



**European Union**  
European Regional Development Fund

  
**URBACT**  
Driving change for  
better cities

# EDUCATIONAL FARMS

Best practice for Agri-Urban project



Photo: Alimos



Comune di Cesena

## AUTHORS

Eva Merloni, ULG coordinator of the Agri-Urban project  
eva.merloni@gmail.com

Elena Giovannini, Service for Strategic Planning, Integrated,  
National and European Projects of the Municipality of Cesena  
giovannini\_e@comune.cesena.fc.it

Annalisa Brighi, Project Manager, Alimos soc. coop.  
brighi@alimos.it

## MORE INFO

**General Secretary Staff - Departement for Coodination,  
Control and Strategic Projects - Service for Strategic  
Planning, Integrated, National and European Projects**

Piazza del Popolo 10 - Cesena 47521

Tel. +39 0547356392

E-mail: giovannini\_e@comune.cesena.fc.it

Website:

<http://urbact.eu/agri-urban>

<http://www.comune.cesena.fc.it/progettieuropi/agriurban>



This case study has been written for the URBACT III action planning network AGRI-URBAN.

**The case study documents the Educational Farms as a good example of an enterprise with multi-functionality, that represent an opportunity for increasing business autonomy and profitability while combining income from agricultural production with environmental and social functions.**

The Educational Farm is a system that promotes sustainable development giving central stage to the environment of which the farm business is part.

The Cesena AGRI-URBAN project team would like to extend its thanks to everyone involved in Educational Farms for their cooperation, support and feedback throughout the writing process. In particular, would like to thank Alimos, a cooperative leader of Educational Farms Network in Cesena that implements projects concerning agriculture, food, environment, sustainability, boosting short food value chain to bridge the gap between producers and consumers.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION_____	p.06
1.1 THE EVOLUTION OF THE AGRI-FOOD SECTOR	
2. EDUCATIONAL FARMS_____	p.08
3. GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FARMS IN CESENA_____	p.11
3.1 SOME DATA: THE PRESENCE OF VISITORS IN EDUCATIONAL FARMS	
4. DISCOVER THE COUNTRYSIDE WITH THE EDUCATIONAL FARMS_____	p.15
5. CONCLUSION_____	p.17



Educational Farms represent one of the possible choices that farmers have when moving away from the single idea of agricultural production and adopting an innovative way to “cope with the negative aspects of productivity, or the agro-industrial paradigm”.

*Henke and Salvioni, 2008*



*Photo: Ortiamo*

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 THE EVOLUTION OF AGRI-FOOD SECTOR

One hundred years ago 98% of the Italian GDP came from agriculture: agriculture was the most important and productive economical sector in the country. All the citizens, adults and children, were able in this context to live or to be in direct contact with the rural world.

In the last 50 years the agroindustrial and food system experienced a really unique revolution: products moved from generic to brand-name ones; the supply, once more limited got richer and richer in differentiated food products and the distribution system evolved profoundly driving away consumers from food production places.

The agricultural land got more and more reduced in favor of the growth of urban center and connected infrastructures. Although a greater availability of food products, there has been a loss in terms of value of food, desire to cook, and also contact and knowledge of agriculture and rural world.

Television broadcasts about cooking multiply but prepared food occupy more space on the supermarket shelves.

From the industrial revolution on, people stepped away from agriculture world perceived as a world of effort, where one gets dirty, and feeding became more and more a moment disengaged from productive world and from our body's needs.

For years the only way to know the agricultural world was the recall to the old farm, the one stigmatized on the books for children or in the songs for the little ones.

Moreover, for a long time, food education has been synonym of nutritional education, focused on the food nutritional principles with the aim to give the scientific knowledge to find a perfect healthy and balanced diet, thanks to food pyramid, caloric counts and the number of meals during the day.

Nowadays it appears clearer and more evident to everybody that **food has not the unique function to feed us, but it affects the deeper part of our being, fulfilling needs of different nature**, like satisfying taste and correspond to ethical, cultural and emotional expectations that each one entrust with feeding.

All of those features are involved in the Educational Farm, a specific kind of farm, that welcomes groups from schools, families and adults, where they have the opportunity to learn about farming, food cycle, animal and vegetable life, rural crafts and the social role played by farmers while learning sustainable consumption principles and protection of the environment.

In fact, in addition to supplying products, Educational Farms ensure a number of other benefits and environmental services such as management of the landscape, biodiversity, as well as social benefits such as the maintenance of rural societies, traditions and the offering of safety and wholesomeness of healthy and fresh food (Gaudio and Trunzo, 2009). Indeed, educational farming performs activities linked both to the third sector, delivering services to individuals and society at large, while remaining anchored to the agricultural sector.

