INTERNATIONAL CONGRESS OF MEDITERRANEAN AGROECOLOGY

AEMED 2025

9 - 12 June 2025

Agrigento (Italy)

Palacongressi – Villaggio Mosè
Teatro Pirandello
Ex Collegio dei Filippini

FIELD VISITS SCHEDULE AEMED 2025

11th June 2025

Coordinator: Martina Maurer

AEMED 2025

AEMED 2025 FIELD VISIT 1 – Organic Farm Airone

Agroecological transition on abandoned soils in the productive area of the Valley of the Temples. Tree crops, aromatic plants, and organic short supply chain horticulture for Agrigento.

8.30 am	Bus departure Palacongressi
8.45 am	Arrival at the farm, San Gregorio district, Agrigento
9.00 am	Ecological walk to visit the farm: **The Airone Nature Park and the Aromatic Trail, selected for Agrigento Italian Capital of Culture 2025.**
10.30 am	Coffee break
11.00 am	Second part of the on-farm activities: **Agroecological practices and weed management in horticultural crops. Organic short supply chain for Agrigento.**
1.00 pm	Rural lunch featuring local specialties
2.30 pm	Return to the Palacongressi / Visit to the Valley of the Temples
	Reference Person: Stefano Bocchi and Paolo Guarnaccia

Theme 1: Biodiversity and resilient agricultural systems – Organic Farm Airone

Agroecological transition on abandoned soils in the productive area of the Valley of the Temples. Tree crops, aromatic plants, and vegetables in organic short supply chain for Agrigento

Airone Srl was founded in 2017 on abandoned farmland in the San Gregorio Bennici area, within the productive area of the Valley of the Temples in Agrigento. Due to prolonged neglect and recurring wildfires that destroyed parts of the Mediterranean scrubland and traditional crops such as almond and olive groves, only about twenty olive trees and a few pines remained across the 20-hectare area, which had also become heavily littered. Driven by the vision of entrepreneur Emanuele Gionfriddo and his daughters Federica and Veronica to create a lasting cultural and environmental legacy for Agrigento, the transformation and regeneration process of the degraded rural landscape at risk of erosion started.

Several projects were launched focusing on environmental, cultural, and sustainable restoration of the landscape and the farm. Efforts began with resetting altered environmental characteristics and safeguarding natural and historical elements that had survived: natural ecosystems like the Akragas riverbed and its banks, ancient water springs (likely old hypogea), wetlands with reeds and seasonal ponds, low vegetation on slopes and clearings, and Mediterranean scrubland. The site also includes historical remnants such as a Roman kiln, the remains of a 19th-century farmhouse, and a World War II bunker.

The first project established was a Nature Park designed to represent the rich Mediterranean biodiversity. It aims to create and restore biotopes together with natural and riparian habitats. A special focus has been placed on nesting sites and refuge zones for wildlife, enhancing food availability with berry-bearing plants and ancient fruit varieties such as sorb tree, azarole, and quince tree. To combat soil erosion, the farm implemented contour-aligned buffer strips and non-productive vegetation bands. Thanks to reforestation and renaturalization efforts, the now publicly accessible park boasts a remarkable biodiversity heritage, including numerous ornamental, forestry, and agricultural species, along with nature trails, scenic overlooks, and birdwatching stations.

In a second phase, agricultural activities were integrated through the planting of native species — olive, almond, vineyard, prickly pear, pomegranate, persimmon, pistachio, fig, citrus fruits, peach, apricot, and pear — alongside forest species like carob and aromatic plants such as oregano and bay laurel across roughly 13 hectares. Today, the farm counts 23,000 trees, 20,000 ornamental plants, and 10,000 annuals, totaling over 50,000 specimens. In 2022, the farm began the process for organic certification. After joining the *Agroecological Biodistrict Valle dei Templi* in 2024, the farm integrated agroecological approaches into its existing sustainability efforts, aiming to enhance soil and water management practices and to participate in a network alongside other agroecological pilot farms. Today the farm is engaged in an organic short supply chain project for Agrigento, an environmental education program for youth and schools, and an inclusive initiative involving autistic students.

