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Cultivation and promotion of conservation varieties

The farmer gradually developed an identity and active role in historic agriculture. He became an organic maintainer of conservation varieties, cultivating them and supplying special small-scale bakery businesses. Thus, local organic food chains were sustainably strengthened.

Becoming a maintainer of conservation varieties

The identity of and active role as the maintainer of conservation varieties grew gradually as the farmer was guided by his interests in local agricultural history. Like other maintainers, he also respected the labour and achievements of previous generations, in the spirit of sustainable development. When the farmer got an invitation through his networks to let his farm's historic rye to be tested at Finnish Food Authority against today's commercial varieties, he did not expect much. However, the landrace rye proved to be a conservation variety, different from all other ryes according to official testing, in terms of morphology and plant development. The farmer named the rye according to his grandfather and became the official maintainer of the denominated rye, with the obligation to have seed stored at all times for two hectares' sowing. He then was introduced to a conservation variety of barley without an active maintainer; the variety stemmed from a nearby village giving the plant its local historic value in the farmer's eyes. Then came along still another historic plant; at this stage the farmer could identify himself in the role of the maintainer of conservation varieties. His aim was to benefit those who want to cultivate, process and consume these historic plants. He saw conservation varieties as common heritage, to be shared within the society, unlike maintainers who rather keep the plants to themselves by staying outside of business networks.



Photo 1. Field of the conservation variety rye. Photo: Lauri Takala

Participation in the business development for conservation varieties

The farmer was asked about his ability to deliver to a new bakery specializing in gourmet products baked of conservation varieties. He realized that by combining maintenance of and business with these conservation varieties their contribution to biodiversity could be best achieved; local agricultural history would also become visible. He found a mill working on small lots and sold the flour to this new bakery. The developments continue as collaborative planning about the next year's demand. Obviously, for the conservation variety market to develop, considerably more collaboration by actors such as maintainers, seed producers, farmers, millers, bakers, pasta makers, brewers, and others such as liquorice manufacturers would be needed. The market actors are slowly coming together and these developments benefit consumers, who appreciate the historicity, respect for others and sustainability of food chains. Essentially, the legal status of conservation varieties supports the regionality of these businesses. The status offers a sustainable springboard for developing local organic food chains and guards the interests of fellow citizens, be they producers or consumers.



Photo 2. Landscape supporting conservation varieties.
Photo: Lauri Takala

Local promotion of conservation varieties

The farmer, as a skilled builder, restored a barn by using ancient techniques. The enhanced farm scenery yielded the idea to promote the historic agricultural plants and harvesting by organizing an event in late summer, with free participation for those interested in these developments. The farmer is committed to continue the work on this track and to give his input into increasingly sustainable food chains.

References

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