



Case Study

Bio Agriturismo La Ginestra

1. Introduction

Bio Agriturismo La Ginestra is a facility located in one of the most beautiful areas of Tuscany: the Chianti hills. Agrotourism is an activity that is part of a very particular and long-standing agricultural context.

The company was founded as an agricultural cooperative and has as its mission to recover abandoned land following the depopulation of the countryside that occurred during the 1960s.

From the beginning, the farm from the beginning embraced natural and sustainable agriculture, when these terms were still little known, cultivating without the use of chemicals but in a totally natural way. This natural imprint characterises the entire activity and has been maintained throughout the years in which the business has transformed and evolved, and since 1993 has also included agritourism.

The wide variety of farm productions, from livestock farming, viticulture, cereal growing, and beekeeping make the farm a very complex reality where agritourism fits in to complement the activity.

NAME OF THE BUSINESS:

Società Agricola La Ginestra
Società Semplice
Bioagriturismo La Ginestra

LOCATION:

San Casciano Val di Pesa,
Tuscany, Florence

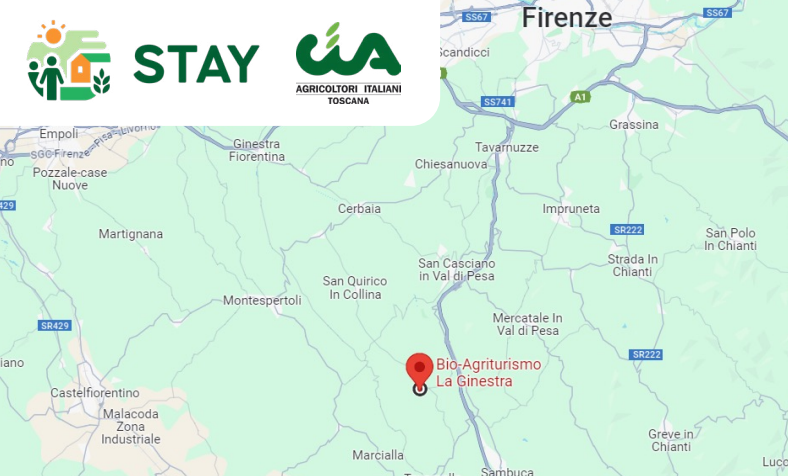
2. About the agrotourism

Bio Agriturismo La Ginestra is located in Tuscany in the Municipality of San Casciano Val di Pesa in the Province of Florence. The territory is mainly hilly and is in the geographical area of Chianti characterized by the cultivation of vines and known worldwide for its landscapes and wine production.

The farm covers about 100 ha including 40 HA planted with cereals and legumes, 6 HA of vineyards and 2 HA of olive groves. Most of the land is in the hilly area where the farmhouse is also located while some of the crops are in the valley near the course of the Pesa River. Not far from the main road that connects Florence to Siena its location is particularly strategic to reach many tourist destinations of different interests. Not far from the cities of art, 30 km from Florence and 40 km from Siena it is immersed in the Chianti area, which in itself is a much sought-after and renowned tourist destination.



Vineyard and workers during the harvest (photo by Chiara Nocci)



When did the agrotourism business start?

The farm La Ginestra was founded in 1978 by a group of young enthusiasts with the aim of renewing and maintaining the traditions of the Tuscan countryside. Settled on uncultivated land abandoned for decades, it takes its name from the beautiful yellow-flowered weed typical of our fields. Since 1989, the company has made the choice of organic farming and produces its own products without the use of synthetic chemicals. The agricultural cooperative founded in 1978 was transformed into an agricultural company in 1989, and in 1993 the agrotourism business also began.

Number of workers

During the busiest period at the agrotourism, 7 to 8 full-time people are employed to take care of all aspects of management and are interchangeable with each other so as to cover all management needs. Farm work and agrotourism work are separated.

Some tourist data from the agrotourism

The farmhouse has 5 apartments with 17 beds. Three of the apartments consist of 3 rooms and are designed to accommodate families while one apartment is a studio and the last one is a two-room apartment suitable for couples. The apartments have many amenities including a fully equipped kitchen, facilities for disabled people, a barbecue, a swimming pool, and parking. The opening period is from March to the first week of January until the holiday of Epiphany.

Guests mostly consist of families and couples but there is also a large segment of young clientele, sensitive to aspects related to respect for nature and the environment, attracted by natural productions and in particular natural wine.

The offer consists of overnight stay with breakfast included. There is a Bio Ristoro, created in the old barn of the farmhouse, where it is possible to have lunches, dinners and tastings as well as enjoy a superlative view of the Chianti hills.

