



DYNIVERSITY

# Safeguard for Agricultural Varieties in Europe – SAVE Foundation

Case study analysis

DYNAmic seed networks for managing European diversity:  
conserving diversity *in situ* in agriculture and in the food chain



DYNIVERSITY project received funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation program under Grant Agreement n. 773814

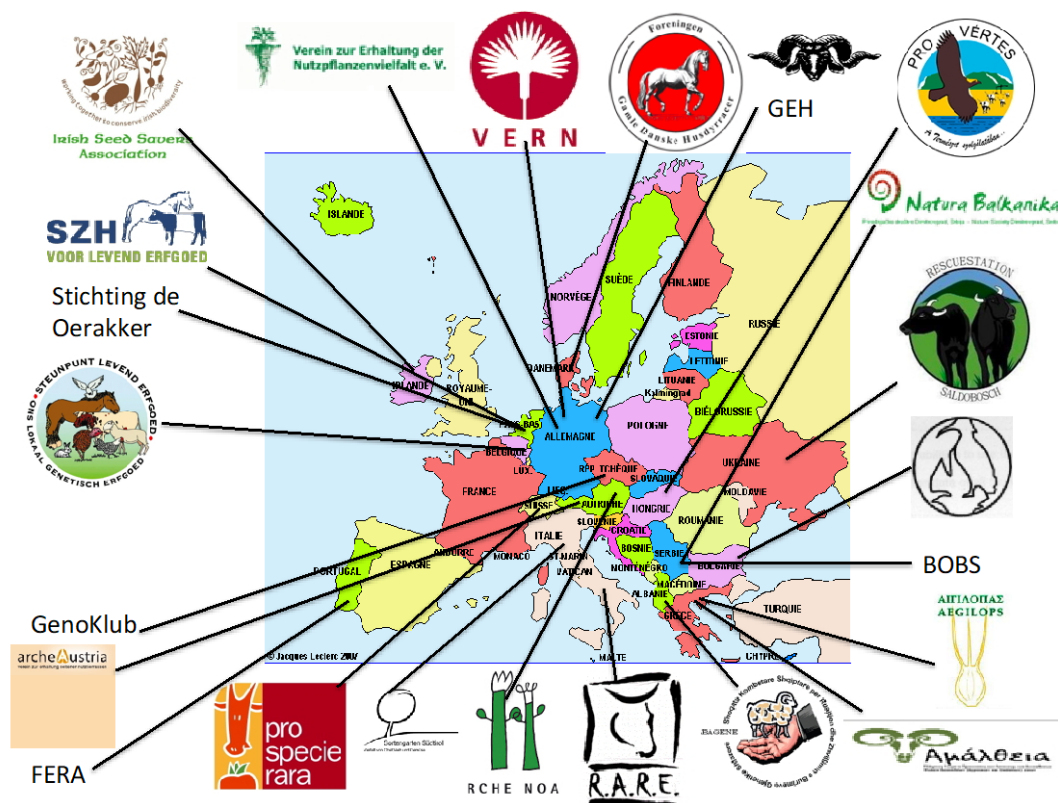
# PART 1: DESCRIPTION

## 1.1 Contextualising the case

The Safeguard for Agricultural Varieties in Europe – SAVE - foundation was established in 1993. Its objective is to maintain the existing diversity of both animal breeds and cultivated varieties. When the foundation was created, just after the fall of the Iron curtain, Eastern Europe still has a rich cultivated biodiversity. SAVE aimed at strengthening the voice of farmers and breeders of crop and farm animal diversity, since it feared genetic erosion by the extension of industrial agriculture to all of Eastern Europe would threaten this wealth of diversity. From then on, SAVE has developed activities to maintain it. To this end, SAVE supports the networking among its members. The basis of its members' work links the issue of agro-biodiversity to rural development in marginal areas. Within areas with special environmental value referred to as "traditional agro-ecosystems" (TAES), SAVE promotes agro-biodiversity as an "option for local populations to improve their incomes and for sustainable landscape management". SAVE brings together 23 national organisations and 2 regional organisations spread across 16 European countries. SAVE runs or participates in projects in 5 geographical areas: Pan-Europe; Balkans; Alps; Carpathians; Mediterranean. Below is the list of SAVE members:

