



Forest genetic resources conservation in practice: Lessons from the Italian “Veneto pilot”

The FORGENIUS pilot in Veneto introduced a new measure (SRA31) within the Rural Development Programme (RDP) to support the conservation and sustainable use of forest genetic resources (FGR). This initiative, which was based on *Quercus robur*, combined scientific research with policy design, leading to the first Italian RDP measure dedicated to FGR. A final stakeholder conference showed the importance for national coordination to replicate and scale up these efforts. This brief outlines lessons learnt and provides guidelines for policymakers and practitioners to scale them up at European level.

Forest genetic resources are critical for resilient forests and climate adaptation; however, they remain a low priority in Italian forestry policy. The Veneto pilot aimed to (1) include FGR into regional funding schemes and (2) promote knowledge exchange through a European-level conference. The Italian measure SRA31 (Support for the conservation, use and sustainable development of forest genetic resources) now supports both in situ and ex situ conservation, marking a significant step forward.

Lessons learnt

- **Research-driven policy:** Genetic studies could contribute to the design of SRA31 and provide scientifically sound solutions.
- **Language simplification:** Calls with clear, plain language assist the beneficiaries and remove bureaucratic barriers.
- **Stakeholder engagement:** Contacting seed source owners directly increased their participation.
- **Scalability requires coordination:** Regional funding is often fragmented and limits the potential impact; it is important that countries develop national strategies.
- **Inspiration by successful models of other countries:** Spain made possible the characterization of 228 Genetic Conservation Units nationally by using centralized funding, dedicated staff, and formal researcher-policy links.



Photo by Roberto Fiorentin

The pilot site: a 24 years old plantation (approx. 8 ha), from 2025 regional seed collection site for English oak, hornbeam and maple, included in a private organic farm property, Vicenza province NE Italy.

Guidelines for scalability

1. Develop a national strategy for FGR and establish a centralized budget line for FGR conservation and breeding programs.
2. Create a national coordination committee that includes the central government, regional authorities, and research institutions.
3. Formalize research-policy links by signing cooperation agreements between policymakers and geneticists for continuous advice.
4. Ensure committed expertise by assigning competent staff to FGR funding measures and technical support.
5. Promote knowledge sharing by organising national workshops with the presence of local level competent authorities (i.e. Regions for the Italian context) to disseminate best practices and monitor progress.
6. Leverage EU and national funds by aligning RDP measures with the National Forestry Strategy and EU biodiversity goals.



Photo by Roberto Fiorentin

Thinning is intended to improve the reproductive potential of single English oak trees, assessed as suitable for pollen and seed production. In the following years, the wooded area will be enlarged planting seedlings from selected sources based on available genetic information.




Next steps

The pilot confirmed that integrating forest genetic resources into funding schemes is possible and effective when backed by research and stakeholder engagement. Scaling up can only be achieved through harmonised policies, sustainable funding, and strong links between science and decision-making. A coordinated European approach will ensure forests remain genetically diverse and resilient for future challenges.



This policy brief has been produced by the EU-funded FORGENIUS project. If you would like to contact the project coordination team, please send an email to: info@forgenius.efi.int

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