During the field visit, participants will discover part of the Nature Park, exploring various ecological zones and both plant and animal biodiversity. After experiencing the "Via degli Aromi" (Aromatic Trail) — a project selected for Agrigento Italian Capital of Culture 2025 — visitors can observe erosion control interventions, shaded areas created with living plant structures, and stunning viewpoints overlooking the Valley of the Temples.

As witnesses to the transformation of a once-abandoned area into a complex agroecosystem, participants will engage in discussions on the challenges faced during the farm's management and transition.

After a coffee break, the group will move to the agricultural section of the farm for a workshop on key agroecological practices: intercropping of pulse crops (grass pea, broad beans, lentils) in almond orchards, natural cover cropping and weed management in vegetable and aromatic crops - with a focus on licorice, a heat-loving native species widespread in the valley and difficult to manage. Participants will be encouraged to contribute ideas for the ongoing transition, such as new intercropping strategies for vegetable crops. The visit will conclude with a rural lunch under the wood canopy.

Airone relates especially to the following themes:

- **Theme 1 – Biodiversity and resilient agricultural systems**
- **Theme 2 – Agroecology and climate change mitigation**
- **Theme 3 – Sustainable food systems and social justice**

USEFUL INFORMATION
Distance from Agrigento: 2 km
Travel time: 10 minutes

AEMED 2025 – FIELD VISIT 2 – Organic Farm Vassallo

Nut tree cultivation and the VALMEDALM project: Improving resilience and increasing farmers' income through integrated intercropping strategies.

8.00 am	Bus Departure Palacongressi
8.30 am	Arrival at the farm in Volpara district, Licata (AG)
9.00 am	Ecological walk to visit the farm: **Nuts and climate change – discovering pecan, almond, pomegranate, and pistachio. Regenerating water through hydraulic land management systems.**
11.00 am	Coffee break at the farm
11.30 am	Second part of the on-farm activities: **VALMEDALM – The use of integrated intercropping strategies and cover crop trials in Mediterranean almond orchards.**
1.30 pm	Rural lunch featuring local specialties
3.00 pm	Return to Agrigento
3.30 pm	Arrival at the Palacongressi

Reference Person: Paolo Bàrberi and Fabio Gresta

Theme 2: Agroecology and climate change mitigation: Organic Farm Fattoria Vassallo

Nut tree cultivation and the VALMEDALM project: Improving resilience and increasing farmers' income through integrated intercropping strategies

Fattoria Vassallo is a family-run farm managed by Salvatore Vassallo, a 40-year-old professional farmer, and his father Ignazio, an agronomist. This multifunctional farm has been practicing organic agriculture for over 25 years. It was the first Educational Farm in Sicily to be officially accredited by the Region, and it also operates as an agritourism. The farm covers approximately 30 contiguous hectares atop a hill 300 meters above sea level and cultivates vineyards, olive trees, various nut trees (including pecans), pomegranates, and arable crops.

The farm's main goal is total sustainability and a significant reduction of external inputs. It is equipped with a 20 kW photovoltaic system that ensures near energy self-sufficiency, especially for irrigation. The farm also employs groundwater recharge techniques by channeling runoff water through underground infiltration holes, and collects rainwater into cisterns. All crops are irrigated with drip systems monitored by tensiometers and mini water meters. Biodiversity conservation is a central focus and is expressed in the cultivation of local varieties — such as 'Grillo' and 'Nero d'Avola' grapes, 'Biancolilla' and 'Nocellara del Belice' olives, 'Tuono' almonds, 'Bianca' pistachios, and other heritage fruits — and in the raising of native livestock species like the Girgentana goat, the Sicilian hen, and the Sicilian honeybee.

Upon arrival, visitors will explore the central courtyard or *baglio*, which includes a dining hall with wood-fired ovens, guest accommodations, a classroom, and a processing lab for nuts. The tour will showcase the photovoltaic system and the farm animals, including bees for orchard pollination. Field visits will follow, with stops at the insect-friendly ecological oasis and demonstrations of the farm's water management infrastructure.

In the vineyards, pistachio orchards, pecan groves, and pomegranate fields, the focus will be on techniques such as minimum tillage and dryland farming; plant protection through powders, traps, and organic pesticides; and soil fertility management — especially green manure, mulching of all pruning residues, and fostering a rich micro- and meso-fauna. The farm produces high-quality mature compost by mixing grape pomace with poultry manure. As a model case, the farm will present its experience with a small ladybug species that lives in symbiosis with pecan trees, effectively controlling aphids attacking pomegranate plants. The tour will also address the challenge of controlling the pest *Megastigmus pistaciae* in organic pistachio groves.