**Regional level:** Dagene (Danube Region), Alpine Network "Pro Patrimonio Montano" (Alpine Region)

**National level:** ALBAGENE (Albania), Arche Austria – Verein zur Erhaltung gefährdeter (Austria), ARCHE NOAH (Austria), Steunpunt Levend Erfgoed SLE (Belgium), Semperviva Society (Bulgaria), GenoKlub (Czech Republic), Association of Old Danish Livestock Breeds (Denmark), GEH Gesellschaft zur Erhaltung alter und gefährdeter Haustierrassen (Germany), VEN – Verein zur Erhaltung der Nutzpflanzenvielfalt (Germany), VERN Verein zur Erhaltung und Reaktivierung von Nutzpflanzen in Brandenburg (Germany), Aegilops Network for Biodiversity and Ecology (Greece), Amaltheia – Greek Society for the protection and conservation of indigenous breeds of domestic animals (Greece), Conservation Foundation Network (Közalapítvány-hálózat) (Hungary), ISSA – Irish Seed Savers Association (Ireland), Associazione R.A.R.E. Razze Autoctone a Rischio di Estinzione (Italy), Sortengarten Suedtirol (Italy), Stichting de Oerakker (Netherlands), SZH Stichting Zeldzame Huisdierrassen (Netherlands), FERA Federação Nacional dos Amoições de Racas Autóctones (Portugal), BOBS, Breeders of old Breeds of Serbia Odgajivaci starih rasa Srbije Slobodan Simic, chairman (Serbia), Natura Balkanika Nature Society (Serbia), PSR – Foundation ProSpecieRara domestic breeds and useful plants (Switzerland), SATrans – Safeguard for Agrobiodiversity in Transcarpathia (Ukraine).



At cross-country level (pan-European), SAVE has 4 projects to promote products from breeds and varieties that contribute to biodiversity. The first is called "Heritaste® Trademark". This project consists of a quality label for the products and services of breeds and varieties. It is the contraction between the word "heritage" and "taste". The second is the "Arca-Deli® Award". This is a prize for good practices in the promotion of products from heritage breeds and varieties. The third consists in revaluing the use of animal traction by donkeys. In response to the decline in its use and associated knowledge, SAVE has created a database on the presence and use of donkey breeds in Europe and has collected a lot of information. Finally, the fourth project is entitled "The Ecological Value of Feral Livestock Populations in Europe". This project focuses on the role of "domestic" animals in park management. For SAVE, "The interaction between the management of indigenous livestock breeds and the traditional agro-ecosystems are of great importance to conservation of both types of biodiversity - the wild and the domesticated. " The project aims to collect data and information about the occurrence of feral breeds of livestock, to connect key actors from the *In Situ* - On Farm conservation areas and nature protection organisations, in order to develop integrated plans for "best management " (SAVE website).

As a separate project, the SAVE foundation manages the Arca-net database, which allows people, travellers in particular, to seek out sites where they can see and learn about rare seeds and breeds ([www.arca-net.info](http://www.arca-net.info)).

## 1.2 « Doing »

### 1.2.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

SAVE does not aim to put seeds into circulation but promotes seed and breed heritage through creating a renewed interest in agro-biodiversity. To this end, SAVE facilitates the production and dissemination of knowledge and the valorisation of the products resulting from the use of agrobiodiversity.

### 1.2.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

SAVE works to raise the visibility and consumption of products from heritage breeds and varieties. This work allows an influence beyond the network or the local association. SAVE has developed three tools for this purpose: a distinctive sign of quality; a search engine and a prize.

The "Heritaste® Trademark" label is a contraction of the terms "Heritage" and "Taste". For SAVE, product development makes it possible, on the one hand, to contribute to the maintenance of biodiversity and, on the other hand, to meet the socio-economic challenges of the regions where this biodiversity exists. A quality label offers the possibility of "contributing to the solution of these problems by creating an income for inhabitants of rural areas. This income is of especial benefit to young people and women."

To be applicable for the label, the production must be local, low-input and non-industrially made, and has to represent a cultural asset. These products are visible in a search engine on the website [www.heritaste.com](http://www.heritaste.com). To stimulate the use of the label, since 2011 SAVE has been developing a prize which highlights the innovations and good practices in the promotion of products derived from heritage breeds and varieties. The Arca-Deli® Award indirectly provides economic returns through increased visibility and media coverage, but it is not a sum of money.

Arca-Deli® Award criteria are:

- Product or service (PoS) must originate from a farm that is connected either to the European Ark Network "Arca-Net" or the "Variety-Savers" Network.
- PoS must serve the *in situ*/on farm conservation of the autochthonous breed or variety.
- PoS must be qualitatively above the average
- PoS must be recommendable as a model or example of good practice.

