise irrigation. The packaging used for the organic extra virgin olive oil is fully recyclable, emphasising their commitment to environmentally friendly practices. The farm operates self-sufficiently, reinvesting earnings to continuously improve the quality of their products and environmental practices.

Desiree uses social media to communicate their commitment to conscious agriculture, serving as an example for other businesses and future generations. She actively supports female businesses, fostering connections among women in agriculture and emphasising their value to society. Currently, Desiree is also organising a conference on agriculture, culture, and territory, with a focus on women's perspectives. Additionally, she tackles important social issues such as violence against women by collaborating with public institutions to implement educational projects in schools.

Desiree takes pride in the farm's connection to the land and its rich history. The region has been cultivating olive oil since ancient Etruscan times, and she feels honoured to continue this tradition. As an immigrant from Cuba who has become an Italian citizen, Desiree appreciates the diverse cultural heritage of the land. She aims to promote the region's historical treasures, particularly the ancient Etruscan necropolis of Bisenzio, by organising historical treks in collaboration with local authorities. These treks will showcase the evolution of the area and its agricultural practices, highlighting the enduring bond between humans and nature.

# ALL THE APPLICANTS



# ALESSANDRA POGGI

ITALY – COLDIRETTI

Alessandra Poggi was inspired to return to her farming roots and runs the family organic farm BioFavole. The farm combines traditional farming practices with the needs of modern mothers seeking nutritious food for their children.

Originally, Alessandra was looking to grow her own food to avoid the allergies of their son, whilst today she produces a range of products includes fruit purees, fruit juices, vegetable soups, and tomato purees. The produce is hand-picked and processed on the same day to maintain freshness and nutritional value. Quality and goodness is prioritised by using family recipes and avoiding preservatives, dyes, and additives. Alessandra has also developed homogenised products for children, made with locally sourced fruits and without added sugar or salt.

To ensure sustainability, BioFavole has invested in machinery and training, allowing her to process fruits at low temperatures and with vacuum technology to preserve nutritional properties. She has also implemented a photovoltaic system on the farm's roof to harness solar energy and reduce their environmental impact. Additionally, production waste is repurposed as fertiliser for the fields.

Located in the Marche Region of Italy, known for its organic production, BioFavole is one of the pioneering farms in the area. Alessandra actively engages with the community and offers activities such as orchard walks, fruit picking experiences, and workshops on jam and juice production. She also organises tastings and snacks featuring their products for local and foreign tourists. Alessandra also frequently visits schools to educate children about healthy eating.

Over the years, BioFavole has expanded its distribution and gained recognition. Alessandra's products are sold in specialised organic shops throughout Italy, and since 2020 have began exporting to Hong Kong. The farm has received local awards for their commitment to organic farming and sustainable practices. In 2022, they launched an e-commerce website to reach customers globally and share their story with the world.

# ALICE PERINI

ITALY – COLDIRETTI

Back in 2016, Alice Peirini decided to change career and become a farmer. She rented a plot of land in the countryside near Mantova, and started her new life by cultivating bees, mixed berries, medicinal plants, and "forgotten fruits" like mulberries, cornelian cherries, and quinces.

Just before the COVID-19 pandemic, Alice opened a teaching farm where she conducts activities, including summer camps for children aged 3 to 6, promoting values such as biodiversity, respect for nature, healthy nutrition, and environmentally friendly practices. In addition, she organizes open days where people can observe the entire process, from berry picking to the production of preserves. Her products include a variety of flavours, from classic options like "Blueberries" to more unique combinations like "Mulberries, cherries, and raspberries in a mix." Alice sells her preserves, along with other products such as juices, herbs, saffron, honey, and natural cosmetics, primarily at local markets. She also collaborates with local companies to promote her farm and its offerings.

The teaching farm has grown steadily, attracting both children and older residents from the village, and helping to bridge any perceived generation gap. The greatest satisfaction for Alice comes from the drawings children create about their experiences on the farm and their eagerness to return. Teachers who have visited her farm have expressed heartfelt wishes for her to continue her work, praising her ability to convey serenity and create a corner of paradise. Alice's passion for her work and connection to her roots in the countryside have brought her a sense of balance and fulfilment that she did not find in office jobs or city life.

She aims to make a positive impact by growing quality food, creating exceptional products, and educating children and adults about the importance of respecting nature.

# ANNA CHIACCHIERINI

ITALY – COLDIRETTI

The Centro Tori Chiacchierini, founded by Dr. Augusto Chiacchierini in 1975 and currently managed by his daughter Anna Chiacchierini, is a unique and pioneering business in the field of bovine breeding and genetics. After her father's passing, Anna took over the company and has since expanded its technical and commercial dimensions over the years.

The farm specialises in breeding bovine bulls and buffaloes, with a focus on producing and marketing semen and embryos for genetic improvement in farms both in Italy and abroad.

An important aspect of the farm's activities is its contribution to genetic selection and improvement. The centre collects and controls genetic data, working closely with the Italian Breeders Association and the Breed Associations to enhance the genetic quality of the animals. This genetic improvement work is supported by a system of control and data collection, making Italy a world leader in this field.

In addition to breeding activities, Anna has diversified into other areas overcoming obstacles along the way. They operate a renewable energy plant using biogas production and more recently Anna has successfully connected agrotourism with the Centro Tori Chiacchierini, to showcase the beautiful landscape of the region alongside their core activities.

Under Anna's leadership, the Centro Tori Chiacchierini has seen remarkable growth and development. They have built a modern centre with state-of-the-art laboratories and expanded their international presence by exporting Italian genetics, particularly the Chianina breed and Italian Mediterranean buffalo, to numerous countries worldwide. The farm has achieved complex certifications for animal health and distribution, working closely with the relevant authorities to ensure compliance.

# BARBARA BONIFAZI

ITALY – COLDIRETTI

Barbara Bonifazi is the owner of La rinascita farm in Sellano di Camerino. The farm has a rich family history stemming from Barbara's great-grandparents, and which Barbara continues.

The farm is involved in cattle, pig, sheep, and poultry breeding, as well as cereal and fodder production. These activities are interconnected, with the production of crops supporting the livestock. Beehives are also present, contributing to honey production. Additionally, there are olive groves for oil production, and recent additions include currant, raspberry, blueberry, and blackberry plants for jam production.

One of Barbara's key principles is maintaining control over the entire supply chain, from animal raising to product processing and direct sales. This approach ensures that consumers can enjoy high-quality, zero-kilometre products. She takes pride in the farm's specialty cured meats, made from pigs reared in the wild. The ingredients used are natural, including salt, pepper, chili pepper, and wine infused with garlic. By avoiding preservatives, she aims to provide a healthy product that preserves traditional flavours.

Visitors to the farm have the opportunity to witness each stage of production, from animal welfare practices to the creation of the final product. This transparency allows visitors to appreciate the farm's commitment to environmentally friendly practices and the preservation of the ecosystem. These aspects are considered of utmost importance in today's world.

