

**Work-package group 4:** Agroforestry for arable systems  
**Specific group:** Trees for timber intercropped with cereals  
**Date of meeting:** 24 June 2014  
**Date of report:** 7 Oct 2014  
**Location of meeting:** “Casaria Farm”, Masi (Padova), Veneto Region, Italy  
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## 1. Context

The AGFORWARD research project (January 2014-December 2017), funded by the European Commission, is promoting agroforestry practices in Europe that will advance sustainable rural development. The project has four objectives:

- 1) to understand the context and extent of agroforestry in Europe,
- 2) to identify, develop and field-test innovations (through participatory research) to improve the benefits and viability of agroforestry systems in Europe,
- 3) to evaluate innovative agroforestry designs and practices at a field-, farm- and landscape scale, and
- 4) to promote the wider adoption of appropriate agroforestry systems in Europe through policy development and dissemination.

This report describes one of about 40 initial stakeholder workshops to address objective 2. Further details of the project can be found on the AGFORWARD website: [www.agforward.eu](http://www.agforward.eu)

## 2. Description of the system

The Po river region in the Veneto Region of North Eastern Italy (Figure 1) is characterised by intensive agricultural practice. Cereals are the most common cultivated crops and poplar, for timber production, is the most common cultivated tree species in the area. Agricultural intensification has caused progressive reduction of trees and a gradual loss of woody vegetation in the rural landscape (Figure 2). In this context, there is increasing awareness among farmers of the role of trees in farms due to the supporting mechanism of EU policies (particularly those related to forestry plantations for timber and biomass production).



Figure 1. Location of Veneto region in North East Italy

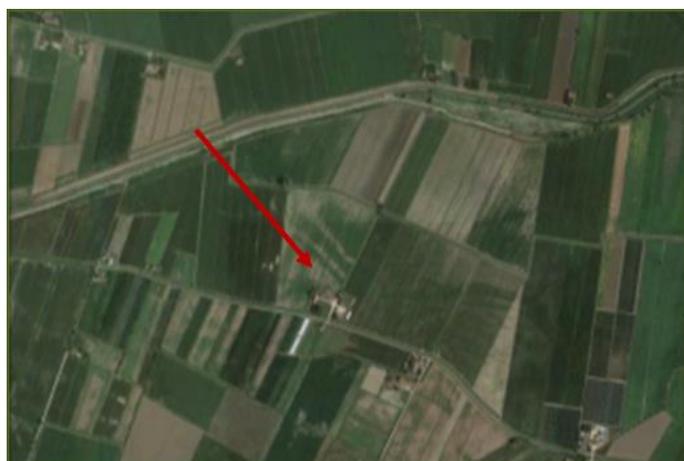


Figure 2. Ariel photo of the field site including "Casaria Farm"

The Casaria farm, in the Veneto region, covers about 65 ha wide with about 15 ha occupied by an agroforestry system established in 2013. The agroforestry system comprises of oaks and poplar intercropped with cereals. Tree species are planted along the border of the fields with a distance of about 35 m between the rows. Along these rows, poplars are planted at approximately 10 m intervals, alternated with oak (*Quercus robur*). As shown in Figure 3 only the poplars are visible over the cereals



Figures 3 and 4. Oaks (not visible) and poplars planted at the edge and across the cereal fields

### 3. Initial meeting

The meeting was organised at Casaria Farm (Figure 5) in the Po river valley of the Vento region. The land use is intensely managed agriculture often as monocultures.