Therefore, **Educational Farms are a good example of enterprises with multi-functionality**, as defined by the *Organisation for Economic Co-Operation And Development*.

This kind of multi-functionality may represent a strategy for increasing the autonomy and profitability of businesses, **a way to combine income from agricultural production with that from environmental and social functions** and a system leading to the involvement of the environment of which the farm business is part, as well as promoting sustainable development (Marsden and Sonnino, 2008).



The Educational Farm involves both aware and not-aware consumers, satisfying the requirements of the first ones and the knowledge needs of the second ones.

## 2. EDUCATIONAL FARMS

We could define an Educational Farm as an **active pedagogy place, where people can have a firsthand experience of the richness and diversity of agriculture**, its products, its landscapes, its acquaintances and its love for the land.

Educational Farms are really agricultural farms, where the work of farmers and the food production occur. However together with the normal productive activities the farmers make available part of their time to welcome young people and adults, giving them the chance to have a direct experience of all the aspects linked with rural activities: from the productive part to the social and cultural role of the farm.

Moreover, Educational Farms:

**1.** satisfy the criteria of environmental compatibility, characterized by systems of biological or integrated production or local quality production;

**2.** are cozy location, providing a covered and heated welcome place for the realization of didactic activities in every period of the year;

**3.** are equipped with the essential furnishing to carry out different activities, such as sanitary facilities for the hosts;

**4.** develop an adequate training program, prearranging active didactic paths focused on environment, food, taste and rurality oriented education workshops, according to the age of users;

**5.** calibrate the educational project on the potential of the farm, with a balance between socio-cultural promotion and necessity of income support;

**6.** ensure safety features with respect for actual sanitary and safety regulations, indicating access limitations or warnings where mandatory and a civil liability insurance which includes the risks of food intoxication;





7. owns a proper promotion and marketing plan, highlighting the features of the farm, the proposed programs and the skills of the operators engaged in the activities.

All the proposed initiatives are designed for people of every age and they are specially programmed with the intention to make visible and comprehensible the synergies among all the aspects that characterize the agricultural work.

During a visit to the Educational Farm, becomes clear how every action has strength and interacts with farm activities putting the accent on the systemic view that characterize the rural world. Visits and courses are performed primarily with a clear didactic objectives.

The whole learning process is tailored and centered to the host that is flanked by two figures with different roles: the teacher has the role of methodological guide inside the didactic process and the farmer that stands as a friendly guide

who knows the secrets of the country and teaches kids practical activities.

**The farm becomes then an astounding ground of active learning.** Kids, but also adults, participate directly to the agricultural activities and can realize their knowledge on the field. Kids learn more about the natural and cultural context where the farm is set, while adults improve their ability of agricultural work. The first ones acquire awareness of how the farmer is part of the environment, the second ones discover local production and breeding systems, with a particular regard to environmental friendly agriculture. Both of them experience a deep understanding of the nature cycles and the relations among different environmental components.



The educational paths transfer in a more efficient way “sensations”, “emotions” and concepts that generally are the basis of hospitality and of our cultural intangible heritage.



### 3. GENESIS AND DEVELOPMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FARMS IN CESENA

The agricultural farms in the Municipality of Cesena are 1.682 (Agricultural notebook of the Chamber of commerce of Forlì-Cesena, year 2016), with 4.455 persons working on them. In that context **Alimos** developed several supporting services for the agri-food farms through the implementation of projects concerning agriculture, food, environment, sustainability and the sustain for the short circuits that strictly link producers and consumers. Since 1996, they organized the **first permanent group of Educational Farms** thanks to the collaboration of farmers who organized themselves into a specific local network in the Emilia-Romagna Region throughout the project "At school in the ecological farm".

The object of the project has been to create a direct contact between the agricultural sector and schools and to disseminate the job of farmer as a guardian of the environmental and cultural wealth of the territory and producer of quality foodstuffs. Understanding farm dynamics during an entire day in the countryside becomes an important moment to get acquainted with the environment close to the school and comprehend the existing relations among productive systems, food consumption and environmental safeguard.

To join this network the farmers have to subscribe the paper of quality requirements of Educational Farms of the Emilia-Romagna Region that collects the features that have to be respected regarding safety, hygiene and training in order to offer a high-quality service to the schools.

Thanks to the strict cooperation with the local farms, the knowledge of farmers's needs and the sharing of the objectives with the farms and the Municipality of Cesena, several projects and activities have been implemented. Nowadays there are more than 2.600 accredited Educational Farms in Italy, spread all over the territory.

