

APPLY TODAY! Calling professional journalists and data researchers with a flair for writing...
The Daksh — India Together Election 2014 Data Journalism Fellowship
 Last date: Feb 16th, 2014.

[Login](#) · [Register](#)



THE NEWS IN PROPORTION

15 February 2014

- [HOME](#)
- [AGRICULTURE](#)
- [CHILDREN](#)
- [ECONOMY](#)
- [EDUCATION](#)
- [ENVIRONMENT](#)
- [GOVERNMENT](#)
- [HEALTH](#)
- [HUMAN RIGHTS](#)
- [LAWS](#)
- [MEDIA](#)
- [PEACE](#)
- [POVERTY](#)
- [RTI](#)
- [SOCIETY](#)
- [WOMEN](#)
- [SEARCH](#)



- [AGRICULTURAL TRADE](#)
- [AGRICULTURE OPINIONS](#)
- [AGRICULTURE POLICY](#)
- [FOOD SECURITY](#)
- [GM CROPS](#)
- [LINKS](#)
- [LIVE STOCK](#)
- [ORGANIC](#)

stay connected



THE COLDIRETTI DEBATE

Lessons from Italy for the Indian farmer

Italian farmer group Coldiretti is ushering in a new paradigm in farming, and has emerged as a powerful lobby for the interests of the small farmer. [Keya Acharya](#) reports on the campaign and wonders if Indian agriculture can emulate the same.



- [Write the Author](#)
- [Organic](#)
- [Livelihood](#)
- [Agriculture Policy](#)
- [Send to a friend](#)
- [Printer Friendly Version](#)

30 January 2014 -

The man is youthful, in his early thirties with an air of earthy dynamism about him that covers, only very slightly though, a determined, fighting spirit. His name is Vittorio Sangiorgio and he represents an association that is unique in the annals of farmers and agriculture the world over.

Sangiorgio is part of Coldiretti, an influential farmers' association in Italy, which is the largest in the EU and now synonymous with grassroots movements for social change. Founded in 1944 by Paolo Bonomi, a young politician from Italy's Christian Democratic Party, Coldiretti's influence is political even though it is an agricultural association. The organisation has 520,000 associate enterprises under its fold and constitutes 69 per cent of the members of the Italian Chamber of Commerce.

Coldiretti works like a pressure group against industries that threaten individual and small farmers' interests. It started lobbying the government for farmer-welfare benefits as early as the 1950s, from which time its membership grew rapidly, perhaps in reaction to Italy's fascist leanings. The lobby too has been increasingly successful. It now has a Brussels office closely following EU laws and works at the national level with environment and consumer groups.

A new outlook

At field level, Coldiretti has deep roots in Italy's farmlands, with nineteen associated regional (akin to State-level size in Indian terms) federations and at least 96 provincial (district-sized) and inter-provincial organisations. It has approximately 6000 offices around the country.

A recent Coldiretti protest before Christmas was against plastic Christmas trees, imported mainly from China and made of PVC and metals, as these were very pollutive both during transportation and disposal. Coldiretti estimates that each synthetic tree emits approximately 23 kg of CO₂ (carbon dioxide), while growing 6 million trees (which Italy uses each Christmas) saves some 282,000 kgs of carbon dioxide. Moreover, these can be grown

according to one's budget.



Even fashionable cities like Milan have Sunday bazaars in various city blocks, where farmers directly sell farm-fresh food like olives, cheese and smoked meat to customers. (Vittorio Sangiorgio. Picture credit: Greenaccord)

 related articles

- [Making farmers more prosperous](#)
- [Organic veggies in my inbox](#)

Thus Sangiorgio, who is the director of Coldiretti's young entrepreneurs or Coldiretti Giovani, echoes these sentiments, narrating how they blocked Chinese tomatoes being imported by MNC companies and canned under a 'made in Italy' label. The ideology behind the move is to encourage local foods, maintain agricultural livelihoods and local economies while conserving energy and reduce carbon emissions from long-distance transportation.

"This is part of zero-waste agriculture", says Sangiorgio, "it saves packaging and also consumes far less of all resources." Coldiretti advocates the reuse of bags and the use of recyclable bags among its thousands of members. Short-chain food transportation also does not need heavy consumptive packaging.

"China's produce coming to Italy also comes from very poor labour conditions", says Sangiorgio. "This is not a waste concept in conventional terms, but we are touching consciences by discouraging products associated with poor labour conditions".

Coldiretti pushes for wholesale markets in direct sales, and has Italy's biggest direct-sales marketing system. Even fashionable cities like Milan have Sunday bazaars in various city blocks, where farmers directly sell farm-fresh food like olives, cheese and smoked meat to customers. These outdoor farmers' markets are very popular, with the flavour of flea market bargains in clothing and other household goods too.

Other environmental measures in its zero-waste agriculture system include conservation methods in water use, teaching rain-water harvesting (RWH) for greenhouses and the use of appropriate devices for RWH in irrigation too. Water is filtered and re-used in this, using solar photovoltaic panels for energy usage in irrigation pumping. We have created photovoltaic panels on the roofs of greenhouses and farm buildings, not just on flat land", says Sangiorgio.

Their zero-waste campaign is now in the countryside, urging less packaging, more consumption and buying of locally-produced foods through direct-sale markets, the use of RWH and solar energy in agriculture.

Sangiorgio says Coldiretti has managed to reduce CO2 emissions by 6 per cent in comparison to CO2 emissions from the olive oil manufacturing industry. There has also been a 30 per cent reduction in food waste.

