

# ORGANIC FARMING AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION. Experience of Riet Vell

"Natura 2000 effective use of support possibilities  
under rural development policy"

ENRD workshop. Brussels, September 28th





**The project starts in the 90's in delta del Ebro, Nature 2000 site and one of most important wetlands in Europe**



2/3 of delta del Ebro surface are rice fields

Rice fields are essential for bird conservation and the physical survival of the delta del Ebro... but,

Rice is a very intensive crop using lots of chemicals affecting biodiversity quite heavily and polluting water in Ebro river and natural wetlands

Between 1997 and 2001 SEO/BirdLife developed a Life project evaluating environmental, agronomical and economical feasibility of organic rice in delta del Ebro.



## Main results:

Higher density of birds, fishes, invertebrates and plant biomass in organic fields

Higher rice production in conventional paddies

And very important:

**Organic, despite be more difficult and more risky, could be as profitable as conventional rice fields.**

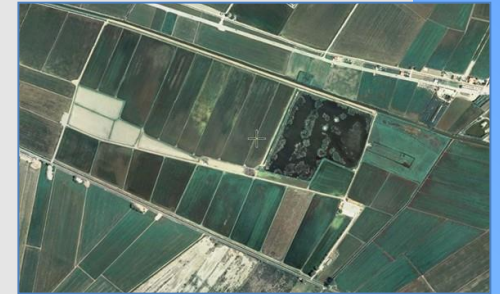
## The success of this project led to SEO/BirdLife to promote a much more ambitious initiative:

- . **To create a private company** dedicated to crop and sell the organic rice produced in its own fields but also by other farmers in the area, valorizing its origin and added value
- . **It was needed 600,000 €** as starting capital, so it was necessary the participation of many people, specially motivated with this idea.
- . With that money the company would buy a plot of land and all the equipment to cultivate organic rice.

# AND IT WAS DONE!

- . SEO/BirdLife **announced the initiative** to their membership, in specialized magazines and some other environmental NGOs.
- . Almost **200 people bought participations** with a minimum investment of 1,500 € getting a capital of 800,000 €.
- . **SEO/BirdLife is the main stockholder** with 18 % of the company.
- . The company (Riet Vell, S.A.) started working in March 2001 purchasing a 54 ha plot of rice fields. 11 Has were abandoned to restore marshlands and 42 Has are used for organic paddies.

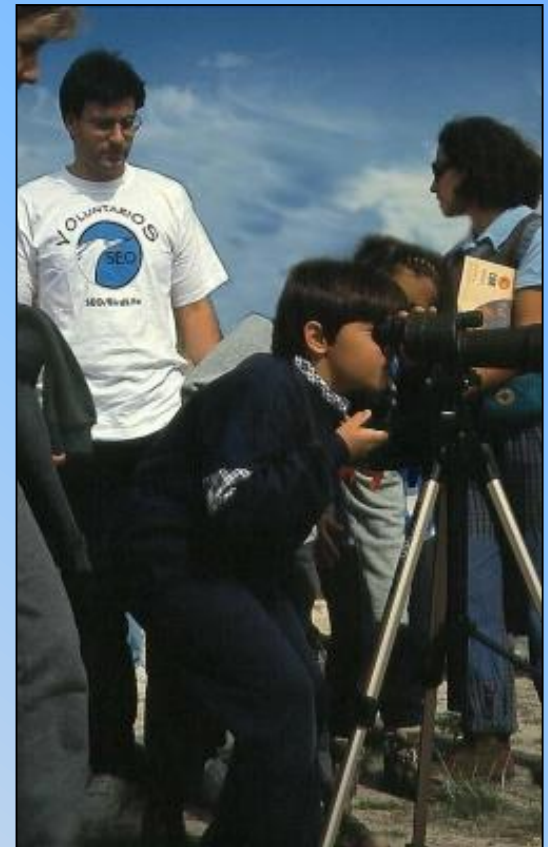
# RIET VELL RICE FIELDS



Nowadays, Riet Vell is a **reference in Spain about organic rice production**.

Riet Vell lagoon is an **important place to visit for birdwatchers** and environmental friendly tourism in delta del Ebro.

**Riet Vell has a land stewardship agreement with SEO/BirdLife** for environmental management of the marshlands. Educational and volunteers programs are offered all the year around





Riet Vell rice is sold with an image designed to communicate its quality and its roll in birds and habitats conservation in delta del Ebro.

*puro*  
**ARROZ**  
DEL DELTA DEL EBRO

**RIETVELL**  
*puro arroz*

★ AGRICULTURA  
ECOLÓGICA ★

ESTE ARROZ PROCEDE  
DE CULTIVOS  
ECOLÓGICOS EN EL  
DELTA del EBRO  
\*\*\*\*\*  
FAVORECE  
la  
CONSERVACIÓN  
DE ESTE VALIOSO  
ESPACIO NATURAL  
Y DE SU RICA  
BIODIVERSIDAD



After its experience with rice, in 2003 Riet Vell starts a new initiative:  
Production of macaroni and spaghetti coming from organic durum wheat  
from the Iberian Steppes



Steppes are very important ecosystems for biodiversity conservation in Europe, specially for birds.