In addition, SAVE runs the Arca-net database, which provides a mean to connect the general public with places where they can experience crop and breed diversity. The idea of such a database emerged during a project in which SAVE was mapping sites hosting rare animal breeds in order to establish so-called isolation programs in case of epidemics which would threaten the survival of a given species. During this search, they found that (i) sites hosting rare animal breeds often also cultivate rare crop varieties and (ii) it would be worthwhile to advertise these sites for the benefit of the general public, and travelers in particular.

### 1.2.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

The maintenance, development and promotion of varieties and breeds requires the production of knowledge through exchanges between members as well as the promotion of such knowledge and the product itself, in particular through the label.

## 1.3 « Organizing »

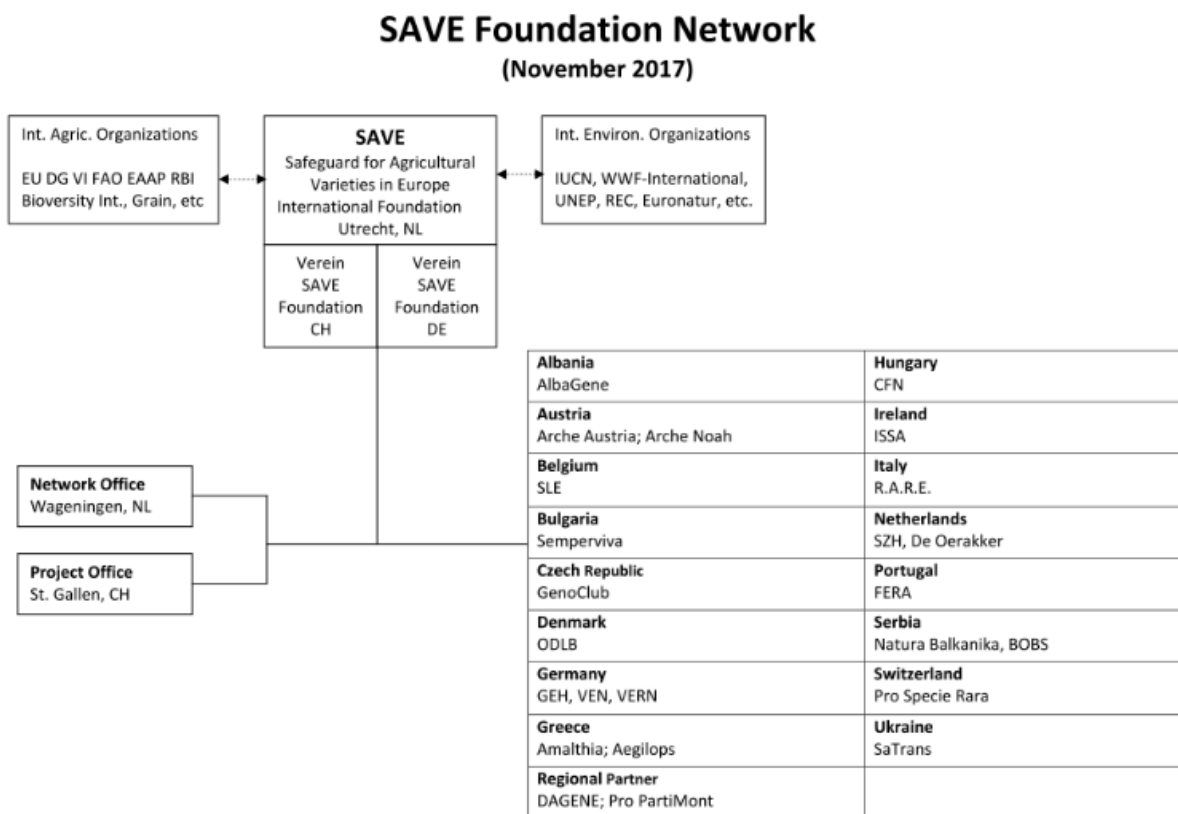
### 1.3.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

SAVE is structured as a foundation under Dutch law. A board of Directors' and an executive committee manage the foundation. At the same time, for improving their access to funding and strengthening advocacy actions, SAVE has created support associations in Germany and Switzerland: SAVE Foundation e.V. and Verein SAVE Foundation Schweiz.

In addition to the board, there is a committee in charge of project monitoring and a council of cooperating partners. This council is composed of experts on animal breeds, plant varieties and marketing. The role of the Cooperating Partners' Council is to advise the Foundation On technical issues and appoint new experts when needed. This council meets once a year.

Currently, one of the challenges for SAVE is the renewal of members of the board and committees. Some of them have been present for a long time. SAVE faces the challenge of finding people who are willing to volunteer to support its actions in favour of biodiversity.