In the second part of the visit, the PRIMA-funded "VALMEDALM" project will be introduced. This project focuses on integrated intercropping strategies in almond orchards, particularly using various species for winter cover cropping. Fattoria Vassallo is one of six demonstration sites across five Mediterranean countries assessing the impact of intercropping on pest control, weed management, and soil microbial composition.

The aim of intercropping is to increase biodiversity, reduce pest and disease pressure, improve soil fertility and nitrogen fixation, maximize land use, optimize resource efficiency, and limit erosion and nutrient leaching.

By refining agroecological practices, the project supports farmers in adapting to climate change while enhancing the resilience and profitability of farming systems.

After a rural lunch featuring products from the farm, participants will have the opportunity to further explore and discuss the topics covered during the visit.

Fattoria Vassallo is particularly relevant to the following themes:

- **Theme 1 – Biodiversity and resilient agricultural systems**
- **Theme 2 – Agroecology and climate change mitigation**
- **Theme 3 – Sustainable food systems and social justice**
- **Theme 4 – Technological innovation and agroecological practices**

USEFUL INFORMATION
Website: https://fattoriavassallo.com/prodotti/mandorle/
Distance from Agrigento: 32 km
Travel time: 30 minutes

AEMED 2025 – FIELD VISIT 3 – Organic farm Azzalora Bio

Regenerative techniques in organic table grape production. Promoting farmers' ecological knowledge, the biodistrict model and pilot farms for the agroecological transition.

8.00 am	Bus Departure Palacongressi
8.30 am	Arrival at Castrofilippo, Azzalora district, Pizzeria Jack
9.00 am	Ecological walk to visit the farm: **Regenerative cultivation techniques in organic table grape production. Experimental cherry orchard.**
11.00 am	Coffee break
11.30 am	Second part of the on-farm activities: **Promoting the biodistrict model and pilot farms for the agroecological transition. Farmers' ecological knowledge and its transfer within the community.**
1.00 pm	Rural lunch featuring local specialties
2.00 pm	Visit to the village of Castrofilippo (AG)
3.00 pm	Return to Agrigento
3.30 pm	Arrival at the Palacongressi
	Reference Person: Cesare Pacini and Giovanni Dara Guccione

Theme 3: Sustainable food Systems and social justice - Organic farm Azzalora Bio

Regenerative techniques in organic table grape production. Promoting farmers' ecological knowledge, the biodistrict model and pilot farms for the agroecological transition

Azzalora Bio is a family-run organic farm located near the rural village of Castrofilippo, about 25 km from Agrigento. The area is known for its high-quality fruit and table grape production, thanks to the fresh, calcareous soils and hilly landscape. The farm is managed by professional farmer and agronomist Martina Maurer, together with her husband Aldo Ciccarelli. Certified organic since 1999, the farm is a founding member of the *Valle dei Templi Agroecological Biodistrict*, established in 2024, and recently joined the *Canicattì IGP Table Grape Consortium*.

In addition to several table grape varieties, the farm produces olive oil and grows cherries, local fruits, and vegetables for household consumption. This year, it also began cultivating the Sicilian conservation grain *Perciasacchi*. In the past, Azzalora Bio launched the first organic fruit and vegetable home delivery service in the province—an innovative short supply chain project that the Biodistrict aims to reactivate through a local producers' network.

The 8-hectare irrigated farm, supported by two wells, has long been committed to improving soil fertility and agroecological practices. It also pursues vertical diversification, such as closing the value chain on high-quality organic grapes, which are sold directly to customers across Europe and to small shops in Agrigento. The farm is currently undergoing renovations to activate rural tourism, environmental education services, and a teaching garden. Since 2011, it has operated a 6 kW photovoltaic system on the farmhouse roof. This year, the system is being expanded with an additional 6 kW and a storage battery on the agricultural warehouse, which is also equipped with two cold storage units—steps toward energy self-sufficiency.