La rinascita farm stands out for its dedication to sustainable farming methods and preserving traditional flavors. Barbara's decision to continue her family's farming legacy reflects her passion for animals and nature. By offering direct sales and showcasing the entire production process, the farm ensures customer satisfaction and provides an educational experience for visitors.

# BOŻENA JASZCZOWSKA

## POLAND – KRIR

Bożena Jaszczowska began her business with pumpkin preserves, expanding to include red and green tomato preserves and the cultivation of wrinkled roses. Today, her farm is the first organic farm in the local municipality, focusing on sustainable and environmentally friendly practices.

Bożena avoids the use of chemicals and instead relies on natural and organic products and preparations. The farm prioritises using resources and crops in harmony with the natural rhythm of vegetation and conserving water resources. The farm's 1.24-hectare field is home to various vegetables and roses, which are used to produce preserves, coffee, and wine. Traditional recipes and methods are employed to maintain the unique scent, taste, and colour of the roses. Many of the farm's products have received awards in culinary competitions.

The farm is a member of the Polish Chamber of Regional and Local Products and the EKOLAND Association of Organic Food Producers. It holds the Culinary Heritage- West Pomerania certificate, emphasizing its commitment to preserving culinary traditions. The farm's special product is the Dolic rose wine, made from fermented rose fruits without the use of preservatives.

Bożena focuses on preserving the highest quality of her products through traditional recipes and proper preparation and storage methods. She offers a wide range of preserves, jams, juices, and other culinary specialties made from ingredients such as rosehips, pumpkins, dandelion, nuts, and wild cherries. The farm also engages in educational activities to share its knowledge and experience.

The farm's innovative approach combines using natural resources with small-scale, non-polluting farming practices to create high-value products. The unique preserves and combinations of products reflect the region's culinary heritage and promote the local area. Bożena's products have gained recognition both locally and nationally. By choosing the right crops and adapting to the regional market's needs, the farm achieves self-sufficiency in production and processing.

# ELISA MIGNANI

## ITALY – COLDIRETTI

Elisa Mignani's journey to honor her late grandfather's memory and preserve her family's rural legacy. The family farm, with a history dating back to the 1960s, is situated in Parco Oglia Su and Rete Natura2000, showcasing Elisa's commitment to environmental conservation.

Over the years, the farm has diversified, encompassing cereal and vegetable cultivation, agritourism, and activities for children. In 2010, Elisa's parents introduced a cereal processing unit, utilising ancient wheat varieties to distinguish themselves in the region.

Elisa's involvement began by reviving activities for children, culminating in a successful summer camp in 2021, now followed by weekend activities. Today, her responsibilities span social media management, marketing, public relations, children's programs, and direct sales. The farm now boasts two stone mills, three cereal cleaning machines, a bakery, and facilities for pasta and snack production. Collaborating with 20 other farms, they offer over 40 diverse products, promoting them at their agritourism site, "Il Campagnino."

Elisa streamlined operations with management software obtained through "Psr giovani," reducing paper use and ensuring product traceability. New young staff, sharing her vision, have been hired to support the farm's multifunctional expansion. Elisa's innovative use of social media platforms like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp Business has yielded impressive results, increasing visibility and attracting new clients. WhatsApp broadcast groups enable efficient communication with customers, providing updates on farm events and menus while offering convenient ordering.

In 2023, the farm initiated "Fattoria sociale," a project promoting social inclusion by hiring people with disabilities. This has expanded the farm's network and fostered social inclusion. Collaborations with schools aim to reduce dropouts and offer internship opportunities. Elisa's commitment to her family's rural business not only preserves her grandfather's legacy but also positions the farm as an environmentally conscious, socially inclusive, and innovative enterprise. Her dedication, coupled with strategic modernization, has brought new life to the farm and created a model for sustainable agriculture and social responsibility.

# FANNY PETROVICS

HUNGARY – NAK

Fanni Petrovics inherited the family farm from her late grandfather in 2021, and currently works as a Precision Agricultural Manager at the University of Szeged.

Operating a 20 hectares, producing a variety of crops including sweetcorn, sweetpea, alfalfa, sunflower seeds, wheat, and phacelia, Fanni is dedicated to exploring sustainable farming methods and setting an example as a young, smart woman in the industry. She began by making a complete 180-degree turn, adopting soil zone management maps and conducting thorough soil analyses. Thorough guidance from leading scientists in Hungary, she pursued knowledge on soil and microorganism preservation. Emphasising the use of biorganic pesticides and implementing bee colonies near phacelia and sunflower lands, she also obtained horse and sheep manure to replace ploughing with a cultivator. In her experiments, she explored the benefits of cover crops, mushroom compost, bacterial cultures, and mycorrhizal symbiotic relationships with plants.

Fanni also communicates about her experiences and promotion of sustainable farming via social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook. In addition, she recognises the importance of bridging the generational divide, and organises a farmer's club during the off-season, engaging older farmers in discussions on precision farming, agricultural reforms, laws, bioorganic farming, and cover crops.

The transformative results of her sustainable farming practices have been promising. Soil degradation has been halted, and the revival of microorganisms has attracted beneficial insects and birds back to the farm. The impact of her approach has also inspired other farmers to embrace change and experiment with cover crops, manure usage, and no-till techniques. Her hope is that their shift in mindset extends beyond farming practices and alters their perception of women in agriculture. She aims to dispel the prevalent underestimation and undervaluation of women by showcasing their expertise and dedication.

# FEDERICA FAGGIOLI

ITALY – COLDIRETTI

Federica Faggiolo, a second-generation farmer from Italy's Emilia-Romagna region, has harnessed her rural upbringing, social activism, and interdisciplinary education to launch Borgo Basino, an ecovillage community project. She aims to revitalise a marginalized area, combat depopulation and unemployment, and promote sustainability and well-being within the community.

Borgo Basino operates as a vibrant living and learning community centered around a versatile farm, inspired by the Global Ecovillage Network, emphasising ecological, economic, social, and cultural sustainability. In ecological terms, Borgo Basino generates surplus renewable energy from wind and solar sources, employs passive filtration and rainwater collection systems, and utilises permaculture principles in farming practices. Economically, it diversifies income through agricultural tourism, educational farm tours, farm-to-table lessons, local partnerships, and selling excess green energy to the local power grid. The social dimension is fostered by Borgo Basino's role as a network hub, encouraging innovative governance and decision-making processes, and its commitment to teaching inclusive design principles. Culturally, local traditions are preserved, low-impact diets promoted, and community events and learning opportunities are facilitated, incorporating diverse inputs into sustainable system design.

Despite launching during the pandemic, the ecovillage has shown resilience and success in its multifaceted approach. Notable achievements include hosting a summer camp for the visually impaired and tailored experiences for young people with limited access due to the pandemic. It has also provided training to over 500 individuals worldwide in permaculture, community building, rural territorial promotion, and farm-to-table practices.