The products offered at the Bio Ristoro are farm and locally produced and follow seasonality. Among the activities offered to guests is a guided tour of the farm, the crops and the winery, during which the philosophy of the farm and all the activities carried out are explained. Guests can also participate in beekeeping alongside expert beekeepers. It is possible by reservation to take cooking classes at the Bio Ristoro.

To enrich the offer dedicated to guests, the agritourism collaborates with physiotherapists and massage therapists who offer the service directly at the agritourism. It also collaborates with tour operators who offer bicycle tours and companies that rent bicycles for simple rental.

Guests do not participate in farming directly but can assist with certain operations such as bee care. Annual attendance is about 1450 per year spread somewhat throughout the opening period.



Bio Agriturismo Double room (photo by Chiara Nocci)



Bio Agriturismo Breakfast buffet (photo by Chiara Nocci)

About advertising

The company has no experienced marketing staff in-house, and all promotion activity is done by the people who are involved in running the farm.

For advertising, the farm mainly uses social media platforms Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/www.laginestra.toscana.it> and Instagram https://www.instagram.com/cooperativa_la_ginestra/?hl=it. It also has a corporate website <https://www.laginestra.toscana.it/>.

As a means of advertising, some illustrated flyers are also used and distributed at farmers' markets in which the farm participates weekly with a stall. During the markets it is possible to buy products that come from the cultivation of grains and legumes and as well baked goods, pasta, etc. Word of mouth is the best way of advertising on which La Ginestra counts on.

About starting up the business

The history of this farm goes back a long way and the origin of what we find today dates back to the late 1970s when a group of young people decided to recover some abandoned farmland and gave birth to the cooperative that began cultivating the land. Over the years, the cooperative has transformed into an agricultural company and has maintained its initial character, namely, that of enhancing the land and cultivating according to the dictates of natural agriculture, becoming an organic farm.

The agrotourism activity was established in 1993 to diversify the business as a support to farm profitability. In fact, agrotourism to date is a very important part of the whole business. When the agrotourism business was undertaken none of the people involved had experience in tourism or business.

About commercialisation

To market the products and services the channels mainly used are Facebook and Instagram on which specific promotions related to events and tastings are also made. Through the company's website at the moment it is possible to book farm stays but it is not possible to purchase.

The company is working on revamping the site by also introducing an e-commerce to purchase products directly from the site. Booking the farm stay is handled directly by the company and it is possible to book by sending an e-mail, calling but also booking directly from the company website.

It is also possible to book through booking.com <https://www.booking.com/hotel/it/bio-agriturismo-la-ginestra.it.html>.

In addition, the farm is present on the specific portal of agrotourism Agriturismo.it <https://www.agriturismo.it/it/agriturismi/toscana/firenze/Bio-AgriturismoLaGinestra-4900176/index.html> on Expedia <https://www.expedia.it/San-Casciano-In-Val-Di-Pesa-Hotel-Bio-Agriturismo-La-Ginestra.h27484540.Informazioni-Hotel> and on Airbnb <https://www.airbnb.it/>.



Bio Agriturismo Dining room (photo by Chiara Nocci)



Beekeeper at work with hives and sunflower field
(photo by Chiara Nocci)

The background was more in agriculture and technical agronomy. The agrotourism business was born and grew through the work of people, without resorting to outside help or support, who followed an idea and realized that it could be an opportunity for the future of the farm.

The road to building the agrotourism business was not easy, and many mistakes were made precisely because of inexperience in the tourism sector.

In 2015, the team that currently operates both the agricultural and agrotourism parts of the business was established on the farm.

The people involved in the management of the agrotourism are trained for this activity and have adequate skills for the management of the accommodation business. It is very important to anticipate or catch current trends in order to be able to offer guests interesting and new activities.

The most significant obstacles that were encountered in starting the agrotourism business were definitely those related to the lack of training in tourism.

The territory in which the Bio Agriturismo La Ginestra is located, Chianti, is an area very famous for its natural beauty and for its particular anthropisation made of vineyards that have created a unique landscape thanks to their geometries. In this context, agrotourism and other types of accommodation are very numerous and this makes it very difficult to establish oneself in an area where competition is really high.

