Aboca

1. Introduction

Aboca started its activity as an organic farm in 1978 from a vision of the founder, Valentino Mercati, matching innovation and medical herbs. In the beginning, the original idea was to provide pharmacies and herbalist shops with dry medical herbs. The following innovative steps consist of building up laboratories for research and analyses of active principles in plants for medical interest, and to produce natural pharmaceutical products authorized in 1984 as "Officina farmaceutica". Between the 1980’s and 1990’s, the distribution towards pharmacies expanded and in 2001 a phytochemical research laboratory was established. Today Aboca holds 1,500 ha of which 800 in Tiber valley and 700 in Valdichiana where 70 different plant species are cultivated following the organic farming methodology.
This story can be inspiring for other entrepreneurs, as Aboca started as a small family farm in the 1970’s and now is a leading organic farm for the medical plants in Europe. The idea is a possibil to establish a medical plant district.

2. Promoter profile

First Name
Valentino Mercati

Last Name
Mercati

Birth Year
1939

Gender
Male

Education

University degree

3. Farm Profile

Address
Loc. Aboca, 20 52037 Sansepolcro

Country
Italy

Farm area in hectar
1500.00

Date of establishment of the farm
2078

Date since when the promoter owns/rents the farm
Sat, 01/01/2078 - 12:00

NUMBER OF WORKERS	**FAMILY MEMBERS**	**EXTERNAL WORKERS**
Full time	890	4
Part time	100	0

Farm description

The farm consists of 1,500 ha of organic cultivations of medical plants, distributed between two main bodies, Umbria and Tuscany, one in the Northern Tiber Valley and the other in Valdichiana. The original farm location was on a hill rich with spring waters, where Aboca's headquarters are still located dominating the Tiber valley below. Because of the quick development depending of the successful business many hectares of land were added in the valley, where tobacco was traditionally cultivated as monoproduction. The multiplication of medical interest species cultivation increased the biodiversity also with great advantage for the environment thanks to organic cultivations without the use of synthetic chemicals. At the same time, there was a critical point due to chemicals distributed by conventional farming in areas of proximity to Aboca's organic cultivations with risks of spraying of drift contamination. For this reason it was necessary to invest in Valdichiana with a lower impact

of intensive conventional culltivations. More recently the branch of the farm company has started swine (black swine race from Nebrodi) and bovine (Chianina race) breeding to provide company restaurant and canteens with organic meat. A restoration and reuse of old farms project , called "leopoldine", is undergoing a feasibility study in the land properties. Another recent project consists of foresting a State area in the Sansepolcro surroundings in collaboration with the Union of Municipalities to compensate for the gaseous emissions of the company car fleet.

Website and social network links

Website

4. Multifunctional/sustainable farming and European Agricultural Landscapes (EAL)

Multifunctional & sustainable farming Key Words

Biodiversity
Quality/Organic/Certified production

Free Text

Innovation is the key word for company vision combined with nature and organic farming. The hill and plain cultivations increased the local biodiversity experimenting with about 70 species and their adapted varieties offering the best ratio between active phytotherapeutic principles and environmental adaptation. The organic farming methodology, without the use of synthetic chemicals and GMO, has decreased gas emissions in the atmosphere and water and soil pollution. The phytochemical extracts tested in advanced laboratories and processed by pharmaceutical technologies enlarge knowledge and application range of medical plants for pharmacological purposes. The ongoing tree plantation contributes to CO2 reduction and provides natural compounds from roots adding their available phytochemical active principles to those from medical herbs. This dynamic natural context and agricultural landscape is the engine of a responsible and sustainable ecosystem combined with innovative organic farming production. The motivation, that also a small farm can become one day important in a world market, is a real case study of great importance: small farmers could follow this wave and do practical changes to protect the environment and find a new way to make farming rentable with maintaining a sustainable environment, since agricultural landscape cannot be maintained without affordability.

Advice/Recommendation

- Nature has it all, we simply have to find it, combine it in the right way, process it and preserve it by applying all the knowledge of the past and present. It is beneficial for the balance between man and nature.

• Natural substances for health are important as a technological advancement respecting man and the environment aiming for a cleaner and more protected nature.

• The planet and the future generations are in the hands of governments that should state the reduction of dangerous gas emissions and stop the use of fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy sources.

• Landscape maintenance is to be taken into account as an historical heritage, to be protected as well as a dynamic implementation of land suitable cultivations contributing to health and environment issues.

5. Considerations, skills/competences involved and queries/questions

General considerations

Training is essential for the innovative organic farming based company. The presence of about 70 cultivated species and a research based on such a large biodiversity have to meet a large range of competences from the field to the labs, up to processing, communication, marketing, and commercialization. This complexity brings to different kinds of training needs depending on work and relevant competences. Each person is a part of a certificated quality scheme, whatever is the process sector in which s/he is involved, from the field to the final medical product. Organic farming was the starting point for the vision and way of production for Aboca and it still provides all medical plants for extraction of active principles and ongoing research in the laboratories. People involved in organic farming cultivations are i) agronomists, with different agronomic and phytoiatric skills, ii) farmers trained for all kinds of practices as land tillage, fertilization, planting and transplanting, control of pests, cryptogames and weeds, field maintenance, harvesting, transport of products from the field to the factories, iii) workers and technicians involved in the processing phases, iv) biologists, chemical analysists and geneticists in charge of evaluating, controlling, and designing the processing planning from the field to the final products, v) central administrative and executive officers coordinating company work and actions. Communication, commercialization and marketing complete the range of needed competences. Out of the farm company there is a commercial organization based on a distribution network in the main developed markets all over the world.

Strengths	Weaknesses