Furthermore, Federica has facilitated research and collaboration with undergraduate and postgraduate interns, developed food production systems and educational farm laboratories, and generated tourism and investment opportunities for the local community. Federica's vision extends to addressing the challenges faced by vulnerable rural populations. Her goal is to build community cohesion, attract foreign tourism, and foster pride and understanding of local traditions through educational opportunities. By creating space for community development and inclusive activities, Borgo Basino seeks to tackle issues like income instability, isolation, and limited access to essential services prevalent in the region.

## GAIA FIRTH

### BELGIUM – BOERENBOND

Georgina Firth, known as Gaia, pursued her childhood dream of becoming a farmer, despite not coming from a farming background. Today, she manages her own fruit growing production named De Fruittuin, spanning 7 hectares in Belgium. Her primary focus is on apple trees, but she also cultivates pears, plums, peaches, and various soft fruits, all while adhering to organic and biodynamic farming practices, with a strong emphasis on soil health and sustainability.

De Fruittuin markets its produce through the BFV (Belgian Fruit Auction) and directly to customers via a small farm shop, local farm shops, and market stands. Gaia places great value on direct consumer connections, actively seeking feedback through weekly markets, farm tours, and pick-your-own fruit days, vital for a small-scale business like hers.

Preserving and enhancing soil quality is a top priority for Gaia. Her approach involves the use of organic manures, like local cow slurry, which are meticulously incorporated into the soil beneath the trees to prevent nutrient loss. Organic cow manure and woody compost nourish the soil, promoting robust soil life. This strategy benefits the trees by ensuring nutrient absorption, improving soil hydration, enhancing drainage during wet periods, and increasing water retention in droughts.

Gaia's innovative practices aim to create a positive legacy. She aspires to increase soil organic matter content by at least 1.5% by the time she passes the reins to the next generation. She also focuses on cultivating older, lesser-known apple and fruit varieties to preserve their heritage and offer customers diverse flavors. Disease resistance plays a vital role in her variety selection, favoring those suitable for organic farming.

Furthermore, Gaia is determined to reintroduce peach trees to the region, where they once thrived but waned due to changing agricultural policies. Her plantation of 60 peach trees seeks to contribute to the preservation of local peach varieties and adapt to the region's evolving climate conditions.

## GINEVRA COPPACCHIOLI

### ITALY – COLDIRETTI

Ginevra Coppacchioli, a recent graduate in government and public policies, and has embarked on an entrepreneurial journey alongside her academic pursuits. Her micro-winery, nestled in the Sibillini mountains of Italy's Marche region, reflects her deep commitment to the local territory and sustainable viticulture practices, despite the challenging microclimatic conditions at an elevation of 1000 meters above sea level.

Ginevra's winery is dedicated to environmentally sustainable mountain farming, breathing new life into abandoned areas and preserving peasant culture. Guided by organic farming principles, she prioritizes the preservation of the natural heritage that surrounds her. With Mount Tranquilla's protective presence, a favorable microclimate, and a south-west exposure, her vineyard enjoys an ideal winemaking environment.

To spread her production philosophy and showcase her territorial wines, Ginevra uses various communication channels, including social media, an e-commerce-enabled website, and participation in events and fairs. Her focus lies on crafting strictly organic and unadulterated wines, encompassing Classic Method "Millesimato" sparkling wines and still wines. The standout Primodicupi is made from the ancient native vine Vissanello, a variant of Pecorino. Additional offerings include Pinot Noir, Chardonnay Pas Dosè, Rosè Extra Brut, and a limited-edition sparkling wine, Pecora Fuorigregge, also based on Vissanello.

Ginevra's commitment to local tradition combines innovative projects with bolstering the regional economy. The historical association with "shepherd's" wine, harvested during August's transhumance, underscores the enological heritage of the area. The winery's logo pays homage to the Sanctuary in Macereto, featuring the names of the three brothers: Gaia, Lucio, and Ginevra.

The wines produced by Ginevra's micro-winery are renowned for their distinctive minerality and acidity. Specializing in handcrafted sparkling wines using the Classical Method, her approach is truly artisanal, reflecting a deep-rooted passion for winemaking.

# GIUDITTA MERCURIO

ITALY – COLDIRETTI

Giuditta Mercurio and her partner Agnese have co-founded the organic enterprise Il Gentil Verde in Italy's Marche region. Starting with 3 hectares of land, they've expanded to 55 hectares dedicated to cultivating ancient crops suitable for organic farming and resilient to climate change. Their expertise lies in spelt monocot and rye, promoting biodiversity in their fields and products. They craft a range of traditional Marche recipes, including bread, cakes, crackers, rusks, biscuits, and breadsticks.

Il Gentil Verde operates a direct-to-consumer model, primarily through farmers' markets, fostering a short supply chain and a close rapport with their customers. They consider themselves both producers and co-producers, sharing goals and vision with their clientele.

Beyond cultivation and processing, Giuditta welcomes the public, hosting food and cultural events. She has transformed the bakery workshop into a kitchen, allowing people to appreciate the landscape while experiencing art and wholesome food. "Nel Verde," an on-farm festival, combines food, cultural performances, and educational workshops for all ages, spanning various art forms and cooking. Expanding into agritourism, the farm introduced the first StarsBox in the Marche region, inspired by traditional shepherd's beds, offering visitors a chance to sleep under the starry sky in a light pollution-free setting.

Recognising the importance of social sustainability, the farm collaborates with "MovIS" to provide education in physical activity and nutrition for patients with prior breast cancer. This initiative offers a healthy natural environment where individuals can learn about healthy living and nutrition through workshops, seminars, conferences, and cultural meetings, integrating art to promote well-being.

Il Gentil Verde contributes to building a resilient community and enhancing well-being across physical, psychological, and relational aspects. Their collaborations with social and environmental projects have earned recognition as a national-level best practice.

# JOLANTA WIELGAT

POLAND – KRIR

Jolanta Wielgat, a horticulturalist in Zambrów, owns and manages the Wielgat horticultural farm. Spanning around 4 hectares, the farm specialises in cultivating a diverse array of plants, including bedding flowers, balcony flowers, annuals, biennials, perennials, grasses, and vegetable seedlings. She has transitioned from conventional field vegetable production to niche flower cultivation, resulting in improved profitability.

Jolanta is committed to sharing her horticultural knowledge, evident through her Facebook page where she provides valuable insights into plants and her farm. She also collaborates with the editorial team of the monthly magazine "Wiadomości rolnicze," published by the Podlaski Agricultural Advisory Centre in Szepietowo. Additionally, she volunteers her time to teach floristry classes at the Zambrów Municipality Senior Citizens' Club.

Jolanta has partnered with the Special School and Educational Centre in Długobórz, where she practices hortitherapy with children and young people. She brings them to the farm to engage with plants, allowing them to experience the positive impact on their well-being.

Beyond her farm duties, Jolanta actively engages in her community's social life. Since 2007, she has served as a reeve, and since 2010, as a councilor. Currently, she holds the position of Chairman of the Zambrów Municipality Council and serves as a delegate of the Podlasie County Council of the Chamber of Agriculture. Additionally, she leads the Rural Women's Circle.

