

INTRODUCTION

Ager - agroalimentare e ricerca is a project conceived and developed by a group of foundations sharing goals and resources that decided to support scientific research in order to give new impetus to Italy's agri-food sector.

In this second edition, Ager is taking advantage of cooperation with nine Foundations of banking origin (**Fondazione di Bolzano, Fondazione Cariplo, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Cuneo, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Modena, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Padova e Rovigo, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Parma, Fondazione Banco di Sardegna, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio della Provincia di Teramo, Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Udine e Pordenone**) and **Fondazione con il Sud**.

After funding research projects in the previous edition in the cereals, fruits-and-vegetables, wine growing and producing and livestock segments, **Ager** now intends to become involved in more diverse areas, chosen for their strategic role or their strong potential for growth, and in any case needing study. In particular, the new sectors are: **aquaculture, mountain agriculture, olive tree and oil and dairy products**.

The Foundations want to contribute towards improving production processes and technological development in order to: consolidate the *leadership* of Italian agri-food products, guarantee consumers highly nutritional, wholesome and appealing food, and combine high yields with the environmental sustainability of the agricultural production chain.

To pursue their objectives, the 10 **Ager** Foundations have been organised into a temporary Association, with leadership as well as powers of representation assigned to **Fondazione Cariplo**.

The Foundations of banking origin are private corporate bodies with full operational autonomy which, under the provisions of Law 23 December 1998, no. 461, and Legislative Decree 17 May 1999, no. 153, pursue purposes of social utility and promotion of economic development. **Fondazione con il Sud**, on the other hand, was established at the initiative of the bank-established Foundations of banking origin and the world of volunteerism, for the purpose of enhancing and expanding social infrastructure in the regions of southern Italy.

1 - REFERENCE CONTEXT

Economic Context

Worldwide, aquaculture has now superseded fishery production, and it is expected to reach two-thirds of total fish production by 2030 (FAO, 2014). This prospect points towards aquaculture as the cornerstone on which to base a new national development policy for the fish sector.

The segment produces 200,000 tonnes of product annually, with total turnover exceeding 500 million euros (ISMEA, 2013). Italian producers primarily focus on the quality of the product and its sustainability rather than on the amount that can be sold.

Just over one-half of all the aquaculture companies are dedicated to producing fish (fresh and saltwater), slightly less than one-half to mollusks (saltwater and brackish water) and approximately 1% to crustacean production (saltwater). According to the Italian Fish Farmers' Association (API), 60% of production is concentrated in the north, 18% in the centre and 22% in the south of the country.

Shellfish farming (with mussels predominating) is the main form of aquaculture nationwide in terms of quantities; in terms of product value, however, 66% comes from fish farming (in first place, trout, of which our country is Europe's leading producer). In the area of fish farming we are also seeing a growing trend in the production of sturgeon (associated more than anything else with the production and sale of caviar), up an average of about 9% each year since 2002.

Given this national situation, only one-third of the fish we find on our plates comes from Italy, and the export/import balance is strongly negative. The problem affects all of Europe, but Italy is the EU country with the greatest shortfall. Especially astonishing is the consolidated negative balance sheet for products like orata (gilthead bream), spigola (sea bass) and mussels: Italy has environmental conditions and technical and business capabilities that should make competitive production absolutely possible.

The reference market for our products remains the domestic Italian market, but it has now become clear that Italy's supply is decidedly inadequate.

Critical Issues and Potential

The prices for our aquaculture production are systematically higher than the prices of imported fish, which indicates a need to adopt strategies that differentiate and enhance the Italian product. Whilst this is generally valid for many other production sectors, in the specific case of aquaculture the fact is that up to 60% of the production cost comes from the supply of feed. The market price of feed is in fact rising steadily as a consequence of the gradual limiting of the availability of fish meal and oil - the basic ingredients - due to overexploitation of the ocean's fish resources. As a response to these problems, the use of feed produced using lower-cost raw materials has now become widespread. Unfortunately, however, completely or partially replacing fish meal and oil with alternative sources of proteins and lipids has in most cases proven to be counterproductive in many ways, causing - among other things - a reduction in growth performance, an increase in excreta and in pathologies, and a reduction in the overall quality of the final product, with obvious repercussions both economic and environmental.

In addition, the national aquaculture segment suffers from shortages of a structural and functional nature that are jeopardising its position. The nature of the problem is therefore much broader than merely economic, affecting the political, health and social spheres as well.

Counterbalancing these problems, which are both typically Italian and valid globally, there is still strong potential that makes aquaculture a sector with good prospects for development, in our

country too. In Italy, the conditions for getting into aquaculture are objective and workable: tradition, know-how, areas of coastline that can potentially be used for sustainable fish farming, major wet areas like large and small lagoons, coastal ponds, salt marshes and salt ponds. Second, there is ample room in the domestic market, offering worthwhile opportunities. In Italy, per capita consumption of fish products has reached 20 kg/year and mirrors a worldwide trend which, over the last 40 years, has doubled average consumption, with an almost linear spread of the phenomenon in every country in the world. Currently, fish products are responsible for supplying some 17% of the animal protein consumed in people's diets, and their consumption also plays a critical role in regard to the population's general health, given the Omega-3 fatty acids, which seems correlated to a reduced risk of heart disease and to some extent cancer as well.

