

A collective dream of care and fair work

A concrete practice of purchasing and managing a historic farm in difficulty

For additional information: casadigeri@valdibella.com and fill in the form to communicate your interest in purchasing a participation share,

A bit of history

This is the story of the Rizzuto family's farm - which is located in the beautiful Valdibella valley (north of Camporeale) called Valdibella - and the link of this estate with the Valdibella cooperative.

Originally, Giuseppe Rizzuto bought the estate. Geri, his son, took over and expanded the area by acquiring another plot nearby, where he created an almond grove that was his passion. Overall, the entire farm now consists **of 5 hectares: olive groves for 1.5 hectares and almond groves for 3.5 hectares**. The two estates enjoy very fertile soil and are equipped with two ponds for irrigation. Two other small areas are intended for the cultivation of vegetables.

Geri's company has always been linked to the Valdibella cooperative because it was its origin. In 1981 the first Valdibella cooperative was founded, born from a group of farmers including Giuseppe Rizzuto with the aim of participating in a program of the Sicily Region, which provided aid for the mechanization of cooperatives. The law favored the purchase of agricultural machinery and tools in a cooperative form, covering 50% of the cost. Thanks to this law, many cooperatives were born in Sicily in those years. But after a few years, after completing the whole procedure, the cooperatives were dissolved or sold to other farmers. And it is precisely this second case that happened: the old group of farmers who founded the first Valdibella left the cooperative and were replaced by a new group of farmers, namely us. Geri was the only farmer of the old guard to remain a partner even after the transition to the new team. He always kept alive the hope of a **mutualistic** and **collaborative** relationship between farmers. Perhaps the new group of farmers gave him this feeling and finally **his idea of agriculture and society based on cooperation could come true**. Geri was always active and collaborative in the cooperative, always participating enthusiastically in all the initiatives and especially in those that had a greater social and human background, the

economic part of the activity always interested him little. For example, he never missed the training days of the Practical School of Agroecology and was particularly involved in the atmosphere that reigns in those days, made up of friendship and mutual exchange.

Unfortunately, Geri left us on August 15, 2023 and now the entire property is for sale. The daughter and only heir Naima is living in Holland. Although she is particularly emotionally attached, she cannot manage the company and has decided to sell it.

This story has motivated us to imagine a continuity to collectively overcome the sense of defeat and discouragement that the system often imposes to be experienced individually. We want to take care together of this farm, which we would like to become a practical experimentation of a fairer and more beautiful corner of the world.



The view from the house on the olive grove

The project promoter group

Two networks, two communities - Valdibella and Contadinazioni-FuoriMercato - who like each other so much and who looked into each other's eyes during a lunch in this farm, at the end of a peasant march against the new GMOs and a system of exploitation of people and the land. Together they decided to think of themselves as united and propose to the people closest to them a project of a dream and shared practice.

Valdibella

It was founded in June 1998 in an area with a strong agricultural and rural vocation, alongside the Salesian community Itaca, which is active in the reception of young people with social hardship and promotes, through the Jonathan project, their work inclusion.

From the beginning, the cooperative has tried to unhinge cultural stratifications that have dominated the Sicilian territory in recent centuries: restore dignity to farmers, promoting concrete actions against commercial and labor exploitation and putting in place organic farming methods that focus on **biodiversity** and **native crops**.

We knew from the beginning that the only way to succeed in the project was for several farmers to come together. Alone, each would have done little. Or nothing. And every day this conviction is confirmed even in small things.

Valdibella, a sustainable project within which all resources, both human and natural, find their realization. If today we produce wine, wheat and pasta, almonds and oil, vegetables and legumes, it is only because within our cooperative there are women and men who know how to overcome their individuality to join a common and cooperative project.

Contadinazioni

Contadinazioni was born in 2014 symbolically in the ghetto of Campobello di Mazara (in the province of Trapani), which houses migrant seasonal workers mainly engaged in the harvest of Nocellara del Belice olives. From the meeting of Sicilians in precarious work conditions and migrant worker, an informal group was born. "Against all exploitation" is written in the logo. Today, Contadinazioni tries to treasure this experience and place itself as a place of reflection and action for **food self-sovereignty focusing on the theme of work**.