Each year, Jolanta introduces new plant varieties into her production, sourcing seeds and seedlings from reputable breeders globally. She champions the use of microbial products to bolster plant resistance to pathogens, reduce reliance on chemical plant protection products, and minimize environmental impact. The farm's cultivation methods prioritize customer safety and well-being, catering to those with health conditions or allergies. Furthermore, Jolanta has devised a proprietary plant monitoring and identification system tailored to her farm. This system enables her to observe plants from the same family, monitor their health, detect diseases, and evaluate their response to natural microbial treatments. The data collected through this system enhances her expertise and aids in effective plant health management.



# JOŽICA GRIČNIK

SLOVENIA – KGZS

Jožica Gričnik, an agricultural technician and dedicated farmer, inherited her farm from her mother. She plays an active role in the Slovenske Konjice Association of Women Farmers, contributing to the establishment of training programs, workshops, and social activities for farm women. Additionally, she served as the Vice-Chairwoman of the Slovenian Association of Women Farmers, earning recognition from the Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, and Food.

Situated at an altitude of 700 meters, Jožica's farm has held organic farming certification for two decades. They engage in mixed cultivation, encompassing suckler cows, fattening bulls, laying hens, tall-stemmed apple, cherry, and pear trees, as well as various vegetables and strawberries. Complementary activities such as timber felling, wood cutting, and road maintenance are also part of their operations due to the presence of 20 hectares of forest on the farm, where Jožica's husband and son also contribute.

Jožica's expertise in agricultural policy led her to the Committee of Farmers for Areas with Limited Cultivation Factors. The farm, a pioneer in organic farming in the region, initially faced challenges in promoting organic food for local kindergartens and schools. Over time, they have gained knowledge from their experiences and agricultural advisory services. They actively share their wisdom through tastings on neighboring farms and workshops for schools, emphasizing the importance of local, organic ingredients for well-being, health, and environmental protection.

Jožica's dedication to maintaining a pristine landscape and advocating for organic farming earned her a role as a municipal councillor, representing farmers' interests. She also sits on the Monitoring Committee for the Rural Development Programme and actively participates in various agricultural and forestry-related associations. Despite her busy schedule, she finds joy in involving her grandchildren in farm activities, passing on her knowledge and skills to the next generation.

# KATARINA JOHUM

CROATIA – CROATIAN CHAMBER OF AGRICULTURE

Katarina and her family have established a business focused on organic plants and the production of creams, ointments, soaps, and essential oils. They prioritize ecological practices, ensuring their products are handmade, not tested on animals, and free from silicones and chemicals. They possess certifications for all their products, highlighting their commitment to quality and sustainability.

Their flagship offerings include facial creams made with Swiss rose essential oil, Swiss Alpine rose stem cells, collagen, and hyaluron. These creams provide hydration and are suitable for all skin types. Additionally, they offer a cream infused with immortelle essential oil, collagen, and hyaluron. Notably, Katarina's business is the first in Croatia to develop a cream featuring Swiss Alpine rose stem cells.

# LAMYA ZITKOVA KOURDI

CZECH REPUBLIC – ČMSZP

Lamya Zitkova Kourdi, a flower farmer and florist, traded city life for a rural existence a decade ago, dedicating herself to growing fruits, vegetables, and raising a goat herd. Her farming journey led her to identify the need for a soilblocking tool tailored to small-scale farmers, inspiring her to design and register the ProSoilblocker tool, which she now sells to fellow farmers.

Managing a 6-hectare farm, Lamya specializes in cultivating low-impact specialty cut flowers. She sells half of her crop to florists and transforms the remainder into bouquets or wreaths for individual customers. Additionally, Lamya offers on-farm activities like “pick your own flowers” and bouquet-making workshops. During winter, she crafts bouquets from her dried flowers and arranges field trips for agricultural schools. Lamya optimizes her garden space through intensive growing practices that conserve water and reduce travel distances. She ingeniously employs shaded areas between trees for growing shade-loving flowers, maintains a non-heated polytunnel for extended growing seasons, and uses passive heating techniques in her greenhouse to save energy. Her flower fields benefit from composted manure from their sheep herd. Operating in a Less-Favored Area (LFA) with sandy and stony soil, Lamya has improved soil quality significantly by annually adding tons of compost and incorporating biochar to enhance moisture retention and nutrient preservation. She sows green manure crops in the fall to enrich the soil for the upcoming spring. To minimize soil disruption, Lamya practices shallow plowing, which prepares beds, controls weeds, limits pests, and preserves soil structure. Through local selling, compost and biochar application, and densely planted flowers, she actively reduces her farm’s carbon footprint while maximizing yield per unit area.

Lamya employs standardised 75 cm wide beds to facilitate efficient tractor use, with living pathways between beds to maintain soil integrity, prevent erosion, and offer a pleasant walking experience. Organic fertilizers like composted sheep manure, vermicompost, vermiliquid, and herbal broths nourish her farm. Rainwater collected from building roofs serves as the irrigation source.

Beyond farming, Lamya collaborates with agricultural schools, offering free tours and educational experiences. She actively participates in the Czech flower farming association, Vykvet z.s., promoting small-scale and sustainable farming, particularly for women farmers. Lamya’s farm and the ProSoilblocker tool have gained recognition, attracting requests for wedding preparations, farm visits, and collaborations with florists. The ProSoilblocker’s success extends internationally, with increasing demand from Europe and the United States.

# LAURA NICOLAI

BELGIUM – BOERENBOND

Laura Nicolai completed her PhD in Genetics in 2012, and joined the family business with a specific focus on apple breeding. Her primary objective was to enhance food production by developing nutritious foods sustainably, thereby benefiting both public health and the environment. Alongside overseeing the breeding program, Laura manages the day-to-day operations in the nursery, emphasising plant health and sustainability through techniques like mechanical weed control, reduced fertiliser usage, and the quest for disease and pest-resistant rootstocks.

The family runs two companies: a nursery producing around 1,000,000 apple trees annually for European professional growers, and a breeding company named ZOUK, established in 2008. Apart from breeding, ZOUK also produces certified budwood and manages new varieties. The introduction of several new apple varieties has led to increased sales volume, highlighting the consumer preference for apples with excellent texture, taste, and consistent quality. Encouraging fruit consumption, especially among the younger generation, holds significant importance for public health. Laura continues to introduce new varieties to the farm which have demonstrated strong scab tolerance, allowing for organic cultivation, and supports fruit production amid regulatory constraints. The selection process for new varieties places a premium on tree health, orchard management ease, early and consistent production, and profitability for farmers, thereby enhancing the sustainability of fruit farming.

The apple production sector, especially in Belgium, faces challenges such as decreasing consumption in favor of soft drinks and unhealthy snacks. Introducing improved apple varieties with superior flavor, texture, and year-round quality can boost consumption. Additionally, the industry must transition to more sustainable production methods, meeting demands for environmental restoration, soil quality improvement, biodiversity conservation, and ecologically sound land and water management. Classical breeding endeavors aim to create disease- and pest-tolerant or resistant varieties, reducing the reliance on chemical treatments.