2 - OBJECTIVES OF THE CALL FOR PROPOSALS

In this context, **Ager** intends to contribute to carrying out scientific projects aimed at achieving results that will have a short-term impact on the development of Italian aquaculture, with specific reference to fish farming, which accounts for an important share of the market.

In particular, we are looking to promote an adequate food strategy for farmed fish so that we can respond, at the same time and effectively, to some of the sector's priority needs, such as production cost containment, reducing the environmental impact of the farms, and improving the quality of the final product.

To this end, we will be selecting research projects - with a maximum term of three years - geared to the study and resolution of the main problems deriving from the use in aquaculture of feed formulated using raw materials of animal and vegetable origin other than fish meal and oil, in order to improve - merely by way of incomplete example - the health, growth performance, nutritional quality, variety and appeal of farmed fish, as well as the yield after processing in the case of processed products.

The study may propose new formulations or improvements in existing ones, in any case taking a multidisciplinary approach to the topic.

3 - GUIDELINES

3.1 - Acceptable Subjects

Ager will review projects presented by institutions, organised into partnerships only, that carry out scientific research activities directly in the contexts identified in the call for proposals.

The lead partner must be located within the operating area of the **Ager** member Foundations, as defined at point 5.4 of the "Submission Guide".

Given **Ager's** goals, partners can be located whether within or outside the Foundations' reference area. Foreign partners may also participate if they contribute significantly to carrying out the proposed studies.

The partnership must provide for participation only by institutions eligible to contribute to the Foundations according to the eligibility criteria indicated at point 5.3 of "Submission Guide". Together with their project proposals, the partnership acceptance letters must be submitted by all participating institutions, according to the template provided.

3.2 - Communication Plan

Ager wants to ensure that the funded projects and the results acquired during and at the end of the study are promptly communicated and disclosed to the scientific community, the stakeholders and civil society. The project must therefore provide for a “Communication Plan” as an integral part of the study, drafted based on the *Guidelines for communication and dissemination of results* which can be downloaded from www.progettoager.it.

Failure to properly draft and manage the communication plan by following the instructions given in the *Guidelines* may lead to a reduction in the amount of funding requested for the communication effort, even if the project has already been approved.

3.3 - Economic Plan

Ager's grant covers 100% of the total project costs (additional and current expenses). The grant application must be consistent with the proposed experimental plan, the scale of the partnership, the project's term and budget availability as indicated in the call for proposals.

Projects must present an economic plan providing exclusively for the listed expense categories, in keeping with the relative ceilings (if any):

- **Amortizable Costs.** This expense category must not exceed 15% of additional project costs. It may involve the total cost incurred in purchasing the equipment and software programmes to be used for years to come that are not already available in the partnership's pool and that are demonstrably necessary for carrying out the experimental plan. This expense category may also include amounts to be incurred in the event of equipment leasing and for any finishing work needed for installation.
- **Temporary staff**
- **Sub-contractors and consultants**
- **Consumables**
- **Overheads.** This expense item must not exceed the 5% threshold, calculated on the sum of the additional project costs
- **Communication and dissemination activities and other costs.** This expense item must not exceed 15% of additional project costs. This may involve expenses for the types of activities indicated in the *Guidelines for Communication and Dissemination of Results*, as well as for missions, meetings among the partners and training courses for researchers involved in the project.

It is advised that applicants provide a breakdown of the expense categories using the special format indicated at point 5.1 of the “Submission Guide”, justifying the amounts indicated with estimates or quotes where possible.

When the forms are filled out, the total project cost will match the requested grant.

3.4 - Evaluation Criteria

Based on the evaluations of an international panel of independent experts to guarantee objective and impartial judgments (peer review), the **Ager** management committee will select those projects that deserve a grant. At the end of the evaluation process, the experts' judgments will be conveyed to the applicants, regardless of the outcome of the evaluation.

In addition to overall scientific quality and the adequacy of the economic plan, the evaluation will also consider the following factors:

- the past experiences of the institutions participating in the partnership, demonstrable through scientific results and/or applications relating to the specific sector
- the methodological approach
- the level of innovation
- the added value of each partner and its level of integration into the research group
- the contribution of the proposed research to the sector sustainability (environmental, economic and social)
- the contribution made by the proposed study to improving the quality (safety, nutrition and sensory quality) of farmed fish
- prospects for transferral of the research results and potential economic impact
- adequacy of the communication plan
- the ability to offer paths for professional growth to young researchers

3.5 - Projects not acceptable for funding

Funding will not be granted for projects with the following characteristics:

- requests for funding for activities already receiving funding from other sources;
- requests for funding for the creation of new research centres;
- requests for funding that do not involve the recruitment of young researchers in training

4 - BUDGET

The budget available to the present call for proposals totals 1.5 million euros.