We were born to fight against the most visible and crude face of the exploitation of man by man and of land by man. For this reason, in addition to supporting migrant workers with various activities, we have produced table olives, dried tomatoes, pestos and olive oil over the years with agroecological techniques.

We adopt a perspective of **territorial resistance** that starts from the need to co-produce knowledge with the support of the collective “Scienza Radicata”: together, we develop projects for the reappropriation of the resources necessary for the communities of citizens, workers, peasants based on solidarity. We share this perspective at the national level with the realities that build the trade union association "Autonomia in Movimento - FuoriMercato", based on the principles of conflictual mutualism. Our regional network, the "Network of Peasant Agriculture and Self-Managed Work - Fuorimercato Sicilia" (Rete dell'agricoltura contadina e del lavoro in autogestione - Fuorimercato Sicilia), connects Sicilian producers in a path of co-design and pooling of knowledge, energy, resources and risks.

It is together with these communities and with our skills that we have carried out activities to support seasonal workers in Campobello di Mazara: by organizing the campaign "Let's bring water to the ghetto of Campobello di Mazara" and the first demonstration in memory of Omar Baldeh, a worker who died in the ghetto of Campobello di Mazara, which in 2023 was reorganized as a social anti-mafia demonstration against the exploitation of the land and people.



Grape harvest in Valdibella, a moment of meeting between members of the cooperative in Camporeale in 2023

Demonstration in memory of Omar Baldeh, organized by Contadinazioni together with the workers in Campobello di Mazara in 2022



The collective purchasing project

We want to launch in our communities - with the people we share the desire to commit, as well as an effort to protect beauty and make it accessible to more and more people – a project for the purchase and collective management of a historic farm in difficulty. We want to put in place a new experiment of **agroecological co-production** that is carried out through **fair work** and **agroecology practices** in the construction of a **participatory guarantee supply chain**.

What is the commitment we ask you all?

We ask you to become associate/partner of the “società agricola semplice” (simple agricultural company) which will be constituted by 20 associates/partners, who will purchase a participation share. We have started to look for the most suitable legal form, in line with our willingness to share a land which we consider a common good. We look at examples which align to this vision: the popular shareholding campaign (“campagna di azionariato popolare”) launched by workers of the former GKN factory in Campi Bisenzio (Florence) (see <https://fridaysforfutureitalia.it/gkn-for-future/>) during the three years of fight for a grassroots ecological transition and the experience of Ma Ferme in Belgium (see www.maferme.be).

In the meanwhile, we propose to you many elements to reflect on!

Each partner will be able to purchase one or more participation shares of the property. The share can be transmitted by inheritance or be given in afterwords. The promoting group will set requirements to step in the society to guarantee that new associates/partners are aligned with the general objectives of the project. These requirements will be explained in the first assembly in January 2025. Each person purchasing a share will be partner of the company after paying € 15.000 (300 participation shares of € 50 each, for a total of 20 partners).

Part of the collected amount (€ 300.000) will be used to purchase the property (€ 190.000) and the remaining to carry out small renovation works to turn the property into a more functional space for collective use.

The promoting group (further details below) is composed of Contadinazioni-FuoriMercato and Valdibella cooperative, whose representatives will make the board of trustees. These members will be part of the company by buying a quota (€ 50).

What will an associate/partner be entitled to, in practice?

The associate/partner will be able to live for two weeks a year in the property (equipped with 6 beds). The rotation of the available periods will be managed by the promoting committee, entitled to harmonize the needs of the 20 partners. The partner has the right to have a share of the company's products (minus the expenses necessary for production). The associate can decide whether to withdraw them or give them to Valdibella Cooperative and to the national network FuoriMercato for marketing/distribution. The partner will be able to participate in the management of agricultural activities, in social and cultural initiatives which will be organized during the year and in research/experimentation actions in collaboration with Valdibella Practical School of Agroecology and Scienza Radicata collective.