Concerns over rising production costs and low prices can be challenging. However, selecting new varieties capable of withstanding droughts and heatwaves ensures stable production and sustainable food systems. Breeding can help address these challenges by selecting new varieties that are easy to cultivate and consistently yield high-quality apples.

# MARGIT KITZWEGER-GALL

AUSTRIA – LKÖ

Margit Kitzweiger-Gall, alongside her husband, manages a conventional farm in Velm, where they cultivate a variety of crops, including cereals, sugar beets, potatoes, and pumpkins. Additionally, they engage in seed propagation and maintain a small number of animals.

Margit plays an active role in advocating for agriculture and raising awareness about rural life. Since 2014, she has been offering “school on the farm” tours and operates a farm shop. She also serves as a press officer at “Die Bäuerinnen,” an organization dedicated to representing the interests of rural women in Austria. This organisation focuses on improving the living and working conditions of women on family farms in rural areas while also enhancing awareness of their livelihoods and fostering dialogue between agriculture and society.

After completing training as a “Seminarbäuerin” to act as an ambassador for regional and seasonal food, Margit introduced school action days to promote her district, Bruck. A notable initiative undertaken is the “AckerkulTOUR,” an interactive and self-guided nature trail designed to provide firsthand agricultural knowledge to visitors. The trail features informative boards explaining various arable crops, their cultivation, harvesting, and uses. In addition, QR codes provide access to videos and quizzes with prizes. The AckerkulTOUR is an annual event that showcases different crops and offers regional delicacies at select stops. Its primary objectives are to promote agriculture, increase transparency in food production, and encourage the consumption of regional products.

The project has yielded positive outcomes, including the training and empowerment of women farmers involved. It has garnered praise for the team’s competence and community-building efforts. Local schools have expressed interest in participating, and a volunteer team has been established to guide school tours. The project has also garnered significant media attention, with coverage on social media, TV interviews, and newspaper articles. This increased media presence has raised public awareness about agriculture and the contributions of women farmers.

# MARIJKE D’HERTEFELT

BELGIUM – BOERENBOND

Marijke d’Hertefelt, together with her husband, manages Koeweidehof in Merchtem, near Brussels. They run a sustainable dairy farm alongside their FarmFun venture. Marijke’s role on the farm involves ensuring the well-being of the animals, handling administration and communication tasks, and providing support as needed.

Koeweidehof is a dairy farm with 200 dairy cattle, 125 young cattle, and 189 hectares of arable land. They cultivate various crops, including fodder crops, sugar beet, cereals, potatoes, and ground chicory. They utilise innovative techniques such as milking robots, feeding robots, and GPS-controlled tractors. The farm also operates a digester that converts cows’ manure into electricity, generating approximately 170,000 kW per year. This sustainable practice allows the farm to run entirely on green electricity and even supply surplus energy to around 10 families.

Beyond farming, Marijke welcomes schools and groups for farm tours and organizes “Boerderijkriebels” (farm fun), a farm camp for children during the summer holidays. At FarmFun, Marijke focuses on creating memorable experiences by facilitating team-building activities that promote connection and a sense of community. Through interactive activities, Marijke aims to foster connection, engagement, and a sense of belonging among the participants. She aims to support her cow-leagues through teambuildings, letting them cow-municate, cow-nnect and cow-coon without a care in the world.

The farm’s innovative approach has yielded positive outcomes. By selling ground chicory and potatoes through a vending machine, they have successfully shared their story with the public. Innovative investment in dairy and arable farming, supported by EU funding have been instrumental to their success. Collaborations with partners, including cooperatives, local processors have also played a crucial role. In addition, they have expanded their agricultural activities by growing malting barley for a local brewery.

Looking ahead, Koeweidehof aims to further engage with the community and raise awareness about their milk production. They also seek to enhance the farm’s role as a landscape builder by improving water management and incorporating semi-public functions. By integrating agricultural activities with public engagement, they strive to create a sustainable and multifunctional farm environment.

# MARTINA BUCCOLINI

## ITALY – COLDIRETTI

Martina Buccolini, has a background in Communication and Marketing, and joined her family's farm in Macerata in 2010 to assist her father. Since then, she has been involved in various aspects of the business, including agriculture, processing, administration, and sales. She has also taken on the responsibility of developing the farm's digital channels, such as the website and social media platforms, as well as internal accounting programs.

The SiGi farm was established in 1996 by Martina's parents, with the aim of preserving ancient fruits and traditional recipes that were disappearing from the market. The farm specialises in producing jams, jellies, and dessert wines using these traditional fruits, presenting them in a modern and innovative manner through packaging and utilisation. Martina's primary objective has been to enhance the recognition and awareness of the SiGi brand through digital tools, utilising her knowledge gained from university studies and specialised courses.

In addition to her work on the farm, Martina has embraced new opportunities in the agricultural sector, particularly through her involvement with Coldiretti Marche association. She has been engaged in multifunctionality and social farming, offering her expertise and farm facilities to others. This approach has allowed her to personalise activities and contribute to broader goals, emphasising the importance of social impact alongside commercial success.

Martina's efforts in the digital realm have contributed to the growth of the company, even during challenging periods like the pandemic. Through her involvement in the TuttinCampo project, she has demonstrated successful negotiation skills and collaboration with various organizations and institutions, including universities and non-profit organizations. Bridging the interests of disabled young individuals visiting the farm with the profit-driven goals of a private company has been a significant endeavor for her.

The farm has received numerous awards and recognition over the years, both in the food and wine sector and the agricultural industry. They have been acknowledged by entities such as Gambero Rosso, Grand Gourmet, Slow Food, and the Academy of Italian Cuisine. The farm's mission revolves around embracing innovation while preserving traditional practices and traditions.

# MARTINA TONELLI

## ITALY – CIA

Martina Tonelli is the owner of La Succhiata, an agritourism located in Camugnano, Italy. After completing her hospitality diploma in 2014, Martina gained experience working in various catering establishments to understand the culinary preparation process. She then pursued a course to become a certified agritourism operator, enabling her to register on the regional agrotourism.

La Succhiata is situated in the heart of the Regional Park of Lakes Suviana and Brasimone. The farm promotes sustainable mobility by restricting motor vehicle access, allowing visitors to reach the location by foot, horse, or bicycle.

The farm offers a catering service specialising in traditional Bolognese cuisine, prepared according to seasonal availability and minimising food miles. Additionally, La Succhiata provides hotel accommodations, including a four-person bedroom with attached facilities. They also organise tasting events and activities focused on exploring the local territory.

Sustainability is a fundamental aspect of Martina's work, aligning with Goal 15 (Life on Land) of the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development. She promotes sustainable management of the natural forest on the farm, contributing to the conservation of mountain ecosystems and supporting the preservation of cultural and natural heritage.

Martina's farm represents a unique combination of agricultural and hospitality services, offering tourists an immersive nature-based experience. Activities include guided walks, evening dinners accompanied by the sounds of deer during the summer, and autumn lunch dates followed by guided walks to witness the "foliage" phenomenon. Martina's focus is on catering to small groups of nature enthusiasts and creating personalised experiences.