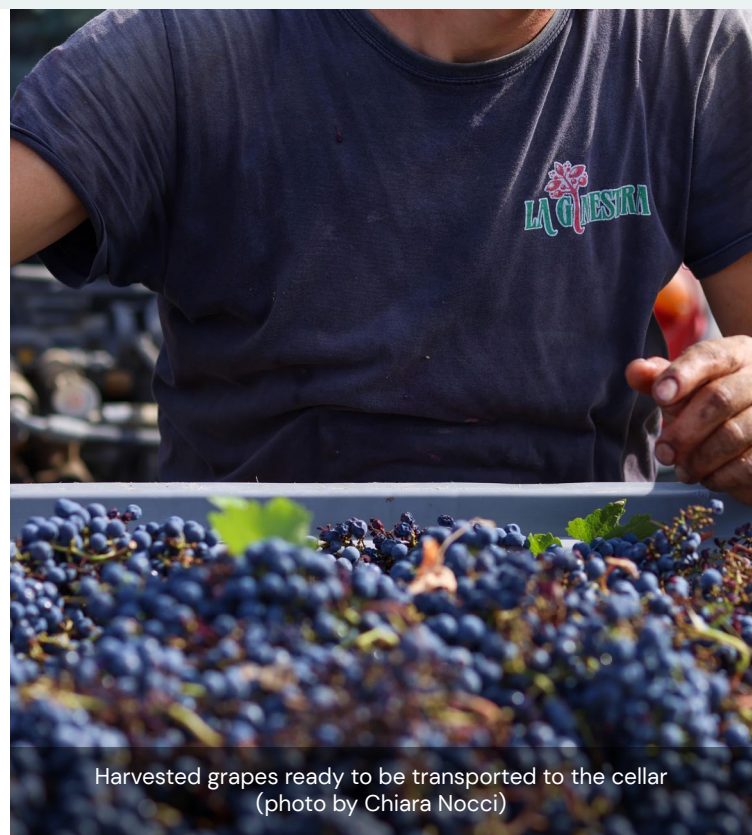
Today it would be unthinkable to run a facility like an agrotourism without the necessary skills. Training is always useful and necessary to keep the quality standards of the offerings high.

About managing an agrotourism business

The farm has an extension of about 100 HA of which 6 HA are cultivated as vineyards where grapes are produced to make natural wines.

The beekeeping activity, which was started in the 1980s, is very important and includes about 700/800 beehives for the production of monofloral honey (Acacia, Chestnut, Sulla, Clover, Sunflower, Coriander, Ailanthus, Lime), wildflower honey and woodland honeydew, as well as all hive products (pollen, wax, propolis, swarms, queen bees).

On more than 40 hectares, ancient grains and legumes are cultivated through the ancient system of rotations.



Harvested grapes ready to be transported to the cellar
(photo by Chiara Nocci)

This technique allows cows to graze each season on different pastures, fertilising the fields and keeping them clean of weed seeds.

Farming includes cattle and pigs.



Pigs grazing (photo by Chiara Nocci)

Prominent among the ancient durum wheat are Cappelli, Verna, and Rondine in addition to spelt, triticale, and rye. Some legumes including chickpeas and lentils are also included in the rotations. After harvesting, the pearling, milling of grains, and bread-making of flours are done by the best artisans in the area.

Pork is processed by the local charcuterie factory.

The resulting bread is naturally leavened, from wood-fired baking, from stone-ground, semi-whole-grain flours. Pasta dried at very low temperatures.

Genuine cured meats are prepared according to the best Tuscan tradition. Among the productions, some spirits include nocino, grappa, honey grappa, and walnut-flavored wine.

There is also a small production of hemp from which a hemp liqueur and essential oil are made.

Extra virgin olive oil is made from olives of the typical varieties of central Tuscany, Frantoio, Moraiolo and Leccino, grown in about 2 HA of olive groves. The oil produced is used almost exclusively in the agriturismo's Bio Ristoro.

The main income comes from the agritourism, which brings 75% of the entire income. The La Ginestra Bio Agrotourism is an average facility among those in the area and no special skills are needed for management, which is similar to family management. Minimum skills in tourism are sufficient. An important requirement for those engaged in the agritourism business is to be very adaptable and interchangeable in roles.

The expectation for the future is to grow, improve, and confirm what has been achieved in recent years and commit to the business to continue it in the best possible way.



Bio Ristoro Breakfast table (photo by Chiara Nocci)

Advice for new entrepreneurs

The advice aimed at future agritourism entrepreneurs stems from experience in running La Ginestra Organic Farm. It is crucial for local businesses to network. Finding meeting points that facilitate management and allow the business to be improved at all times. Unfortunately, among the facilities in the area there is no real network that could be really important instead.

This characteristic is typical of the area where the Bio Agriturismo La Ginestra is located, but unfortunately it is a feature that affects many other areas.

Another useful tip is to adapt to the times with regard to pricing policy.

Many facilities still apply a pricing policy that is outdated and old, based on high, medium, low seasons.

Today it is important to sell accommodations using a dynamic pricing policy so as to adjust supply to demand by analysing market trends.