



ESG4SMEs
Sustainability in Action



Co-funded by
the European Union

ORO DI POLLINA

Case study



Context

Type and size of SME: Micro-enterprise (single-owner farm)

Rural setting: Pollina, a small rural town in the hills of Sicily, Italy

Founded in 2022 during the COVID-19 pandemic, **Oro di Pollina** is a small agricultural enterprise in rural Sicily that cultivates **saffron** using regenerative and biodynamic practices.

Its mission is to reconnect people with nature, empower youth, and promote sustainable food systems. The farm emerged as a response to the challenge of creating an ecologically sound, economically viable, and socially engaging rural farming model during a time of crisis and disconnection.

Operating in a context marked by traditional resistance to ecological methods and limited opportunities for rural youth, the founder embraced ESG as a transformative framework to regenerate both land and community.



ESG Challenge / Opportunity



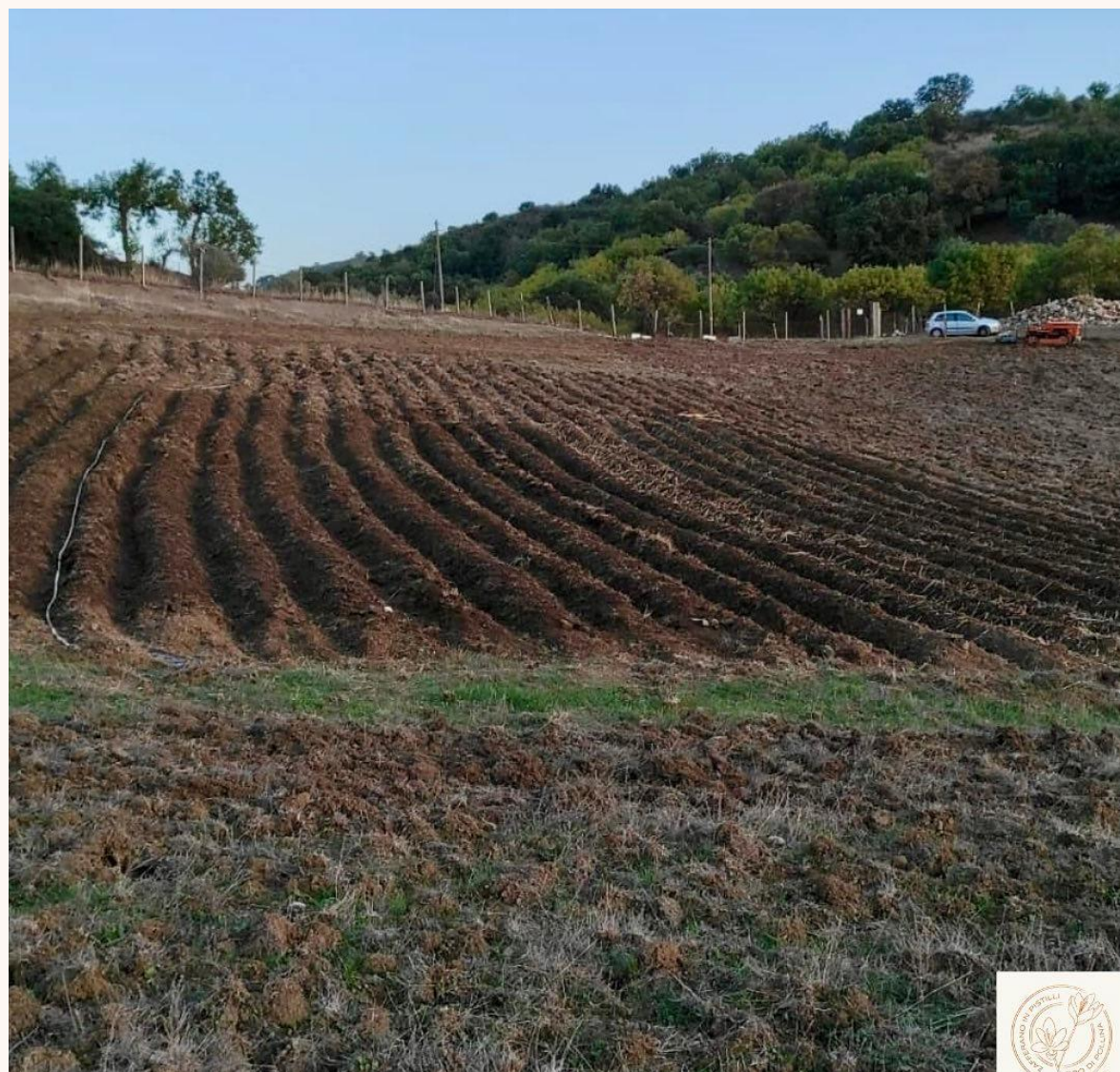
Oro di Pollina faced the challenge of **designing a farming model that could be truly sustainable** - environmentally regenerative, socially inclusive, and ethically governed - **within a rural context**.