The **Ager** management committee may reformulate the budget at a later date within the limits of availability.

5 - SUBMISSION GUIDE

5.1 - Forms and delivery

In order to present a project, please visit the website www.progettoager.it where you can download the 4 presentation forms listed below:

- “Anagrafica capofila” (Details of lead partner)
- “Progetto sintetico” (Project summary)
- “Project presentation form” (this document will contain a detailed description of the project and will be evaluated by the panel of independent experts)
- “Budget form” (this document will contain a detailed description of the economic plan of the project and will be evaluated by the panel of independent experts)

These forms, together with the **partnership acceptance letters** (template provided), are to be filled in and sent to the e-mail address info@pec.progettoager.it (**only for sending the projects**). The submission of material in hard copy is not required and will not be taken into consideration.

Participation in the call for proposals requires reading the following documents, also available at www.progettoager.it:

- “Guidelines for Communication and Dissemination of Results”
- “Reporting Guide”

5.2 - Project Proposal Selection and Evaluation Procedure

The projects submitted will be subjected to an initial selection process based on their formal eligibility and consistency with respect to the content and goals of the call for proposals. In particular, the following projects may not access the subsequent project evaluation phase:

- a. projects submitted by subjects ineligible to receive a grant from the Foundations (see point 5.3, “Institutions Eligible for Foundation Grants”), including when the subject is participating as partner
- b. projects submitted with incomplete or missing forms (including the partnership acceptance letters)
- c. projects that are inconsistent with the goals, guidelines and criteria established by the call for proposals
- d. projects submitted after the deadline (the date on which the e-mail is sent is considered authoritative)

During this initial phase, **Ager** reserves the right to contact the applicants in order to gain additional information useful for assessing eligibility. Projects that do not get past the selection phase will receive a written notification through the project leader.

Only projects that make it past the aforesaid selection process will go on to an evaluation of their merit.

At the conclusion of the entire selection and evaluation process, the list of projects funded will be available at www.progettoager.it. The outcome of the evaluation will in any case be communicated to the applicants by written notice to the project leader.

5.3 - Institutions Eligible for Foundations Grant

Based on the Foundations' own by-laws and internal regulations, grants, disbursements or subsidies of any kind may not be given - directly or indirectly - to for-profit institutions or companies of any kind, with the exception of cooperatives operating in the entertainment, information and leisure industry, social enterprises and social cooperatives.

From time to time, the goals pursued and the activities carried out by the institutions that received grants will be reviewed; for this purpose, articles of association and balance sheets are reviewed, and the Foundation may request or acquire additional documents or information.

The absence of a for-profit orientation must be shown by the presence in the articles of association of a regulation that, on the whole:

- a. prohibits the direct or indirect distribution of profits, operating surpluses, funds and reserves to members of the board, partners, participants, workers or associates;
- b. provides for profits and operating surpluses to be allocated to statutory activities or to increasing equity;
- c. calls for any assets resulting from liquidation to be used for purposes of public utility or to go to other not-for-profit organisations.

The following are in any case excluded from receiving a grant from the Foundation:

- institutions and organisations not formally established with a duly recorded instrument
- political parties
- union or employer organisations
- industry associations
- those subjects engaging in political propaganda, directly or indirectly, to influence the legislative procedure and election campaigns
- those subjects seeking to limit the freedom and dignity of citizens or to promote any form of discrimination
- natural persons.

Grants for projects which, although submitted by institutions formally eligible based on the preceding criteria, are found to be attributable to non-fundable subjects cannot be granted and, if approved, cannot be disbursed.

5.4 - Foundations' Operating Area

The area in which the **Ager** member Foundations operate encompasses the following provinces and regions:

Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Bolzano: provincia di Bolzano

Fondazione Cariplo: regione Lombardia e province di Novara e del Verbano-Cusio-Ossola

Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Cuneo: regione Piemonte

Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Modena: provincia di Modena

Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Padova e Rovigo: province di Padova e Rovigo

Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Parma: provincia di Parma

Fondazione Banco di Sardegna: regione Sardegna

Fondazione con il Sud: Basilicata, Calabria, Campania, Puglia, Sardegna e Sicilia

Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Teramo: provincia di Teramo

Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Udine e Pordenone: province di Udine e Pordenone

For purposes of meeting the geographic constraint, the institution's operating headquarters or registered office will be considered indifferently. In the event of doubt, it is recommended that you contact **Ager's** offices (tel +39.02.6239214, simonapinnavaia@fondazionecariplo.it) to be certain.

Details provided will be processed as specified in Italian law n°. 196 of 30 June 2003, the "personal data protection code"