

# AGRIBOLOGNA

## *General description of the SME*

Agribologna is an association of agricultural cooperatives that operates in the vegetable production sector. Agribologna aims to enhance the yield and quality of the harvested products of the affiliated companies. The main activity of Agribologna is to coordinate the production of vegetables in the north-east of Italy. In 2014, the association has launched innovative production of different varieties of tomato within a high-tech generation greenhouse utilising soilless growing systems that utilises energy from a nearby biomass power plant. The association has a key role in northern Italy in managing the different realities of farmers in order to help its associates to choose the methods of cultivation, the vegetable varieties and technologies to use year by year. Agribologna holds an important strategic role in the Italian national market for its investments in technological and agronomical innovation, such as the construction of the high-tech greenhouses, the adoption of soilless technologies and the implementation of energy efficient cultivation units.

## *Description of productive activities*

The activity of the consortium covers principally vegetable production in different aspects: initially supports to the associated farmers for the selection of horticultural varieties, identification of optimal farming practices and scaling of agricultural tools and equipment. In addition, AgriBologna informs and supports investments for the renewal of tractors and agricultural machinery through a dedicated office. Finally, it coordinates the collection and sale of crops, selling directly to supermarkets and small boutiques in different cities of Emilia Romagna and northern Italy. AgriBologna in its different productive steps aims to lead the interest of his partners increasing the competitiveness of agricultural enterprises promoting agricultural, technological, organisational and commercial innovation: to do so, AgriBologna organises training and dissemination events for farmer associates and the civil society. AgriBologna also provides technical assistance and follow-up to the farmers' seasonal activities, as well as the support in the management and promotion of members, boosting their presence in the national markets. Finally the association promotes

innovative tools for specialisation of products and processes in market segments where there is the possibility to consolidate the vegetable crop production and processing industry.

A technological peculiarity of AgriBologna is the new ecological greenhouses sponsored by members of the consortium and strongly supported by the municipality and the territory of Budrio, nearby Bologna. The greenhouse has a surface of 10,000 square meters, and uses soilless vegetable production systems. It uses the energy produced by biodigestion processes as heat, making it a centre that combines sustainability and cooperation. Actually the greenhouse is mainly dedicated to the production of tomatoes.

### *Location and environmental factors*

AgriBologna consortium is constituted by 135 members, cultivating an area of about 2,750 hectares. Each member has an average of 20 Ha, a situation that well-characterises a type of medium-large companies with high rate of specialisation. More than one third of the land of members is used for growing fruits (19%) and vegetables (81%). The territory in which the affiliated companies are distributed, ranges from Bologna, the capital of Emilia Romagna, also including small portions in the province of Ravenna, Rimini, Modena, Mantova, Rovigo and Venice. Other members are located in central/southern Italy in the provinces of Viterbo, Latina, Bari and Agrigento.

The new greenhouses inaugurated in 2014 are placed in the countryside of Budrio, a city of 18,000 inhabitants, 16 Km from Bologna. The greenhouses utilise the residual heat of the biodigestion processes within the combustion centre otherwise dispersed.



**Figure 2:** The new greenhouses of the cooperative AgriBologna in via Cantapoiana, Budrio (Bologna, Italy) and close to the plant biomass combustion centre. The greenhouses are located 5 Km from the town of Budrio and 16 Km from Bologna. Photo: Google Earth



**Figure 3:** Agribologna greenhouses with soilless system growing for tomato. Photo: AgriBologna.

*Markets and marketing*

**BUSINESS MODEL CANVAS**

<p><b>Key participants:</b></p> <p>Farmers that are producer of fruit and vegetable in the Region Emilia Romagna and north area of Italy, associated with the cooperative Agribologna.</p>	<p><b>Key activities:</b></p> <p>Production and selling of vegetable. Supporting activities for the associates</p>	<p><b>Value proposition:</b></p> <p>Construction of high technologies and methods for vegetable production.</p>	<p><b>Customer relations:</b></p> <p>formal, contract based</p>	<p><b>Market segments:</b></p> <p>Customers are the final consumers in Regional and National markets</p>
<p><b>Key resources:</b></p> <p>Sale of high quality vegetable and fruits.</p>	<p><b>Marketing channels:</b></p> <p>Direct sales, wholesale, retail</p>			
<p><b>Cost categories:</b></p> <p>Hi-tech greenhouses, research and developments of performing of agronomic techniques, investments for new tools for cooperative associated, long-term investments.</p>		<p><b>Revenue sources</b></p> <p>Sale of agricultural products, earnings from energy savings by adopting innovative technologies</p>		

*Key participants:*

The members of the consortium are different companies of vegetable and fruit production within the territory of Bologna and other north Italian provinces. The members organise and control the entire production process: on the basis the production program, members are guided from AgriBologna in all cultivation practices but also in the post-harvest and selling stages.

*Key activities:*

AgriBologna core business is the production of vegetables and fruits. AgriBologna aims to increase yield and quality of the products utilising sustainable practices such as agricultural tools with low environmental impact, high productive efficiency of production chain and efficient energy consumption greenhouses. In addition, AgriBologna wish to ensure at its customers high standard of quality and food safety also promoting the utilisation of local vegetables and fruits.

*Key resources:*

The key resource derives principally by the sale of vegetable and fruits in the region. In addition, resources derive also from the production in other provinces of north Italy. The production of vegetable and fruits derive from the association of the 130 specialised producers. AgriBologna help associates to enable investments in the development of agricultural production gaining by the partners a revenue equal to the annual membership fee.

*Value proposition:*

AgriBologna aims to raise the quality of local production by implementing innovations such as the new ecological soilless greenhouses for the production of different varieties of tomato, as well as short food supply promoting the quality of the local production.

*Market segment:*

The customers are the final consumer, industrial partners and catering market for the consumption of fruit and vegetable in the territory of Bologna.

*Marketing channels:*

Through the wholesale in the CAAB (Consortium of Agro-Food of Bologna) the distribution is both wholesale and retail in the local markets.

## *Conclusions*

- The main success factors of AgriBologna are the cooperative action and the diffusion of technological innovations in order to increase the quality of vegetable production.
- The environmental sustainable greenhouses are an example of technological advancement in the agri-food sector promoted by AgriBologna.
- The main limitations and challenge for AgriBologna, concern the associate economic difficulties due to the economic crises of the last decade. AgriBologna is trying to lead the agronomical production in a way of sustainability/viability of association initiative (financial, ecological, social, and institutional).
- These kinds of associative initiatives of entrepreneurs and farms are widespread in the Bologna area. Agribologna can be an example of the improved quality of the product offered by the local media and ideas of small-medium producers as otherwise there could be difficulties in covering the entire production chain.

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