

THE PRODUCTION OF ORGANIC SEED

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Seed is a strategic component for conventional, organic and Genetically Modified Organism (GMO) based type of agriculture. A strong and efficient seed industry is a pre-requisite for producing quality seed of varieties suitable to maintain the type of agricultural systems chosen by farmers. The total cost of seeds sustained by the Italian farmers, for example, is estimated in about 800 million Euros per year, of these more than 300 million Euros burden our trade balance due to the import of seeds of species such as corn, oilseed crop, vegetables, sugar beet and potato.

In organic farming all the input need be organic, including the seed, and this is regulated by the EU legislation that recommends, beginning from the 1st January 2004, that seed used in organic agriculture must be organic, unless not available in the market.

Important aspects related to the improvement of organic seed production is the control of pests, diseases and weeds. In recent years the concern about research in organic agriculture is increasing. In fact, in 2005 for the first time in Italy it has been funded a project aiming at researching and innovating seed production, particularly for organic farming. The project is promoted by the Regione dell'Umbria, and involves 14 research institutions, scattered in the North, Central and South Italy, including Sicily and Sardinia. Basic themes are: tracing the most suitable areas for seed production, improvement of seed production techniques, finding the most suitable cultivars, the conservation and safeguarding of biodiversity. Forage crops are an important component of the project.