One of their most successful current campaigns is to bring back young people into farming. The association promotes agriculture as something innovative, something that allows young people to have a good quality of life. Sangiorgio offers himself as proof. "Look at me, I'm a farmer and in my early 30s. Nowadays, it's cool to be a farmer in the countryside. I found a girlfriend, am now engaged, and I should be able to get married now!"

Can India get there?

Unfortunately, farmers' associations in India pale, even without comparison. With loose, fragmented associations of small farmers and organic agriculture operating in various regions, a farmers' lobby large enough to be a force for change is a long time coming in India.

"Indian farmers are sitting ducks for middlemen", says David Hogg, chief sustainability officer of the Naandi Foundation, an NGO that interacts with the government on agriculture and other development issues. "Farmers here are doubly disadvantaged by being both fragmented and small-scale. We just have to organise ourselves into strong structures." Hogg says at least 98 per cent of farmers in India have less than 5 ha farmlands.

Indeed, India's agricultural sector has been in crisis over the last two decades, dealing with dwindling water resources, shrinking land base, failing soil and the need for ever-increasing chemical inputs, the vagaries of climate change and labour shortage due to high rural-urban migration. Poor prices for produce is an additional burden, strangely even as the urban food retailing sector is being hailed as a 'sunrise industry' with strong and profitable marketing potential.

Hogg points out that 40 per cent of farmers in Punjab live below the poverty line, unable to eke out a living from failing soils that have less than 0.3 per cent of organic carbon content currently, chemical inputs having destroyed all fertility.

"There is huge despair at the agricultural level. I think water storage within soils is essential for small farmers in India; if we make it farm policy to sequester even 1 per cent of organic carbon in soil, we will restore 120,000 litres of water per hectare," Hogg has calculated. "A strong farmers' federation would go a long way in ensuring this as policy."

But, as Satnam Singh Behroo, president of CIFA (Consortium of Indian Farmers) - an umbrella group of 250,000 farmers from various organisations around the country points out, improving farmers' conditions in India is nothing short of a constant struggle. "If any improvement had happened so far, would farmers be in such difficulty as you see now?" asks Behroo from the New-Delhi based headquarters.

Behroo says he is still fighting in the Supreme Court to get the recommendations of the Swaminathan Commission implemented. Dr. MS Swaminathan, pioneer of India's green revolution and Chairman of the National Commission on Farmers had brought

out a series of reports from 2004-2006, recommending a slew of measures for farmers' income security and welfare, including land reforms and water for irrigation for poor farmers.

Though several of these measures have been taken up by the National Policy for Farmers, 2008, implementation in the field remains non-existent. Perhaps India's several field organisations need to band together now more than ever.

Keya Acharya

30 January 2014

Keya Acharya is a development and environment journalist. She was present at Vittorio Sangiorgio's talk to a group of international journalists in Naples in November 2013.

Comments



[Click to post](#)

Note: Solicitation and commercial posts not allowed.

enter your email **NEWSLETTER**

Newly published articles delivered each week to your Inbox.

RECENTLY IN INDIA TOGETHER

- [Could being 'right' be wrong for AAP?](#)
- [What has your MP done for you?](#)
- [Who will cast the first vote for equality?](#)
- [Politics, through the eyes of Bihar's Dalit students](#)
- [New body should have better pay, more autonomy](#)
- [A few facts for GM-advocate Manmohan Singh](#)
- [Tales of the excluded](#)

- [Left to languish in a foreign country](#)
- [Lessons from the "other" Indo-Pak conflict](#)
- [Can a post box save the Indian whistle blower?](#)
- [Moulding the young as change agents](#)
- [Losing India's Greta Garbo](#)
- [Seeds of doubt](#)
- [The strange case of ICTT Vallarpadam](#)
- [What constrains our social enterprises?](#)

MORE ARTICLES

on similar topics ...

AGRICULTURE POLICY

- [A few facts for GM-advocate Manmohan Singh](#)
- [Why your bag of vegetables costs more every week!](#)
- [What could make our farmers more prosperous?](#)
- [Agricultural policies are to blame](#)
- [Uttar Pradesh to set up 2000+ mandis](#)

LIVELIHOOD

- [What constrains our social enterprises?](#)
- [Big hopes from small tea](#)
- [Char dwellers turn to sugarcane, but will it be enough?](#)
- [The wonder climber for areca nut trees](#)
- [MIS = Too many mistakes!](#)

ORGANIC

- [Vegetables in the backyard](#)
- [Winning the battle against hunger, silently](#)
- [Organic veggies in my Inbox](#)
- [Good food, Indian-style](#)
- [Timbaktu Organic is scaling up](#)

Topics

- [Agriculture](#)
- [Economy](#)
- [Education](#)
- [Environment](#)
- [Government](#)
- [Health](#)
- [Human Rights](#)
- [Laws](#)
- [Media](#)

Other Sections

- [Editorials](#)
- [Interviews](#)
- [Opinions](#)
- [Reviews](#)
- [Talks](#)

Subscribe

- [Newsletter](#)

India Together

- [Home](#)
- [About us](#)
- [Overview](#)
- [Support](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Disclaimer](#)

Also see our sister

India Together is published in part with support from Oorvani Foundation, supporting public-funded media for the new India.

- [Poverty](#)
- [RTI](#)
- [Society](#)
- [Women](#)

- [RSS feed](#)
- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)

publication



© Oorvani Media Pvt. Ltd., all rights reserved.



Close Send



SIGN IN

Sign in to post comments, pictures, discussions, articles and more

Sign in with



[Google](#)



[LinkedIn](#)

OR

Sign in with India Together account

Email

Password

[forgot my password](#)

Log in

Remember me



REGISTER

Register to post comments, pictures, discussions, articles and more. Its free.

Email

Password

Password confirmation

Name

Register