The farm visit offers insights into organic table grape cultivation, a grapevine collection plot featuring native Sicilian varieties, and an experimental field with different cherry cultivars. In the vegetable garden, visitors can observe examples of local agrobiodiversity such as the *paglina* onion of Castrofilippo, the *Corleonese* tomato, and a red local chickpea. Seeds of these varieties are preserved and propagated by local farmers.

The farm is also home to dry-stone walls, stone piles, and bramble- and hawthorn-covered embankments that serve as shelters for beneficial insects, pollinators, birds, and other wildlife. Two new native-species hedgerows were planted this year, and particular care is taken to ensure flowering plants are present year-round.

Walking under the organic table grape pergola, participants will explore soil management techniques during a regenerative workshop: green manures and cover cropping, mulching of pruning residues, vermicompost and compost tea trials, minimum tillage, varietal diversification, copper reduction strategies through early vineyard covering, the use of potassium bicarbonate, mating disruption systems, and beneficial insect release. Discussions will also include farmers' ecological knowledge, ethnopedology, and the transfer of agroecological practices within the community.

After a coffee break—and, if the season permits, cherry picking "from farm to stomach"—attention will turn to the social, cultural, and educational dimensions of biodistricts as examples of farmer-led participation and cooperation with local actors. Together with representatives of other biodistricts, a workshop will explore the role of biodistricts in empowering women in agriculture, building local markets, encouraging collective purchasing,

and facilitating the exchange of seeds and knowledge. The potential of biodistricts to enhance the rural territory and to educate and inform the public will also be examined. Finally, the workshop will outline how the biodistrict model and pilot farms can lead the agroecological transition.

A rural lunch prepared by young collaborators on the farm will provide an opportunity to enjoy traditional meals and exchange experiences among participants. After lunch, a brief visit to the village of Castrofilippo is planned.

Azzalora Bio is particularly aligned with the following themes:

- **Theme 1 – Biodiversity and resilient agricultural systems**
- **Theme 2 – Agroecology and climate change mitigation**
- **Theme 3 – Sustainable food systems and social justice**

USEFUL INFORMATION
Website: http://www.azzalorabio.it/ | Facebook Page
Distance from Agrigento: 25 km
Travel time: 25 minutes

AEMED 2025 – FIELD VISIT 4 – Organic Farm Carbonìa

Mixed intercropping and technological innovation on a multifunctional farm. Revitalizing the rural territory through agroforestry, agritourism, and extra virgin olive oil.

8.00 am	Bus Departure Palacongressi
8.30 am	Arrival at the farm in Carbonìa district, Aragona (AG)
9.00 am	Ecological walk to visit the farm: **Olive groves, almond orchards, and arable crops. Mixed intercropping, water harvesting, and technological innovation**
11.00 am	Coffee break under the Century-old Poplar
11.30 am	Transfer by bus to the Carbonìa agritourism building
11.45 am	Second part of the on-farm activities: **Revitalizing the rural territory through agroforestry, agritourism and extra virgin olive oil production**
1.30 pm	Rural lunch featuring local specialties
3.00 pm	Return to Agrigento
3.30 pm	Arrival at the Palacongressi
	Reference Person: Giovanni Dinelli and Guido Bissanti

Theme 4: Technological innovation, agroecological practices and agroforestry - Organic farm Carbonìa

Mixed intercropping and technological innovation on a multifunctional farm.

Revitalizing the rural territory through agroforestry, agritourism, and extra virgin olive oil production

Carbonìa farm is located between the town of Aragona and the village of Santa Elisabetta, in a landscape notable for its distinctive gypsum soils and crystal outcrops. The 88-hectare estate has belonged to the same family for four generations and has been managed by women for the past two. It is certified organic since 1996 and today it is run by the owner and professional farmer Eugenia Gino. She cultivates olives for oil, almonds, cereals in rotation with legumes (including biennials), a small orchard and a vegetable garden for household use including the Slow Food Presidium *buttiglieddru* tomato. A livestock enclosure built with traditional dry-stone walls made from gypsum stones — some in dovetail pattern — reflects the farm's pastoral history. A significant portion of the farm is made up of natural pastureland with exposed rock, which has helped preserve the native spontaneous biodiversity of the area, both flora and fauna.

