

THE MET BIODISTRICT RECOGNISED AS A GOOD PRACTICE FOR SUSTAINABLE TERRITORIAL DEVELOPMENT BY THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE AND THE LAZIO REGION IN ITALY

By Kim Assaël

On 20th and 21st November 2024, the [National Workshop on Biodistricts](#) took place in Rome, in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture (MASAF), the Lazio Region, and the Council for Agricultural Research and Economics (CREA). Biodistricts have recently gained significant attention at a national, European, and international level. The European Union, in particular, recommends their promotion and support by Member States to foster organic production within the framework of the [European Action Plan](#). Numerous



countries worldwide are interested in their creation and development, also by establishing international networks and accredited research centres promote Biodistricts as a successful tool for local sustainable development (such as the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements [IFOAM](#), the International Centre for Advanced Mediterranean Agronomic Studies of Bari [CIHEAM](#), and the Global Alliance for Organic Districts [GAOD](#)).

In the presence of institutional representatives, the national workshop was organised over two days: the first day focused on a comparison between Italian, European and international experiences, while the second day consisted of field visits to two sample areas: the [Maremma Etrusca and Monti della Tolfa MET Biodistrict](#) and the [Etrusco Romano Biodistrict](#). The event provided an opportunity to learn about the challenges faced by established Biodistricts, the needs of those in the process of being created, and to share solutions for facilitating their development.



This institutional support stems from the success of the innovation brought about by Biodistricts in the sustainable management of territories and in strategies for adapting to and mitigating climate change, centered on organic and agroecological production practices. In Italy, Biodistricts were initially regulated within the framework of Food Districts and later by Law 23/2022 on organic farming, as well as by the regulations of many Regions, which are responsible for granting them legal recognition.

Formally established in 2021, the MET Biodistrict, with a population of 27.208 inhabitants, currently includes the four municipalities of Allumiere, Monte Romano, Tarquinia, and Tolfa, Agrarian Universities, agro-food companies, with agricultural producers, livestock farmers, processing and marketing retails, the Vincenzo Cardarelli Institute of Higher Education in Tarquinia (Agricultural Studies Department), the National Confederation of Craftsmanship and Small and Medium Enterprises of Viterbo and Civitavecchia, and the Viterbo Chamber of Commerce.

It was one of the first to be recognised by the Lazio Region under [Reg. 11/2019](#) [“Provisions for the regulation and promotion of Bio-districts”](#) as a territorial entity dedicated both to improving the competitiveness of organic and agroecological agricultural supply chains and to the sustainable governance of

WORKSHOP
**DIFESA INTEGRATA
DELLE COLTURE:
INNOVAZIONE E**

EVENTO GRATUITO
20 GENNAIO 2023
ORE 10.00-17.00
SALA ELISABETTA
PIAZZALE FRANCESCO COLAGROSSI
COLONNA (RM)

A bio-district is a territory where farmers, citizens, tourist operators, associations and public authorities enter into an agreement for the sustainable management of local resources, based on organic production and consumption (short food chain, purchasing groups, organic canteens in public offices and schools). In bio-districts, the promotion of organic produce is inextricably linked with the promotion of the territory and its special characteristics so that it can fully realise its economic, social and cultural potential.

its territory. Organic production and livestock farming represent 16.3% of the Biodistrict's total area (625.92 km² and an Agricultural Utilised Area-UAA of 34,710 hectares). In addition to the 53 companies currently associated (of which 33 are organic, 2 in conversion, and 18 operating under conventional practices with the intention to convert), the Biodistrict also includes innovative businesses focused on implementing local circular economy processes. Since its establishment, MET has formed territorial alliances with Slow Food Costa della Maremma Laziale, the Italian League for the Protection of Birds (LIPU), and has signed a framework collaboration agreement with CREA Food and Nutrition Research Centre, as well as a multi-year partnership with the [Organic Food System Program \(OFSP\) of the United Nations](#).



At the workshop, the MET Biodistrict was recognised as a national best practice for its outstanding effective process in establishing the promoter committee, which ensures support for the Biodistrict, as well as for its work with the [local organic school canteens](#) and for the ongoing work about the competitiveness of the area's characteristic production chains -cereal cultivation, fruit and vegetables, beekeeping, livestock farming, and tourism ([Start Up Met Bio Project](#)). This approach simultaneously addresses consumer habits and production methods, focusing on the health of citizens and the environment, while improving the cohesion of the territory.



The strategy adopted by the MET Biodistrict is to tackle the complexity of the agri-food system, aiming to enhance the role of the local agricultural business through new multifunctional roles and by involving and collaborating with all local stakeholders. This fosters a new relationship between producers and citizens/consumers, based on an awareness of the links between food, health and the ecosystem.



The Biodistrict has adopted an *integrated system of actions* along three main lines:

- Increase participation and cohesion within local communities through the inclusion of organic products in school canteens.
- Improve the competitiveness, profitability, and sustainability of the area's characteristic supply chains.
- Organize an initial set of proximity services to provide information, technical support, and commercial assistance to producers and consumers.