Three employees ensure networking between the partners. They are divided between two offices: the Network Office in Wageningen (Netherlands), hosted by "Stichting Zeldzame Huisdierrassen", a Dutch foundation for rare breeds, and the other in St. Gallen (Switzerland). The diagram below describes the full structure.



source: SAVE website

Regarding the network structure, the coordination has in the past attempted to professionalise further by making roles more formalised. However, this attempt this did not work, since the roles had become overly rigid. On the basis of this

observation, coordination has changed the approach to something more flexible centred on strengthening the coordination between partners. They decided to develop gradually, "as they go".

For several years now, SAVE has been organizing an annual meeting of the network's members. The objective is to learn from each other, about each other. This meeting takes place over 3 days and brings together 30 to 50 people. Farmers are invited but are not very numerous. Two obstacles seem to impact their participation: their availability and the use of English. The annual meeting is punctuated by workshops, visits and recreational moments. In order to stimulate mutual exchange of knowledge, the coordination has recently developed a pitch talk moment. In three minutes, those who want to present a project or learning experience from their organisation can do so. This short presentation allows, on the one hand, to draw the attention of other members to a subject; on the other hand, it offers all partners a perception of the network's diversity. The Network Manager who initiated the "pitch talks" states that at the beginning, people were angry that they had to stop once she rang the bell to announce that the time had expired. In the following year already, members improved their capacity to respect the three minutes limit. They perceived the added value of shorter contributions allowing everyone to present a project. These "pitch talks" facilitate the initiation of further individual exchanges.

The coordination team strives to give inputs to partners and connect them through different projects. For example, during the annual meeting, collaborative work between partners is facilitated.

The outcomes of the annual meeting are summarized in a final report highlighting the important elements for farmers and/or breeders. Thus, the coordination tries to disseminate the content of the meetings to individuals who are members of SAVE organisations.

SAVE's funding is divided between European subsidies and membership fees. In terms of membership fees, SAVE advocates solidarity between the members according to the means they have available. Each member contributes at least 50 euros. Beyond that, each organization contributes 0.5% of the amount of its annual turnover. In terms of subsidies, SAVE does not want to compete in running for competitive tenders with its members, which makes this line of funding more difficult.

### 1.3.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

The promotion of products from heritage breeds and varieties is an effective way to reach and involve consumers in conservation.

SAVE's advocacy work influences how partners at the national level interact with governments. For example, in Kosovo, the fact that the national organization is a member of SAVE has positively changed the relationship of the national organisation with authorities. Policy makers took the organisation more seriously because it is part of an international, European network.

### 1.3.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

SAVE facilitates the collection and sharing of knowledge and know-how among members, while also working on the political dimension of agro-biodiversity conservation.

At the policy level, one staff member stressed that working on heritage varieties leads to dealing with political aspects concerning seeds. For SAVE, farmers' rights are a political issue, especially at the seed level. SAVE notes that the issue of intellectual property rights (IPR) is expanding from varieties to animal breeds. As a result, IPR issues at the plant and animal level are becoming increasingly similar. On the other hand, she notes a difference in the mentalities of "plant keepers" and "animal keepers". In contrast to "plant keepers", "animal keepers" always have always depended on other "animal keepers" to avoid in-breeding, which leads to a circle of breeders around the "herdbook keeping" embedded in a culture of collaboration.

## **PART 2: ANALYSIS**

### **2.1 Knowing**

#### 2.1.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

For SAVE, it is essential that people are dedicated to coordinating the network. Since its inception, staff has been hired

to facilitate information sharing, exchanges and collaboration, while successfully carrying out the various projects the foundation is involved in.

The coordination seeks to involve SAVE members so that they spend time sharing their experiences and do not disperse their efforts.

In terms of fund-raising, SAVE facilitates dialogue between members in order to avoid competition, acting as a kind of "regulator". Thus, SAVE facilitates discussion between partners in a given country and then with members in neighbouring countries (if necessary). One of the people in the coordination team says that SAVE is looking to run the organisation "like a well-running family". Laughing, she points out that in a family, there are different characters, different mentalities.

Another role of the coordination is the production and dissemination of knowledge. The changes brought about by social media allow people to learn from each other in a much more widespread manner. One of the persons in the coordination notes that knowledge no longer comes from an authority and that legitimacy comes directly from the experiences of the people involved. Thus, storytelling becomes essential. Therefore, the coordinating role is not to produce knowledge, but to facilitate its production, organisation, and dissemination. For SAVE, dissemination does not consist in asking members of SAVE organisations to copy "good practices", but to be inspired by them and adapt them to their own personal situation, on their own farm. SAVE's presentation booklet highlights its collaborations with governmental and intergovernmental organizations, universities, gene banks, livestock and farmers' associations and other NGOs promoting conservation.