The Educational Farms in Emilia Romagna are 429. Of them, 287 regularly propose activities. (Source: Emilia Romagna Region, March 2018).

The Educational Farms network of the province of Forlì-Cesena is composed by **28 Educational Farms, with an average of 13.400 visitors per year. Six of them are located in the Municipality of Cesena.**

These farms are located in a homogenous way all over the municipal territory from the plane to the hills. The majority of them can be reached on foot, by bus or by cycle thanks to the rich networks of cycle paths on the territory. They address particularly the target of nursery and primary school, but many of them offer specific courses for school of higher levels and adults. Five out of six farms act biological production. Note: On a range of 1.682 farms, actually **in the Municipality of Cesena there are 152 farms who lead the production by biological agriculture method** (source: *Regional list of biological operators in the ER-Agricoltura site*).

The hosts of Educational Farms are asked to book the visit directly with the chosen farm, arranging data, timetables and activities.

The cost of the activity is fixed and it is the same for all the Educational Farms of the network.

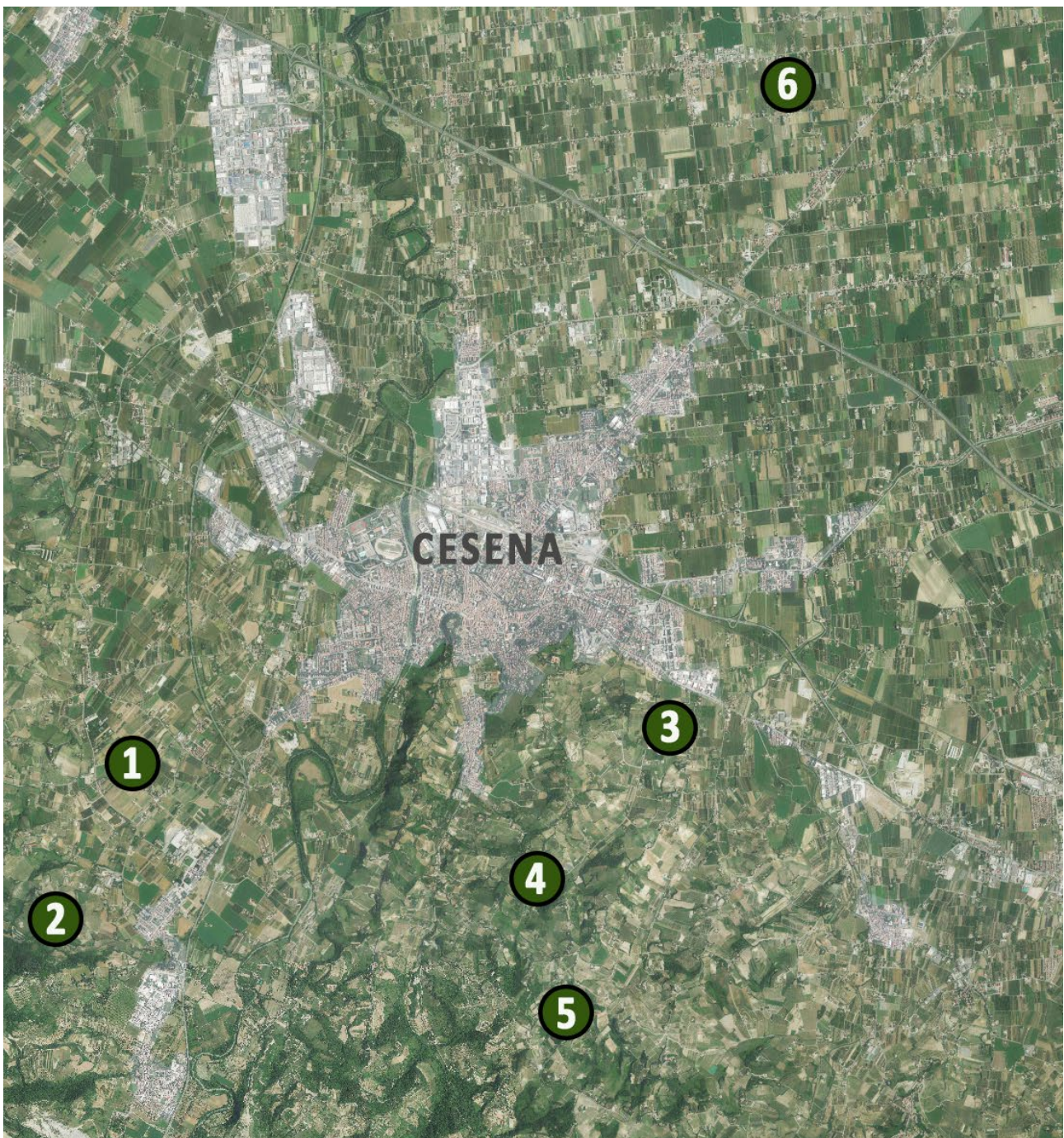
Visiting and staying can be done in every period of the year, while the type of educational courses vary depending on the season and, in case of bad weather, the activities will be held indoor. Some farms provide, by reservation, lunches, dinners and snacks with their products.