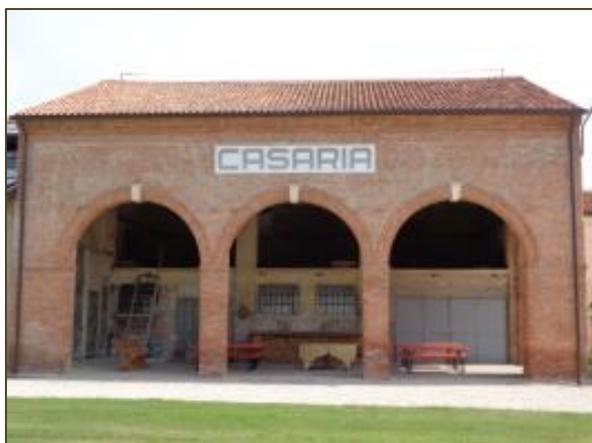


Figure 5. "Casaria Farm"



Figure 6. Some participants during the visit at the "Casaria Farm"

Although a large number of invitations were sent out, a small group of five people attended the meeting (Figure 6). These comprised two farmers, a consultant, and two extension workers.

The meeting was opened with a presentation about the AGFORWARD project and its objectives (Figure 7). Participants were then informed that the main purpose of the stakeholder group was to identify research themes and explored challenges associated with the integration of trees in arable systems. Following the introductory presentations, the specific aims of the workshop were outlined. Participants introduced themselves and revealed their experience and knowledge of agroforestry systems.



Figure 7. Illustrations of slides from the introductory session

The agenda for the meeting was:

- Presentation of the AGFORWARD Project (V. Bondesan)
- Introduction to WP4 workshop (A. Pisanelli)
- Getting to know the participants
- Description of silvoarable systems (P. Paris)
- Discussion: questions and answers
- Presentation of Italian Agroforestry Association
- Buffet

#### **4. Issues and challenges**

The farmer at Casaria Farm started the agroforestry system applying to the grants available in the former Rural Development Plan, managed by Veneto Region in Italy. Note that the farmer was one of only two farmers who submitted applications for agroforestry systems under Measure 222.

The farmer, who has just recently become the owner of the farm, introduced the agroforestry system mainly to increase the landscape value of the farm and to produce timber. He explained that he thought that the arrangement of the trees along the border of the arable fields should protect the crops from the wind during the hottest days of the summer season. The farmer is particularly satisfied with the introduction of the agroforestry system because, according to his opinion, it allows the reduction of chemical treatments on poplar crops.

The five participants, engaged in lively discussions, raised critical issues related to the complexity and difficulty in adopting agroforestry systems. These included issues such as the bureaucratic application procedures under the Rural Development Programme (RDP), subsidies and existing conflict between Rural Development Plans, and the complex mechanism underlying 'Single Farm Payments'. The lack of knowledge and technical skills of the regional authority concerning agroforestry systems were also raised.

Between 2007 and 2013, national and regional governments (depending on the country) could implement measure 222 (Establishment of new agroforestry systems), developed under Article 44 of Council Regulation No 1698/2005 which described the EU's Rural Development Policy for 2007-2013. However although implemented at a regional level, the uptake of the measure in the Veneto region was unsuccessful because the low tree planting densities would result in very low payments. Private consultants that support farmers in presenting applications to the public administration receive little incentive under Measure 222; as such consultants may get paid a fixed percentage of a successful grant application. A much more attractive option for private consultants lay in applying to measures with higher tree planting density and higher application budget (e.g. Measure 221 Reforestation of agricultural land).

## 5. Potential innovations

During the discussion participants raised the need to investigate the following research themes as potential innovation. Two potential innovations were highlighted.

- Comparison between poplar cultivation for timber production in traditional plantations and agroforestry systems: analysis of the effect of tree density on the development of pathogens and diseases affecting poplars; analysis of the stem form, pruning and wood quality;
- Evaluation of the effect of secondary species (oaks and also woody shrubs) in mixed linear plantations: analysis of the tree growth of the main species aimed to produce timber.

A key aspect of the promotion of innovations is the development of user groups, and hence at the end of the meeting the new Italian Agroforestry Association ([www.agroforestry.it](http://www.agroforestry.it)) was introduced.



Figure 8. Slide of the presentation of Italian Agroforestry Association ([www.agroforestry.it](http://www.agroforestry.it))

## 6. Acknowledgement

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