Currently, La Succhiata primarily utilises Instagram for communication purposes, sharing photos, seasonal dishes, and organised activities. However, Martina plans to expand communication efforts offline through poster designing and traditional brochures distributed in Camugnano's frequented areas. Additionally, she aims to develop a dedicated website, providing updates on agricultural products and seasonal dishes.

# MILENIA CESAR

## SLOVENIA – KGZS

Milena Cesar is farmer and business consultant active in various societies and associations such as the Cattle Breeding Association Mirna Peč, the Women in Rural Areas Society, and the Voluntary Firefighters' Society.

Milena's farm consists of 8.5 hectares of arable land and 4.5 hectares of forest. The primary activity revolves around rearing suckler cows and fattening bulls, with a focus on grazing during the growing season. In addition to these agricultural activities, she holds a license for complementary manufacturing, allowing her to produce various products made from wood, cork, straw, and wickerwork. She also engages in timber processing and harvesting from the forest.

Milena is currently transitioning the farm towards a circular economy and have set examples of good practices to inspire others. By adopting more sustainable practices, they have become self-sufficient in terms of food and energy. The income generation activities include the rearing of suckler cows, fattening bulls, and harvesting and processing of forest wood assortments. They actively raise public awareness about proper forest care through positive practice demonstrations, showcasing the correct methods for timber harvesting. Milena also provides assistance and guidance to local farmers who own forests, encouraging them to maintain responsible forest management practices.

In addition, in order to promote and preserve her ancestors' traditions, Milena organises demonstrations of charcoal pile construction and charcoal extraction, offering unique experiences that are rarely found elsewhere. These activities help preserve the art of traditional charcoal production.

Milena also serves on the spatial planning and real estate management committee in her local community, working towards preserving a clean environment for farmlands. She also provides pro bono consultancy to neighboring farmers, utilising her expertise in agricultural management.

# PAOLA LENZINI

## ITALY – GOLDIRETTI

L'Arco is a family-run farm and agritourism company located in Ciociaria, Central Italy, owned by Paola Lenzini. Covering a total area of 53 hectares, L'Arco engages in multifunctional activities with a zootechnical focus and is currently undergoing organic conversion.

The farm breeds cows, horses, chickens, rabbits, and Lacaune sheep. The animals are raised in the wild and fed on fresh grass. During the summer, hay is made for the animals and supplemented with organic feed. No pesticides are used, and all productions are natural without any additives. Fertilisation of the plants is done using manure produced on-farm.

In addition to animal breeding, L'Arco operates a small artisanal dairy where sheep's milk is processed. Traditional methods are employed, and the resulting cheese and ricotta are highly regarded by local customers and shops. To distinguish herself and improve the business, Paola introduced artisanal yogurt through the Agriyò project. This yogurt is made solely from ferments and the farm's own sheep milk, without preservatives, additives, or added sugar. Environmental sustainability is a priority, and the yogurt is packaged in glass jars to promote recycling and reuse.

Paola has a degree in educational science, and often undertakes Social Farming projects, providing job placement in agriculture for socio-economically disadvantaged individuals. She has offered opportunities to former drug addicts, ex-convicts, single mothers, and others, teaching them new skills and providing fair compensation. The project includes tasks such as caring for public green areas, maintaining dry stone walls, pruning hedges, tending to the vegetable garden, and taking care of animals. The farm also contributes to preserving local biodiversity by planting endangered native pear and apple plants. In addition, L'Arco hosts educational farm visits for students of all levels, allowing them to learn about farming practices, cheese production, and food education. Accommodation for overnight stays and a restaurant are available on the farm, where Paola serves homemade and locally sourced food.

During the pandemic, Paola adapted by offering home deliveries of farm products and utilising social media for communication. This initiative gained widespread support and allowed the farm to continue operating while also providing assistance to those in need.

# PAULINE GARCIA

FRANCE – CHAMBRE D'AGRICULTURE FRANCE

Pauline Garcia is a farmer based in Cantal, France, specialising in raising Salers and Aubrac cows for meat production. In addition to her farming activities, she holds a D.U. in animal ethology from the University of Rennes and provides training to individuals in the agricultural sector, including breeders, veterinarians, technicians, and more.

Before becoming a farmer, Pauline worked for ten years in the audiovisual sector in Paris, gaining valuable experience in radio, TV, and advertising production. However, she desired a career that involved animals and offered a simpler, more natural lifestyle. Her passion for animals has been a lifelong interest.

Pauline's farm spans 250 hectares and consists of 100 Salers and Aubrac cows, which are known for their meat production. She has developed a method to improve the docility and handling of her cattle based on scientific studies and environmental enrichment. This approach is detailed in her book, "Le petit guide illustré du bien-être du bovin," published by La France Agricole in 2020. Her book has been well-received since its release in 2020 and continues to sell successfully. She is currently working on her second book, focusing on the mental and physical preparation of the human-animal pair for cattle competitions.

Pauline's dedication to animal welfare extends beyond her farm, as she draws inspiration from the work of Dr. Temple Grandin to improve conditions not only on the farm but also in slaughterhouses.

Pauline conducts comprehensive training sessions, both in-person and online, catering to veterinarians, breeders, inseminators, students, and osteopaths throughout France. The feedback from participants has been highly positive, motivating her to further invest in the field of farm animal welfare. She emphasises the importance of communication on social networks, where she actively shares her knowledge and popularises ethology, making it accessible to a wider audience.

# PETRA METLIČAR

SLOVENIA – KGZS

Petra Metličar is a food technology engineer who owns and runs her own 24ha farm. She follows in her father's footsteps, whilst her sister takes charge of their mother's craft-related activities.

In 2019, Petra began cultivating a native variety of black soybean in her home garden, before expanding its cultivation to a 2.45-hectare field in 2021. She discovered that the black soybeans thrived on her farm, allowing her to achieve a higher grain yield per hectare. These beans exhibited exceptional disease resistance, pest tolerance, and drought resilience. Despite a lack of rainfall from July to August, Petra's black soybeans remained lush in the morning and wilted in the evening. After rainfall, they rejuvenated, bloomed beautifully, and produced abundant pods. In addition to black soybeans, Petra cultivates sunflowers, beans, maize, barley, spelt, buckwheat, and rice, as well as rearing pigs.

As the sole producer of black soybeans in the region, Petra considers it a personal challenge to revive this once well-known but forgotten crop and make it interesting for the market. By growing black soybeans, she also contributes to reducing the carbon footprint on the planet. After years of effort and experimentation, Petra is proud to offer her customers more than just sweet black soybean seeds. Her farm now produces black soybean pasta (with and without eggs), black soybean flour (requiring a special milling process), and black soybean cookies. Additionally, she creates a sweet spread with honey for children and a delectable "soya beefsteak" for gourmet consumers. These products cater to individuals with celiac disease, vegetarians, and especially vegans.