As stewards of a marginal area suffering from rural abandonment, caused largely by the low profitability of farming in this dry and challenging landscape, our goal is the territorial revitalization. The agroecological transition, embraced years ago, is expressed through continuous efforts: protecting natural ecosystems, combating erosion and wildfires, establishing firebreak strips, harvesting rainwater, applying sub-irrigation techniques, maintaining soil fertility, and launching an agroforestry project. We invest in multifunctionality — including the olive oil value chain, renewable energy production, crop diversification (e.g., a wild asparagus plantation), and most recently, agritourism.

The farm visit will begin in the valley area cultivated with wheat and a mixed cropping field featuring *Villalba lentils*, a Slow Food Presidium. While progressively reducing mechanical tillage, we still face resistance to change among some workers. One key tool for managing weeds in arable fields is the tine harrow, which has proven especially effective. During the demonstration of the mixed intercropping experiment with wheat and chickpeas—developed in collaboration with the *Valle dei Templi Agroecological Biodistrict*—we will explore both the technical and cultural challenges of introducing new agronomic practices, and examine the expected benefits of polyculture compared to monoculture.

The tour will continue through the olive groves, where participants will learn about typical cultivars of the area and innovative olive harvesting using a shaker with an umbrella, which can be used even on early-ripening fruit. Soil management practices include shredding of pruning residues, natural or legume-based cover cropping, and the application of mature manure enriched with mycorrhizae. A sub-irrigation system is fed by a newly built reservoir that collects rain and surface water, supplemented by rainwater harvested from roofs and stored in underground cisterns.

After a coffee break under an ancient black poplar tree, the visit will move to the new agroforestry plantation. Tree and shrub species are arranged in a quincunx pattern, combining native productive species—like olive trees and ancient fruit varieties—with support plants such as carob. To combat erosion, hedgerows of native species have been planted along contour lines, selected for their productive potential, ecological corridor function, and nitrogen-fixing properties. In the coming year, herbaceous species will be added to the system.

In recent years, the farm has invested in upgrading its photovoltaic system and restoring a historic rural building from the mid-1800s to host agritourism activities. This development adds value and vitality to the farm, offering visitors a chance to experience a dynamic and productive agricultural setting—not a static museum.

Carbonìa's organic extra virgin olive oil has received multiple awards and carries full certification. Since 2016, it has also complied with the *Sicilia IGP* standard. The oil is sold through short supply chains, addressing increasingly discerning consumers who seek high-quality products.

The long journey toward agroecological transition demands the acquisition of new knowledge and the creation of networks for shared learning. Attention to the well-being of the workforce is a cornerstone of the farm's participatory approach, even in defining business goals. This shift requires dedicated training to support the cultural change among staff.

A traditional lunch served on the farm will provide a relaxed setting to deepen the discussion on these topics.

Carbonìa is particularly relevant to the following themes:

- **Theme 1 – Biodiversity and resilient agricultural systems**
- **Theme 2 – Agroecology and climate change mitigation**
- **Theme 3 – Sustainable food systems and social justice**
- **Theme 4 - Technological innovation, agroecological practices and agroforestry**

USEFUL INFORMATION
Website: http://www.oliocarbonia.it
Distance from Agrigento: 30 km
Travel time: 30 minutes

AEMED 2025 – FIELD VISIT 5 – Organic Farm Lo Pilato and *Kolymbethra Garden*

Agroecological restoration of traditional almond orchards. Agricultural and natural biodiversity in the agroecological landscape of the *Kolymbethra Garden.*

8.30 am	Bus Departure Palacongressi
8.50 am	Arrival at the Parking Lot *Museo Archeologico Pietro Griffo*, Agrigento
9.00 am	***Bosco di Mandorli*: the landscape of traditional dryland orchards facing agricultural abandonment, the conservation of local genetic heritage, and opportunities for agroecological restoration**
10.00 am	Walk along the historical trails of the Almond and Olive Grove to the *Kolymbethra Garden*
11.00 am	Coffee break with *Kolymbethra's* jams
11.30 am	***Kolymbethra Garden:* The evolution from cultural to agroecological landscape and the rich agricultural and natural biodiversity**
1.30 pm	Traditional lunch
3.00 pm	Return to the Palacongressi / Visit to the Valley of the Temples
	Reference Person: Alberto Mantino and Paola Quatrini

Theme 1: Biodiversity and resilient agricultural systems - Organic farm Lo Pilato and Kolymbethra garden

