



AGRINTESA AND ALEGRA TOWARDS A NEW SUSTAINABILITY

by Cristian Moretti and Mauro Laghi

The coronavirus emergency has made the relationship between man and nature more relevant than ever, since it has symbolically and dramatically exposed the fragility of our hyper-technological societies when confronted by a microbe 600 times smaller than the diameter of a hair. While anxious about the effects of this pandemic on our health, in the first instance, and subsequently on the economy, for now we have set aside any issues relating to the sustainability of processes and products to focus on their sanitation and safety while establishing a “new normal”. But attention to sustainability is resurfacing even more forcefully among consumers, precisely as a result of the experience we are living through. The sustainability that emerges will be of a more pragmatic and less radical kind that more effectively reconciles the environmental aspects with the economic and social. This is due to the fact that, while in one sense Covid 19 has shown us how much we

need to respect nature, in another it is leading us into an economic and social situation of which we can still only hypothesise but that will, in the coming months, explode dramatically. On the one hand the severe impoverishment of large sections of the population - and not only in Italy - on the other grave social problems caused not only by the economic crisis but also by social distancing among weaker groups such as the elderly.

THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL SCENE IN CLOSE-UP

Against with this background Agrintesa and Alegria have decided to give even greater impetus to activities that they have been implementing for some time in the area of sustainability, with a programmed and targeted project to help the group guide its processes and products even more effectively in a sustainable direction. Starting with activities in the field, in the next few years the Agrintesa cooperative will be even more effective in



playing the social role that it has had for some time throughout the Romagna area, guaranteeing a future and an outlook to many families and their successors in fruit and vegetable growing by providing constant technical and marketing assistance alongside the bureaucratic and administrative aspects. Even more important, however, are the professional development opportunities that it offers to young farmers through a constant emphasis on innovation, and through the many projects offered to members that we will describe in the following pages. These activities often go unnoticed among the community at large, partly due to

a low inclination among farmers and their organisations to publicise what they do, but also due to a lack of attention among the public to the role of agriculture, often dismissing it as an energy-intensive activity that exploits the land. That is until now, when the coronavirus crisis has focused attention on the strategic role of food production and, therefore, of agricultural activities. But there is more.

FRUIT GROWING AS A BASE OF THE CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Fruit-growing, being a highly labour-intensive activity, involves a high demand



for workers at various times of the year for operations which, if suitably channelled and managed, are an important source of supplementary employment on the land. This will become even more true in future, given the impact that Covid 19 will have on many businesses in the next few years. Finally, again in the context of employment, the processing and packaging of fruit and vegetables call for a specialist labour force to run the sorting and packing machines, generating further job

opportunities. The fruit and vegetable sector, therefore, is an extraordinary social vehicle for the areas in which it continues to exist and develop. On the environmental front fruit growing is also an extraordinary guardian of the land, particularly in the fragile hillside geography of the Apennines where the evolution of fruit growing from the 1970s until today has been directly related to the maintenance of local hydrogeological conditions. In areas like the hills around Faenza and Imola, where

fruit growing has proliferated, the hills have held their own. In other areas, where agriculture has retreated to leave the land fallow, nature has gained the upper hand and led to an accentuation of badland formations. Not to mention the contribution of ultra-modern technologies deployed to reduce the use of chemicals, with integrated production techniques and the use of water from localised and underground irrigation projects. Last but not least is the economic aspect which must,

however, be dealt with from an opposite perspective to that of the previous ones. The social and environmental role of Agrintesa's agricultural activities and Alegra's commercial and service activities, which we will report analytically to international standards in a Sustainability Report currently being prepared, merit recognition to farmers of the value of their activities not only in the production of a primary good like food but also in safeguarding the land and local communities. **B**