When it is time to leave, hosts are invited to fill in the control form of the experience spent in the farm.

The educational farms of Cesena are regulated by *Regional Law 31 March 2009 n. 4 "Framework of rural tourism and multi-functionality of agricultural farms"* that defines the educational farm, its didactic offer, its requirements, controls and penalties.

## EDUCATIONAL FARM IN THE MUNICIPALITY OF CESENA

---



### Legend

---

1. Educational Farm Il campo dei fiori - San Vittore, Cesena
2. Educational Farm La collina del sole - San Vittore, Cesena
3. Educational Farm Terre Giunchi - Rio Marano, Cesena
4. Educational Farm La quiete del rio - Rio Marano, Cesena
5. Educational Farm Castrum Sagliani - Saiano, Cesena
6. Educational Farm Centuria del Rio - San Giorgio, Cesena

### 3.1 SAME DATA: THE PRESENCE OF VISITORS IN EDUCATIONAL FARMS

From 1996 to today it was recorded a huge increase of visits in the farms of Forlì-Cesena (from 43 to 756 classes/groups per farm). Through the processing of the registration cards of the visiting classes provided by farms, it is possible to outline the main features of educational hospitality in farm.

Last academic year **about 16.000 people**, including the participants into summer camps, **were involved**. The most meaningful fact of latest years is the rise of summer schools, which stand at fourth place after primary and nurse schools and groups of adults. Most of the classes and groups chose the half day, followed by the full day and attend the courses during the months of April, May, June and July.

The classes come mostly from the Province of Forlì-Cesena, but significant is the catchment from other provinces of Emilia-Romagna and close regions.

The class visit in farm, although limited in time to a half day or full day, it comes out to be related for 90% to an educational project that results to be in the field of environmental, food education and/or related to other issues such as historical-traditional ambit, sciences and cooking. The courses realized in farm have got the chance, thus, to be resumed and developed at school. From the processing of control forms it merges a judgment clearly positive on the days in farm (from good to excellent), both from the hospitality point of view and the educational point of view (contents, expertise and professionalism), stating the will to replicate the experience of the day in farm also in the next years. Only a minority stated to not replicate the experience because the class has already gone to the farms several times during the years.

Educational Farms evaluate the activity positively, judging it compliant with the agricultural activity. Almost all are engaged in improvement projects, some for the hospitality structures, some for the safety and several declare that the income has been proportional to the sustained commitment. They are involved from 1 to 5 operators, related to the number of present kids/people (they can be hosted from 15 to 100 kids); on the average 3 operators are employed for the courses/labs.

These data indicate that the work done for a greater qualification and diversification of didactic proposals and the widening of farm catchment continues to give good results, but it is mandatory to foresee every year a massive direct promotion work both in the schools and towards organized users of adults, made by the public entity and from Educational Farms.



The multifunctionality respects the identity of the farm: the respect of natural rhythms and farm vocation becomes essential in the realization of the various didactic activities.

## 4. DISCOVER THE COUNTRYSIDE WITH THE EDUCATIONAL FARMS

The Educational Farms represent an important asset in Cesena territory responding to the view of **developing and strengthening the agri-food sector, giving to school and families the chance to bring children near to agriculture**, to let them experience territory, tastes, traditions, ancient jobs, rhythm of nature and to acquire concepts of responsibility and taking care other living being, such as a goat or a calf. We are dealing with real agricultural farms, each one with its peculiarity and specialisation.

The project was born revealing from the beginning the social value of these farms, able to talk about feeding and consumption awareness. The agricultural operators of Educational Farms are expert of the agricultural sector that, through a serious training work, acquire the capabilities and the expertise also in educational field, with the objective to widen their profession beyond the boundaries of productive sector, providing a great informational and social support to the community. As already mentioned the Educational Farms have to own essential quality requirements to satisfy the user and ensure successful results of the visits. For this reason the Educational Farms are eco-friendly, cozy, fully equipped, educative and safe.