**For many threatened species like Sandgrouses, Bustards or Larks, traditional cereal fields and fallows are an essential part of their habitats**

Riet Vell buys durum wheat in Nature 2000 sites in steppes ecosystems of central Ebro valey and transform it to high quality pasta: macaroni, spaghetti and other pasta formats



In 2015 Riet Vell begins to work with a new product: Chickpeas and lentils from surrounding areas of stational and endorreic lagoons in Castilla La Mancha



In cooperation with another NGO, Fundación Global Nature, and working with legume farmers to help them to transform this traditional crop in organic, and so, reducing water and soil pollution and increasing biodiversity.



**Definitively, rice, pasta and pulses Riet Vell is working with,  
are products:**

**With high quality**

**Good for environment (are coming from organic farming  
and contribute to keep proper conservation of high value  
habitats)**

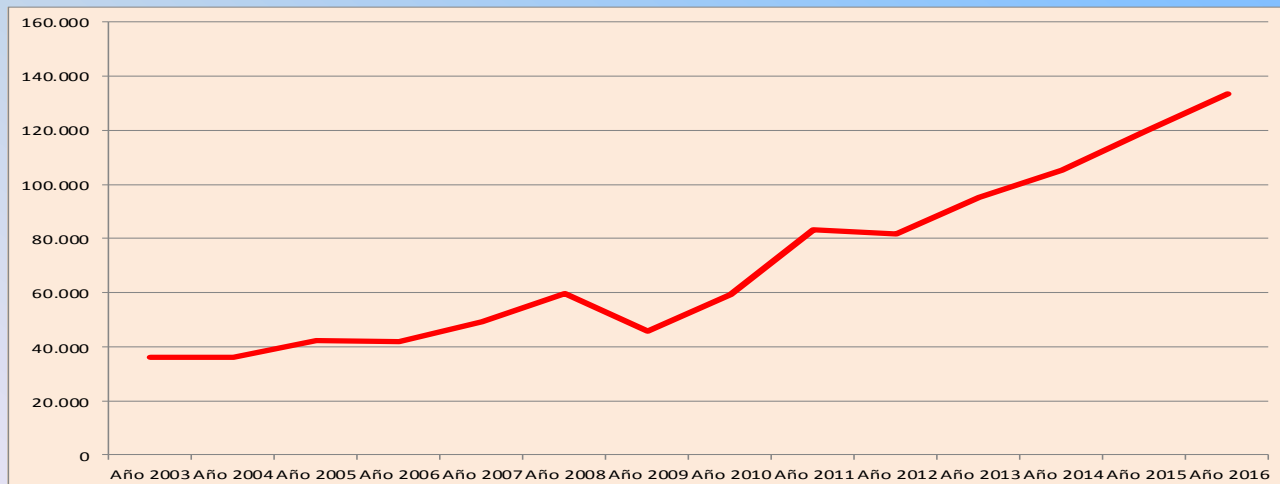
**They are contributing to open new ways and alternatives  
for rural development in depressed areas**

# POSITIVE ASPECTS AND SUCCESS FACTORS

**Education and awareness of consumers are increasing**, as well as their interest about organic products, proximity and the social and environmental implications of food.

**This model has been slowly expanding in the area.** Now there are more brands and more operators looking for these values.

**Riet Vell products sales grow up every year.**





# NEGATIVE ASPECTS AND BOTTLENECKS

The agri-food sector is **very competitive**. It's hard to get the interest of big retailers.

Products have usually a **higher price**. There are a lot of extra costs along the process, and much more in small companies like Riet Vell.

The **regulations** set the same requirements for a small producer as for a large multinational, and sometimes this makes very difficult for small ones to enter the market

**Fraudulent and trickery practices** regarding values as proximity, traceability, certifications ...

At public administrations and managing authorities level: **lack of coordination** and common actions, and sometimes even dialogue, between agriculture and environment bodies.

# REGARDING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIONS AND MANAGING AUTHORITIES

It is important and necessary the support of public administrations to promote compatible and positive activities in Natura 2000 network. Some concrete proposals based on our experience, would be:

- **Increase coordination and communication** between agriculture and environment bodies: environmental components of the policy should be ultimately taken by environmental authorities
- Provide through CAP **adequate financial support** for implementing the EU Nature Directives. Current agri-environmental measures are insufficient.
- Establish mechanisms to **guarantee veracity and confidence** in issues such as proximity, origin, certifications...
- **Flexibility in regulations and requirements** for small and local initiatives working to valorize products or activities in these places.
- **Promotion and public awareness** about what Natura 2000 is and why it is so important. Also about traditional activities carried out there and their social and environmental implications.

# CONCLUSSIONS

**It is possible** to promote and valorize activities and products in Natura 2000 network

But,

**It is difficult** to compete in the market and communicate properly their singularities and added value

Anyway,

There is still a lot to do, but there is **great potential** too.

# ORGANIC FARMING AND WILDLIFE CONSERVATION Experience of Riet Vell



**¡¡MUCHAS GRACIAS!!**