

2.2 The need for actions related to the conservation/valorization of genetic resources.

Recognizing the global danger posed by the increasing erosion of biodiversity in domestic animals, national institutional interventions aimed at effectively bringing back part of the lost biodiversity to benefit sustainable agriculture began in 2008. For avian genetic resources, due to the high level of specialization and standardization achieved by the related production sector, a particular urgency for intervention has been recognized. The Lombard poultry biodiversity currently includes two chicken breeds (Mericanel della Brianza, Milanino) and two turkey breeds (Nero d'Italia, Brianzolo). This genetic heritage has been the subject of conservation interventions for years, carried out by the University of Milan (UniMI) and funded by public institutions: the Province of Milan (Liberal Contribution, 2009), Lombardy Region (CoVAL Project, 2012-2015), Mipaaft (TuBAVI Project, 2018-2020, and TuBAVI-2 Project, 2020-2023). Among the Lombard breeds, the Milanino breed, due to its recent recovery, is not yet included in the Genealogical Book of Italian Poultry Breeds established by Mipaaft in 2014, which considers only breeds constantly present in the territory for a long period, corresponding to at least 50 years. The conservation activity carried out by UniMI within the Avian Center for the Conservation of Local Genetic Resources (Experimental Didactic Zootechnical Center, CZDS, Lodi) has allowed for constant management of the reproduction and selection phases of small nucleus populations of the main Lombard poultry breeds. In addition, some zootechnical tests have been conducted, which have allowed the preparation of guidelines for the breeding of the Milanino breed for meat production. These activities have enabled an initial diffusion of the breeds in the territory for zootechnical purposes: some companies have started breeding small groups of local breed chickens, mainly intended for self-consumption and/or agritourism restaurants. Due to its rusticity and interesting productive characteristics, the Milanino breed has the greatest potential for zootechnical use and therefore the possibility of widespread diffusion in rural areas, including peri-urban and marginal areas otherwise abandoned. Against this background, the project finds fertile ground on which to intervene. Consolidating knowledge and conservation activities of the Milanino breed is essential to improve the status of the currently available population and promote actions to enhance its zootechnical potential. The present project envisages the direct diffusion of the Milanino chicken in Lombard agricultural farms, responding to the emerging need to create local micro-filières based on a sustainable breeding system and a diversified product (meat and eggs) whose demand is constantly growing. It should be noted that the Milanino breed can be considered a dual-purpose breed, providing excellent quality meat in both sexes and a good egg production.