**The Educational Farm plays a fundamental role in the development and reinforcement of agri-food sector thanks to the direct contact between producer and consumer**, considering that the farmers themselves welcome, form and educate the consumers about the life cycle of a product (from the field to the table), the seasonality of products, the care of bred animals, the rural territory, the culture and the local tradition.

An economical development in touch with environment requires a solid alliance among agricultural producers, citizens and consumers. Regarding this the Educational Farms help those consumers who set social target into appropriating the capacity – free and not conditioned – to

choose the products that must be actuated on the basis of criteria related not only to commodity quality and price, but also to the evaluation of the politics accomplished by the farms in terms of social environmental impact.

Several farms give the chance to direct buying into their points of sale. The short supply chain is warranty of quality, of hygienic-sanitary healthiness for the consumer, it is occasion of saving, consuming seasonal products, fruit of history, keeping in contact with passion and professionalism of the farmers.

Buying products coming from small local producers gives the chance to know them directly, understand production methods and last but not least reduce pollution and the waste of energy deriving from transportation. In various Educational Farms are also proposed botanic and olfactory courses to discover different natural essences and spontaneous herbs, guided tastings of healthy products, labs to the discovery of old races and autochthonous varieties, biodance, sensory education, etc...

In the Educational Farms is usual to organize sensory labs for the taste education and realize cooking courses. This represent a tool to learn and save during the years the extraordinary gastronomical heritage of peasantry. Moreover the Educational Farm is a place of rediscovery of rural and enogastronomical traditions, of country mastery and memory.

Finally, Educational Farms are places of carry out real experiences of life and work in the countryside. They represent an opportunity for those seeking healthy and quiet settings, a chance to know the local gastronomy, to taste and buy typical agri-food products, and to and experiment the work of the farmer, the social and economical value of this job, often underestimated and little appreciated.

In the Educational Farm concept, the economic prosperity is complementary to environmental sustainability.





## 5. CONCLUSIONS

Educational Farms express a variety of aims mainly focusing on the following dimensions:

**1. Ecologic dimension.** In order to improve the life quality of local communities, it is important to implement within the territory sustainable practices such as organic production, water management, regenerative farming, conservative practices etc. Recovering, protecting and using agro-biodiversity is essential for the well-being of all: it is good for the planet, good to improve people's diet and good for the local economy.

**2. Economic dimension.** Small and midsize family farms—historically the backbone of rural economies in Italy—have been disappearing for almost two decades, replaced by large, industrialized farms. When they disappear, many jobs evaporate with them. The rural communities are at continued risk as the loss of jobs and business opportunities represented by midsize farms continues. Therefore, create a “new food economy” of small farmers and food producers ensure and

strengthen the local economic development.

**3. Social dimension.** It is important to train peasant communities on social benefits such as the maintenance of rural societies, traditions, the safety and wholesomeness of food but also to strengthen the sense of local community, involving isolated and disadvantaged groups. In this matter, sustainable living networks and movements can make a significant contribution.

**4. Worldview dimension.** Deep respect for the peasant communities, their beliefs, ethos and worldview is essential in order to develop valuable and successful community work with them, supporting peoples' celebrations, festivals and traditions is a way to encourage high self-esteem, and foster leadership qualities in general.

In conclusion, the experience of educational farms, being mainly prized for their work as providers of educational services, must be analyzed as a system which is more complex than it



might have been originally. Since the growth of Educational Farms could provide many benefits to communities, it's in the public interest to help farmers get over all the barriers. To do this, it is recommended that future food and agriculture policies incorporate and emphasize the following actions:

**a) Financial incentives** to help beginning and transitioning farm to a more multi-functional one;

**b) Research and technical assistance** to help farmers adopt diversified farming systems;

**c) Investments** in infrastructure and coordination to get healthy food from farm to fork.

**d) A comprehensive national food and farm policy** that incorporates the above recommendations.

Educational Farms allow citizens to discover rural lifestyle in a conscious and participated way.

Participate to home-made pasta lessons, learn how to dig in the orchard or take care of a small

puppies are all different kind of activities that can be experienced during a visit in the Educational Farm. They offer valuable and remarkable rural experiences allowing consumers to understand how food is processed, improving their consciousness of healthy lifestyle and impact of their consumption habits.

Through a learning by doing approach children will learn and experiment new activities in a fun and adventurous way.

The outdoor educational experience has an extreme powerful effect not only on children's intellectual development but also on social and physical aspects. The Educational Farms learning activity is crucial to boost attention and sensitivity to the environment, promote healthy life style and correct use of natural resources. Educational Farms represents a bottom up example of return to land and savour the slow down of rhythm, characteristic of the country side, through a hands-on and interactive approach where farmers tell their stories and nature discloses its secrets.