#### 2.1.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

Being a member of the SAVE network allows members to gain more legitimacy from their national institutions, as in the case of Kosovo.

Also, the Arcanet database, which allows the general public, travellers and tourists in particular, to find sites keeping and demonstrating rare seeds and breeds in a given geographic area, favours the outreach and sharing of knowledge with the general public, beyond the SAVE network.

#### 2.1.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

The work on animal breeds and varieties developed by SAVE since the early 1990s has met the interest of organisations involved in organic farming, who wish to promote biodiversity on their farms, and in the restaurant sector, such as chefs and wider food movements (e.g. Slow Food). By giving value to the diversity in the plates they prepare, they become important links between producers and consumers.

## 2.2 Framing

#### 2.2.1 Properties WITHIN the initiative (closure)

SAVE fights genetic erosion by bringing together and articulating organizations that promote the conservation of varieties and animal breeds in the field and on farm. SAVE is centred around a Germanic and Eastern European core with offices in the Netherlands and Switzerland. SAVE's ambition is to act at the Pan-European level. Member organisations are composed of both professionals and amateurs.

#### 2.2.2 Properties BEYOND the initiative (outreach)

SAVE goes uses the market to promote products from heritage breeds and varieties. The foundation developed a quality label and communication strategy around it. It also targets the general public by facilitating visits to sites hosting rare seeds and breeds through the online Arca-net database.

#### 2.2.3 Transformative effects beyond the initiative

SAVE considers the preservation of a broad genetic base in agriculture an insurance for facing potential future needs and challenges.

SAVE promotes diversity by encouraging a specific market niche linked to the specific culture (agricultural and social) of a territory. This perspective has been crucial for SAVE from the very beginning. The foundation's aim is to link Traditional Agro-Acological Systems (TAES) with the socio-economic development of rural territories that may be more marginal. To this end, SAVE stimulates the exchange of experiences and knowledge between its members. In addition, networking

strengthens each partner's impact in political discussions about heritage animal breeds and varieties.

## 2.3 Networking

The SAVE Foundation addresses both issues of rare crop varieties and breeds. Staff note that sites (farms, homesteads, rural museums) that host rare breeds often are also interested in rare crop varieties and that it is therefore natural to combine both, which also allows for mutual learning.

Four elements enable effective networking between people from different backgrounds and cultures. First, the employee structure of the foundation. The three people in the structure act as a link between the members. They share the knowledge and teachings of each member, in particular through publications and the annual meeting. This meeting is the second element that connects members and allows them to learn from each other. Employees facilitate learning and meeting, through propositions such as the pitch talk. The implementation of pitch talks has enabled a greater number of partners to become better aware of others' activities and interests. The annual meetings are also an opportunity for building trust and companionship through informal exchanges and recreational moments. The third element concerns the "non-competition" approach, particularly on financial aspects. SAVE, through the proportional contribution mechanism, promotes solidarity. A final point raised by one interviewee concerns the size of the foundation. SAVE seeks to have a structure adequate for its capacities. Therefore, a rapid increase in the number of members would threaten the efficiency with which it operates. At the same time, SAVE is seeing a change in the European landscape of organisations involved in cultivated biodiversity. For instance, the ongoing expansion of the European Coordination Let's Liberate Diversity (EC-LLD) raises questions about complementarities and differences with SAVE Foundation. This questioning concerns both the potential for competition and for collaboration between the two platforms on a European scale. The Dynaversity project, with EC-LLD as a project partner and the SAVE Foundation as an involved Skep member, may be an appropriate place to discuss and begin clarifying these questions.

## PART 3: SUMMARY

With regard to the case of Safeguard for Agricultural Varieties in Europe - SAVE Foundation, we highlight two elements.

First of all, the importance within SAVE of linking the protection and enhancement of biodiversity with the socio-economic development of the territories where this diversity is found. Generally, according to SAVE, these territories are relatively marginal. Thus, SAVE suggests a link between agricultural, economic and environmental issues.

A second element concerns the relationship between competition and collaboration between organisations working towards the same objective of recognising and enhancing agro-biodiversity, as these organisations may end up competing in terms of access to similar financial resources.

SAVE offers mechanisms for solidarity, dialogue and sharing between members. Through these, SAVE solves any potential tension between its members. At present, this same type of tension may develop between organisations operating at supranational European level.