Outside of farming, sport plays an important role in Petra's life. She actively participates in activities such as boxing, cycling, and running, and has completed the Three Hearts Marathon in Radenci and the Ljubljana Marathon. Alongside her farming responsibilities, Petra has been a member of the Hajdoše Fire Brigade for several years, and has also competed in the Slovenian Firefighters' Association league. In 2022, her team achieved first place at the Firefighters' Olympics in Celje, which means she can call herself an Olympic champion.

# PETRA POBASCHNIG

## AUSTRIA – LKÖ

Petra Pobaschnig, a farmer and entrepreneur, manages an organic dairy farm in Kappel/Krappfeld, Carinthia with her husband Bernd and their three children and support of her parents-in-law. The farm consists of 15 hectares of agricultural land, 10 hectares of forest, and approximately 30 hectares of grassland, and is home to 50 dairy cows and their calves, 10 goats, as well as their cats and dogs.

In 2011, Petra and Bernd faced a decision regarding their family income, prompting them to explore new farm ventures. They introduced goat's milk ice cream as a niche product to cater to people allergic to cow's milk. Despite initial skepticism, their goat's milk ice cream gained acceptance, leading them to expand their product range to also include cow's milk ice cream. They joined the regional association of farmers' direct marketers, ensuring quality and origin assurance for their products. They prioritise sourcing raw materials from Carinthia or Austria, with a focus on using local fruits, such as Carinthian strawberries, in their ice cream production. Sustainability is a core value for Petra and her farm. They operate organically, and their ice cream production follows certified organic practices. They have invested in sustainability with a 110kW photovoltaic system to generate electricity and utilising heat recovery to produce warm water. They also aim to purchase an electric car to maximise their use of self-generated electricity.

Beyond farm management Petra is actively engaged in the regional agricultural community. She chairs the regional association of direct marketers in Carinthia, advocating for the conscious use of local food and fostering dialogue with consumers. Petra regularly opens the farm to visitors, including schoolchildren and other interested groups, and uses various communication channels, such as their website, Facebook page, and WhatsApp, to share news and updates about the farm and products.

Petra's dedication to innovation and quality has earned recognition, with the farm receiving the BIO AWARD in 2014, and was commended by former Austrian Minister of Agriculture Mr. Andrä Rupprechter, in 2016. As the chairwoman of the national association of direct marketers, Petra actively shares information about company innovations and encourages other women farmers to pursue their own paths. Through her farm, Petra aims to showcase different pathways to success in agriculture while preserving tradition and shaping the future. She embraces continuous learning and attends various training events to stay updated and serve as an ambassador for the farming world.

# ROSAS ALCÁNTARA MARÍA

## SPAIN – ASAJA

Rosas Alcántara Maria is part of the company Setacor, specialising in the cultivation of oyster mushrooms (*Pleurotus ostreatus*). After years of effort and research, Rosas purchased 5 hectares of olive groves in 2010 and has successfully transformed the leaves of their own olive trees into a substrate for mushroom cultivation, making them the only company in the world to employ this technique. Once the substrate is depleted, it is returned to the olive grove, creating a circular production without waste. This approach not only reduces production costs but also nourishes the soil where the trees grow, promoting sustainability.

Setacor cultivates nine species of mushrooms throughout the year, aligned with their respective fruiting seasons. This eliminates the need for artificial air conditioning in their grow rooms. Their mushroom species range from grey, pink, yellow, and king oyster mushrooms to lion's mane, reishi, and shiitake mushrooms. Setacor holds organic (CAAE) and biodynamic (DEMETER) certifications, ensuring their commitment to sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. The company primarily sells preserved mushrooms, with a focus on dried mushrooms for improved storage and more sustainable transportation. They have an online platform through which they engage with end customers, sharing recipes, their life philosophy, and recommendations from renowned chefs like Joan Roca who use Setacor's mushrooms. Rosas not only focuses on their own cultivation but also offers training and guidance to small entrepreneurs in mushroom cultivation. She has conducted training programs in Spain, Europe, and various other countries, including Niger, Algeria, Morocco, Chile, Uruguay, and Mexico. The company's founder has even authored two books on mushroom cultivation.

Setacor have worked with universities, embassies, and NGOs in countries such as Morocco and Mozambique, where they designed a mushroom dehydrator capable of utilising local materials even during rainy periods. The innovations implemented by Setacor have resulted in several positive outcomes. The company has achieved total traceability in all processes, reduced production costs for both mushrooms and olive trees, sequestered carbon through olive grove management, and reduced the carbon footprint in shipments by focusing on dried mushroom products. Additionally, their decision to avoid artificial heating in mushroom production rooms has led to lower electricity bills.

# SANDRA HUIJSMAN

NETHERLANDS – LTO

Sandra Huijsman is co-owner of Kwekerij de Westlandse Aardbei, a farm that specialises in growing high-quality, flavorful strawberries in the Netherlands. The farm differentiates itself by prioritising taste and quality, allowing the strawberries to ripen on the plant for as long as possible. To maintain freshness, the farm delivers 75 to 80 percent of their strawberries locally within a 50-kilometer radius.

Sandra's concept revolves around four pillars for a sustainable business partnership. First, they ensure frequent and quick delivery, with six deliveries per week to retail customers and three deliveries per week to retailers outside their municipality. This minimises spoilage and food waste. Second, they offer fixed prices throughout the season, providing certainty for consumers and a stable profit margin for retail customers. Third, they provide exclusivity to customers, allowing them to avoid price competition with other vendors. Lastly, their strawberries come in recognisable packaging, enhancing consumer trust and allowing for feedback to improve the product.

In terms of sustainability, the farm implements several practices. They utilise second-class strawberries with slight imperfections for discounted sales and secondary products such as jam and liquor. They also employ a deposit system for transportation crates to reduce waste. Additionally, the farm embraces circular production systems by recycling old plants and growing media for use as fertiliser by other growers. They prioritise biological pest deterrence and minimize the use of chemical plant protection products. Water management is crucial, with rainwater collection for irrigation and a closed-loop system for water recirculation and cleaning, ensuring minimal pollution. The farm aims to become zero-emission by using alternative energy sources like geothermal and residual energy.

The farm values its employees, emphasizing diversity and offering employment opportunities for those learning the Dutch language. Sandra also collaborates with a local care farm, providing work-based activities for individuals with disabilities, promoting personal development and integration into society. Engaging with the community is important to the farm and they aim to educate children about healthy food options through interactive experiences, such as a slide and a view into the greenhouse. Sandra also organises tours for interested parties to share knowledge and promote sustainable growing practices.

# SHANNON PORTER

IRELAND – IFA

The Milk Bar is a sustainable farm project led by Shannon Porter and her family in Co. Donegal. Following a degree in Agriculture, she returned home to diversify the family farm, with the aim to provide fresh, local, and sustainable milk to the community while promoting environmental consciousness.

With 800 acres, 400 dairy cows, and various farming activities, the use of new technologies and practices have helped to improve efficiency and reduce labour costs. Shannon's main activity is the production and sale of high-quality milk from the cows. The milk is pasteurized on-site in a newly constructed room, and is then made available to customers through a self-service vending machine located in a log cabin on the farm. The farm has its own branded glass bottles that customers can purchase and reuse, significantly reducing plastic waste. The Milk Bar also offers flavored milk options and has recently introduced its own homemade ice cream.

