BEST PRACTICES

“Recovery and enhancement of the ancient cultivation varieties”
The case of the Turquoise Potato

Institutional information

Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park
Italy, Abruzzo
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Summary

Explain your case in one or two sentences

In 2001, the Gran Sasso e Monti della Laga National Park Authority launched an important project for the recovery and enhancement of the Turquoise potato, an ancient crop variety once widespread in the mountain areas of the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga and which, unfortunately, in recent decades has been gradually replaced with more productive, modern and more easily available cultivars.

The project involved the multiplication of the potato first in the laboratory to restore its health and then in the field in order to evaluate its agronomic characteristics and define the best cultivation technique. After a few years of multiplication in the field and in different environments of the Park, it finally returned to be cultivated.

Background information: How was the situation previous to your actions?

The last specimens of Turquoise potatoes were recovered from the hands of an old farmer from San Pietro di Isola del Gran Sasso, who still kept 33 small precious tubers. Only after careful research was it possible to find a few more examples of the same variety near San Giorgio, Crognaleto (TE), in the Laga Mountains.

The term Turkish, turquoise or Turkish is attributed in ancient times to those varieties probably coming from other production areas. It can be considered synonymous with stranger, foreigner. Common is the reference to corn defined as "maize".

What were the needs you identified?

The protection of traditional products is closely linked to the maintenance of agricultural biodiversity and this is one of the institutional tasks of the Authority, in order to develop sustainable economies, particularly in the specific fields of agricultural activities, production and marketing of products related to traditional activities.

The loss of biodiversity also affects the agricultural and livestock sectors. In the protected area, characterized by mountain land, crops were mainly cereals, legumes and potatoes.

Many of these varieties were selected in these environments and have particular characteristics of rusticity and resistance. Their loss would be serious and irrecoverable.

What solution you found to cover those needs?

The project, divided into several phases, involved the multiplication of the potato first in the laboratory to restore it and restore its health integrity and then in the field in order to evaluate its agronomic characteristics and define the best cultivation technique.

After a few years of multiplication in the field and in different environments, it finally returned to be cultivated throughout the protected area.

What actions did you take to reach the solution?

In order to guarantee the new cultivation of potatoes and to avoid the loss of biodiversity, the Park has promoted the establishment of a non-profit association, which aims to support the rural world within the Park to protect and promote the recovery, cultivation, conservation, exchange and diffusion of traditional varieties; the productive recovery of the territory and its preservation; popular knowledge, local practices, innovations introduced with respect for the times dictated by nature.

If any, which partners or other organisations did you involve during the process?

During the restoration and multiplication of the potato, a laboratory specialising in plant micropropagation was contacted to obtain the restored tubers.

Subsequently, by means of a public notice addressed to farmers, companies available for cultivation and multiplication in the field were identified.

Finally, for the study of chemical, physical and nutritional aspects, collaboration was started with the product laboratory of the Chamber of Commerce, Industry and Crafts of L'Aquila.

What were the main problems or difficulties you had to face?

The problems faced during the recovery phase are mainly related to the difficulty of restoring the old tubers, compromised by years of misuse. In addition, the ancient varieties present aspects of rusticity but also of delicacy during storage. This has created problems in their conservation and duration until the next sowing. In addition, the low productivity of this potato fails to maintain a fair income for the farmer if not by increasing the final selling price.

What is the situation now, after your actions?

Thanks to the impulse of the Park Authority, an association of Turquoise potato producers has been created. Farmers have adopted production regulations and special rules for the sale of this product. Over time, the association has grown and is currently made up of many farmers operating throughout the protected area. Since 2016, the Turquoise Potato has also become a Slow Food Presidium.

It can now be said that the Turquoise potato is no longer at risk of extinction.

Main lessons learned along the way?

The recovery of the ancient cultivation varieties cannot be separated from the recovery of traditional agricultural techniques and the ancient knowledge to which they were closely linked.

Through scientific and technical projects it is also possible to pursue further and unexpected results such as the recovery of memory and the rescue of those elements of rural culture that can help us not only to explain our origins but also to propose new solutions for today's problems.

Annexes:

ImaC.1

ImaC.2

ImaC.3