The MET Biodistrict operates in the territory pursuing integrated sustainable development and stands out for the following areas of work:

- *Integration between Organic Farming and the Enhancement of Cultural Heritage* (such as the cultivation of *Etruscan vineyards*, the rediscovery of traditional animal breeds, and the reinterpretation of historical farming practices, linking them to contemporary organic production).
- *Mapping and Enhancement of Local Biodiversity*. A scientific approach to enhancing local biodiversity (native plants and animal breeds) and promoting farming techniques that respect and preserve this biodiversity. The district places great importance on *selecting and recovering local, organic, typical, and quality plant varieties*, such as wheat, vine cultivation, and the *Maremma Cow and Tolfa horse*. The conservation of these genetic resources, closely linked to the territory, is seen as an economic, cultural, and environmental asset to be integrated into all production processes within the district.
- *Active Involvement of Institutions and the Local Community and Social Impact*. Another innovative aspect of MET is its participatory governance model, which actively involves institutions and the local community in managing the district and creating new projects to support and develop local entrepreneurship. The involvement of schools and young people are one of the key aspects of MET, aiming to educate future citizens who are aware of the need to protect the environment and promote sustainable agricultural practices.



- *Collaboration with Universities and Research Centres* to develop and apply scientific and technological solutions in organic farming (for example, applied research on the potential of traditional crops and the resilience of organic production to climate challenges in collaboration with the National Research Council and the University of Tuscia).
- *The Role of the "Innovation Network" and Start-ups*, which involves not only organic farmers and producers but also technology start-ups, artisans, and other entrepreneurial figures, creating synergies between different sectors. This network focuses on product traceability, the energy sustainability of agricultural businesses, and water efficiency. Overall, it aims to create innovative solutions for production and marketing, for managing natural resources, fostering a local economy, and strengthening the identity of the MET, making it a true incubator for sustainable ideas and practices.
- *Food-Craft-Culture-Sustainable Tourism Supply Chains*. The approach to *sustainable tourism*, is strategically intertwined with local production. The MET area is indeed an ideal destination for *experiential tourism* that invites visitors to discover the environment, traditions, and culture, constituent elements of each product. Tourism in MET is a form of "*cultural agritourism*" that encourages tourists to engage with the Etruscan roots, local folklore, and craftsmanship.
- *Environmental Sustainability and Ecological Transition*. MET is particularly focused on ecological transition, promoting agricultural practices that go beyond organic certification, such as *sustainable water resource management projects*, *the promotion of renewable energy* for agricultural businesses, and *circular economy practices*, contributing to achieving *climate change mitigation and adaptation* goals.



In 2023, the MET Biodistrict promoted the institutionalization of a Coordination Table in the Lazio Region for Biodistricts – currently comprising 13 territories formally recognized, with a total Organic Agricultural Area (SAU) of 67,780 hectares (41.13% of the organic SAU in Lazio). MET participates with its representative, who is also delegated by the Coordination Table to the Regional Monitoring Committee for the Rural Development, in which Biodistricts are identified as priorities. The aim is to contribute to reducing inconsistencies between various sectoral policies that continue to generate costly inefficiencies, while strategically using the available tools of European and national programming. The cohesion being strengthened within the Lazio Region Biodistricts, facilitates functional coordination by integrating economic, environmental, and social factors into agricultural production, as well as all upstream and downstream stages of the entire food chain, including demand, collateral policies, consumer behaviour, and habits. This provides a concrete basis for what is outlined in Lazio Regional Law No. 11/2019.

What makes the Biodistrict of the Maremma Etrusca and Monti della Tolfa innovative is the adoption of organic farming practices for its territory, its ability to connect educational initiatives (food-canteens) and the organization of the agri-food supply chains within the regeneration of the territorial ecosystem, with emphasis on the linkages between health and sustainability of it; moreover, the fulfilment of the tasks outlined by the founding legislation by implementing support actions for a coordinated programming at the level of Lazio Region. All this creates opportunities of sustainable and resilient territorial development for the future.

To know more

[Maremma Etrusca e Monti della Tolfa Biodistrict](#)

[National Workshop on Biodistricts](#)

[National workshop brochure](#)

[Regional Law "Provisions for the regulation and promotion of Bio-districts" \(Reg. 11/2019\)](#)

[Progetto Start Up MET Bio](#)

[Videoracconto Progetto Start Up MET Bio di CREA](#)

[MET Field visit by OFSP](#)

[Piano d'azione nazionale per il Biologico](#)

[Rural Development Complement \(CSR\) 2023-2027](#)

[A scuola di Biodistretto – Article by CREA](#)

[Article Biodistretto della Maremma Etrusca e dei Monti della Tolfa in giroviaggiandoblog.com](#)

[Article MET in EtruriaNews.it](#)

[Article MET in OrvietoNews.it](#)

[L'esperienza del distretti biologici in Italia – Publicacion CREA](#)

[I Distretti Biologici in Italia in Rete Rurale Nazionale 2020](#)

[I Distretti Biologici in pianetapsr.it](#)