To minimize environmental impact, they reduce food miles and implement sustainable practices like cow collars for health monitoring, improving efficiency. They sell local products alongside their milk, supporting the community.

The farm engages with the community through educational initiatives, hosting school trips for children to learn about milk production. They also welcome students studying relevant subjects, providing practical experiences. Special needs schools visit for unique sensory learning. The farm has expanded its customer base and supplies local coffee shops and farm shops, where the quality of their milk has been well-received.

The farm has received recognition, being a finalist in the Blas na Éireann 2022 and a runner-up in the Food Coast Donegal Enterprise Awards 2022. Looking ahead, The Milk Bar plans to expand its business, develop new products, and build more coffee shop partnerships. Their goal is to maintain sustainability, provide high-quality products, and continue engaging with the community through events and education.



# CHIARA SOLDATI

## ITALY – CONFAGRICOLTURA

La Scolca Wines, owned by Chiara Soldati, is a fourth generation Italian winemaking venture in Piedmont, tracing its roots back to 1919. As the CEO, Chiara has been recognised for her achievements and was honored with the title of Cavaliere del Lavoro, bestowed to her by the President of the Italian Republic, Mattarella. Chiara is actively involved in supporting women working in her company and mentors other women in the business world.

La Scolca spans 50 hectares and produces nearly a million bottles of wine. With a focus on organic practices, the vineyard specialises in growing Cortese, a white grape variety, in a region known for its red wines. The winery's flagship wine Gavi dei Gavi, is considered Piedmont's white wine jewel. For Chiara, wine is not just a product but a representation of Italian excellence and a way of life. She emphasises innovation and places great importance on environmental and social sustainability. Over the years, La Scolca has obtained certifications to validate its commitment to sustainability.

In terms of sustainability, La Scolca has made various investments and implemented innovative practices. In the vineyards, the winery has renewed its fleet of tractors to reduce fuel consumption and ensure the safety and comfort of operators. They have also acquired machines for the foliar wall, allowing timely interventions to mitigate potential challenges caused by drought and high temperatures. In the winemaking cellar, La Scolca has added insulated and refrigerated tanks, increasing the fermentation and storage capacity for wines. The winery has also upgraded its bottling line to a state-of-the-art system that operates in an inert atmosphere, minimizing the use of antioxidant substances like sulfur dioxide. Further sustainability efforts have included new sewage treatment plant that uses natural treatment methods to process wastewater for reuse. The winery has also increased its photovoltaic energy, making the company energy self-sufficient. Chiara emphasises that sustainability has always been part of her family's DNA and highlights their commitment to environmental responsibility and social accountability which can be shown through internationally recognised certifications, including the FSSC certification and the SQPNI mark at the EU level.

La Scolca's attention to the land extends beyond certifications, as they actively engage in self-monitoring programs to promote environmental sustainability and biodiversity. The winery has also modernised production departments, embracing Industry 4.0 principles and prioritising food and people safety.

# TERESA ROCHE

## IRELAND – IFA

Teresa Roche, a fifth-generation farmer from East Galway, Ireland. She is a registered nurse who has also worked in remote farming communities in Australia and New Zealand, as well as with local ethnic minorities. Seven years ago, she returned home to Ireland and established her own farm diversification business, focusing on cheese production and agritourism to showcase rural farming.

The Roche family farm, with over 65 years of milk production, maintains a pedigree dairy herd of Holstein British Friesian cows. They follow a strict grass-fed system, producing high-quality, traceable, and sustainable raw milk. The farm has approval from Bord Bia Origin Green, ensuring a low carbon footprint. Milk is pumped directly from the cooling tank to the on-site cheese vat, resulting in handcrafted cheese with a natural edible rind, minimizing food waste. The farm also practices sustainable forestry, with a progressive tree planting system that sequesters carbon emissions. Hardwoods from their forests are used in aging their hard cheeses for up to two years.

Teresa's cheese, Kylemore farmhouse cheese, is produced on-site with a bio-economy approach, utilising solar panels for electricity, and pristine water from the local Slieve Aughty mountains. The cheese incorporates locally hand-foraged seaweed from the West coast of Galway, making it an exclusive product sold in their farm shop, local suppliers, and prestigious establishments like Ashford Castle. Teresa has created employment opportunities for local people, supporting their further education in food science and agriculture.

Teresa is a vocal advocate for women in agriculture and rural innovation, and was part of the Copa-Cogeca and Corteva INSPIRERS project. She has received several awards, including the Ireland Rural Innovation Sustainable Agriculture Award, Irish Food Writers Guild Award, McKenna Guide Local Food Hero Award, and Irish Restaurant Award. Teresa offers educational farm experiences, collaborates with female-led food producers, and works with Agri Aware to promote sustainable farming practices.

Beyond cheese production, Teresa provides learning and support for students with learning needs and offers a unique luxury experience by pairing her cheeses with locally produced whiskey. Her business not only contributes to the local economy but also promotes sustainable practices and innovation in cheese making.

# ULRICA BJORNHAG

SWEDEN – LRF

Ulrica Bjornhag, a behavioural science graduate, has a diverse background in IT and leadership management. Currently employed at the Swedish National Courts Administration, she also runs a farm with her spouse. Their farm is dedicated to providing a peaceful retirement home for elderly dairy cows, prioritising sustainability and the well-being of these animals.

The retired cows on the farm exclusively consume homegrown grass and enjoy their days with familiar companions. After 6-8 months, the cows yield tender, fatty meat, which is sold to restaurants, through their own shop, and via meat box subscriptions. Ulrica is committed to minimising waste and maximizing efficiency, utilizing every part of the cow. The tallow is sold as a butter or oil substitute for cooking, and “Golden tallow” is marketed from the tallow used in meat dry aging. The cow’s leather is repurposed into various products, and the bones are used to create bone char for BBQ enthusiasts.

In support of biodiversity, the farm cultivates flowers to attract pollinators and preserves wildflowers and plants around their fields. They practice agroforestry, allowing trees and bushes to grow alongside their crops, using trimmed branches as smoke chips.

Ulrica's farm is a popular destination for visitors, especially young people interested in ethical meat production, soil health, and biodiversity. They offer educational farm experiences, allowing visitors to learn about responsible practices and the use of every part of the cow. Collaborating restaurants are required to visit, enhancing their understanding of these practices.

The farm holds a climate certification and operates all machinery without fossil fuels. While education and ethical practices are priorities, they also prioritise running a successful business.



# NOTES

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*The Women's Committee of COPA-COGECA represents women in agriculture at EU level, whether they be farmers, rural entrepreneurs, farming families, agricultural cooperatives or associated with agricultural and other rural activities.*

*The Committee provides a platform to highlight the challenges faced by women in agriculture and rural areas, as well as ensuring a gender perspective to agricultural and rural policies.*

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