Regulations and participation: the stages of a path

The local promoting group role, research and guarantee of fair work and agroecological practices

The public launch of the project is foreseen on 20th November 2024. From this date onwards, it is possible to fill in the form to communicate interest in participating in the first assembly (to be held in January 2025). On that day, the promoting group will show the project and respond to questions, curiosities and doubts.

We expect that the **public launch of the project** can be expected at the end of October, after internally sharing the proposal by email and in collective online calls in the two communities of reference (Valdibella and the national network FuoriMercato).

The heart of the project is an experience of collective practice of a dream, a sharing of responsibility and care that focuses on **agroecology** and the **fair work**. The members of the project will be guarantors of a place where peasant agriculture and fair work will flourish thanks to the collective path.

The local promoting group is responsible for taking care of the internal progress and external communication of the project. The group is made up of heterogeneous professionals supported by the project itself and internal and/or suggested by the Valdibella and FuoriMercato communities.

The tasks of the promoting group must also be established and specified by a regulation that can also be modified every 5 years.

The promoting group proposes a regulation for the management of both the home, working and production, external communication and the methods of participation of all members.

The regulations must be reviewed every 5 years, except for the housing one which must be reviewed every 2 years, according to the physiological and natural course of the experience or may be requested for serious reasons to be revised at the request of at least two members who detect the same need.

The basic proposal on **the management of the house** provides that with the common fund we intervene to create **three potentially autonomous areas** to alternatively allow **members** to come on vacation or to contribute to the life of the project, **to work teams, artists, project participants or training schools** to use the house for limited periods. A system of guardianship for the house will be established (through video surveillance or the commitment of available natural persons) functioning even in the absence of the members.

The house, 200 meters from the almond grove and the olive grove, has two bedrooms with a reference bathroom. On the first floor there are a double bedroom, one with a single bed and a bathroom. On the ground floor there is a sleeping area with three single beds and a bathroom. There is kitchen, dining room and lounge, a veranda. In case of need, a room can be reserved for a caretaker. Wood-burning oven available for events.

The **house will be habitable for 2 weeks a year for each member**, providing adequate time for accommodation and cleaning between periods of stay. During these periods, members will be able to participate in the activities organized by the promoting group and planned according to the seasons (production activities, agricultural management, modernization and maintenance of the home, etc.). **The promoting group reserves a period for a total of about 2 months for the development of complementary activities and projects** within the spaces of the house and the land (political-cultural activities, experimentation and training activities, educational activities, etc.). The management and scheduling of the periods is the responsibility of the promoting group, which will take care to share it with the members and to find any necessary mediations.

Agricultural management is taken care of by the promoting group which makes use of the skills of the Valdibella Cooperative for the design of the agricultural work plan and by Contadinazioni for the drafting of a pact for fair work as an example of agroecological practice against all exploitation. The members will be involved in the progress of the work with a call for the assembly every 6 months and informed of specific projects and / or needs.

Each member will be asked for an annual management fee for out-of-pocket expenses, such as cleaning, utilities, taxes, in the amount of 400 euros per year. This figure may vary depending on consumption and activities and it will be the responsibility of the promoting group to communicate the distribution of these expenses in a transparent manner.

The members together with the community are entitled to a share of oil and production and can participate in the distribution and dissemination of products in their territories if there is a surplus.

The promoting group guarantees availability in two annual windows for the organization of events around Europe to tell about the project together and promote the birth of other good practices.

The label of the products will be the result of the history that we build together and of the **participatory guarantee process** based on **fair work** and on **the principles of agroecology**, an expression of the encounter and cultural and social heritage of the Valdibella cooperative with that of Contadinazioni-FuoriMercato.

The promoting group is responsible for organizing a calendar for hospitality every year and promoting a fair distribution of this possibility. In addition, the promoting group, taking care of relationships with universities, artists and in close collaboration with the school of agroecology, organizes and promotes weeks characterized by in-depth studies on the peasant history of western Sicily and the Sicilian emancipation struggles in close collaboration with Borgo Danilo Dolci in Trappeto, the Arci Pasol association in Partinico and Casa Memoria Impastato in Cinisi. For this work and for the responsibilities it holds, the promoting group receives an adequate and fair annual contribution to be established at the regulatory stage.

Photo gallery of the land and the house