Il Bosco di Mandorli: Agroecological restoration and management of traditional almond orchards. Agricultural and natural biodiversity in the agroecological landscape of the *Kolymbethra Garden*

The organic farm of agronomist Giuseppe Lo Pilato was established in 2005 and spans three publicly owned areas within the Valley of the Temples Park in Agrigento. The cultivated area, consisting of olive and almond groves, covers approximately 19 hectares. At the time of acquisition, the orchards were entirely unproductive due to a prolonged period of abandonment. After around ten years of dedicated effort, the olive grove was restored to productivity. However, the almond grove—composed of senescent and sparse trees—remained unproductive and economically unsustainable.

The restoration project for this extensive area of traditional almond orchards, poetically described by Luigi Pirandello as a "Forest of Almond Trees," aims to preserve its historical and landscape value, as well as its rich agricultural biodiversity. The orchard still hosts numerous ancient Sicilian almond varieties that have largely vanished from the regional production area but are maintained here *in situ* as a cultural legacy.

During the visit, we will observe 100 newly planted bitter almond saplings that are to be grafted with grafts from the historical trees, which are nearing the end of their life cycle. This initiative is both a symbolic gesture and a prelude to a broader restoration project for the entire cultivated area. A "Multidisciplinary Agroecological Planning Group" has been established under the *Valle dei Templi Agroecological Biodistrict* to study the agro-environmental characteristics of this ancient farming landscape. This interdisciplinary group is tasked with designing a comprehensive restoration plan aligned with Sicily's Regional Law 21/2021 on agroecology, biodiversity protection, and the preservation of local agricultural products.

Ultimately, a management plan for the agroecological cultivation of the *Bosco di Mandorli* in San Nicola district will be developed, addressing both productive and environmental aspects through an ecologically sustainable approach. The main goal of this initiative is to provide cultural, scientific, and professional contributions based on new ideas and practices that support a radical transformation toward ecological transition in agriculture and the wider economy.

Following a short break, participants will walk to the *Kolymbethra Garden*, an authentic archaeological and landscape treasure located between the

Temple of the Dioscuri and the Temple of Vulcan. The origins of the *Kolymbethra* date back to the Greek colonization of Sicily around 500 BCE. According to the historian Diodorus Siculus, the tyrant Theron commissioned the architect Feace to build a hydraulic system to supply water to the city of Akragas. Part of this system ended in a large reservoir known as the *Kolymbethra*.

The ancient hypogea (underground aqueducts) that once fed this pool still provide clear water used today to irrigate the garden, which is rich in ancient citrus varieties, fruits, and centuries-old olive trees.

Today, the five-hectare garden represents the agricultural and natural landscape of the Valley of the Temples. It includes patches of untouched Mediterranean scrubland and a stream flanked by poplars, willows, and tamarisks.

On the terraced slopes, framed by towering calcarenite cliffs, lies an ancient citrus grove that is cultivated using traditional Arab techniques: "A little valley that, for its astonishing fertility, resembles the Garden of Eden or a corner of the Promised Land." (Abbot of Saint Non, 1778).

During a period of neglect, the *Kolymbethra* landscape risked disappearing entirely. In 1996, agronomist Giuseppe Lo Pilato proposed its rescue and, along with Professor Giuseppe Barbera, involved the Italian Environmental Fund (FAI). The garden was entrusted to the FAI in 1999, and after a landscape restoration project, it was reopened to the public in 2001. The initial restoration focused on preserving the historical memory of local agricultural traditions, establishing the garden as a cultural landscape. With the return of fruit production, it evolved into a productive landscape and was successfully converted to organic farming. Over time, the observation of this ancient system revealed that many agroecological principles and practices are inherently present—evidence of a timeless, ancestral wisdom that continues to inform innovative approaches to agroecological landscapes today.

After the visit, a traditional lunch will be offered in the garden.

Il Bosco di Mandorli and *Kolymbethra Garden* are especially connected to the following themes:

- **Theme 1 – Biodiversity and resilient agricultural systems**
- **Theme 2 – Agroecology and climate change mitigation**

USEFUL INFORMATION
Website: https://fondoambiente.it/luoghi/giardino-della-kolymbethra

Distance from Agrigento city center: 5 km
Travel time: 15 minutes