The farm's approach tackled key ESG aspects: improving soil health and biodiversity (environmental), empowering youth and educating the community (social), and ensuring that every farming decision was ethically evaluated for its long-term impact (governance).

In rural Sicily, where youth unemployment is high, traditional agricultural practices dominate, and biodiversity is under threat, these issues are deeply relevant.

The initiative was driven by a strong ethical vision, growing market interest in high-quality, sustainable products, and a desire to meet community needs through education, engagement, and example.

What did they do?



The heart of the farm's model is the BSC method: Bio-Sinergico Consapevole - a blend of organic, synergistic, biodynamic, and regenerative agriculture. For Michele, this is more than just a technique - it's a way of thinking.

“Organic, because we must understand the biology of the soil. Synergistic, because nature and humans must work together. And aware, because we must always ask ourselves why we do something, and what it means for the land, the plants, and ourselves.”

This mindset led the farm to completely eliminate chemicals and avoid soil-compacting machinery. Instead, they work with living soil, supported by microorganisms, and use manual or light-touch tools to preserve its health and structure.

What changed?

The results of this approach are visible both in the field and in the community:

- **Healthier soil** and greater biodiversity
- A **high-quality, ethical product** with growing demand
- A stronger sense of **connection between people and land**
- Opportunities for **youth involvement** in agriculture through workshops and experiential learning

Oro di Pollina also attracts visitors and eco-conscious consumers through educational events and agritourism experiences - combining sustainable food, ecological education, and cultural preservation.

ESG in Action: People, Skills, Tools

ESG Competences and Roles

Who did what?

In Oro di Pollina, founder Michele Rocca embodied all three ESG roles typical of micro-enterprises:

- **ESG Leader:** Set the sustainable vision and led ethically.
- **ESG Optimizer:** Applied regenerative farming and organized community engagement.
- **ESG Analyst:** Assessed outcomes through observation and feedback to align practice with ESG values.

Relevant ESG Competences used

- 1.E.1 Ethical and sustainable thinking
- 2.E.1 Defining a vision
- 3.S.1 Mobilising others
- 4.G.1 Coping with ambiguity and risk

Tools and methods

- **Strategy tools used:** No formal tools like SWOT or materiality matrices were applied, but the approach reflected intuitive materiality assessment and long-term thinking, guided by ecological principles and ethical priorities. Similar rural SMEs could formalise this using basic tools to support decision-making.
- **How progress was tracked:** Through direct observation of land, biodiversity, and social engagement outcomes.
- **KPIs used:** Informal indicators such as saffron yield and quality, visible biodiversity (e.g. pollinators, microbial life), and participation in educational activities.
- **Data collection methods:** Field notes, photographs, and qualitative community feedback.
- **Reporting standards followed:** No formal reporting frameworks used; however, the farm's approach aligns with regenerative practices that could be structured within GRI or CSRD frameworks in future.

Leading with Purpose, Rooted in Place

How One SME Made ESG Work

Inspiring change

What ESG Leadership looks like

Michele showed strong **ESG leadership** by turning a personal crisis (the pandemic) into a vision for ecological and social renewal. His work embodies:

- **Vision:** Grounded in ethics, regeneration, and community empowerment
- **Risk-taking:** Abandoning conventional agriculture for a bold regenerative model
- **Transparency:** Every decision is made consciously and openly, aligning with long-term sustainability
- **Influence:** He inspired local youth, attracted eco-conscious visitors, and sparked dialogue on sustainable farming, going far beyond basic compliance

Making it work locally

Adapting ESG to Our Rural Reality

Oro di Pollina successfully adapted ESG to the rural Sicilian context by:

- Embracing **local traditions and land-based knowledge** while introducing regenerative innovations
- Leveraging Sicily's **cultural identity** and natural beauty to engage visitors through agritourism and education
- Addressing **rural socio-economic challenges** (youth unemployment, ecological degradation) through participatory, values-driven solutions
- Using the **small scale and strong community ties** of the territory as enablers of experimentation, engagement, and impact

REFLECT

- What were the key success factors that enabled *Oro di Pollina* to integrate ESG in a rural context?
- What challenges might prevent rural SMEs from adopting a similar ESG model?
- What could your SME or organisation learn from this approach in terms of mindset, methods, or community engagement?
- What role did personal motivation and values play in this case? Would this be a strength or a challenge in your situation?
- How does leadership grounded in personal ethics and reflection shape long-term impact?
- Could a version of *Oro di Pollina's* approach work in your own SME or community? What would need to change for it to succeed?
- What support (skills, tools, people, partnerships) would be needed to make this type of transition work where you operate?
- What limitations or trade-offs might come with this type of ESG model?
- Can you identify a first step your organisation could take today to move toward a more integrated ESG approach?