



Interview

# A livestock farmer's view

**Andrea Salieri**  
interviewed by  
Valeria Salvatori

Andrea Salieri is a 23-year-old livestock breeder. He raises cattle and goats, mainly focused on dairy. The operation was started by his father several years ago in Foreste Casentinesi National Park so that Andrea could work there once he finished his studies.

## What made you decide to join the programme and host volunteers?

One of the main reasons was to pass on experience of sheep farming to people who have never experienced it themselves, who live in distant places and have no idea what it means. To bring to life the world of small livestock businesses and to introduce them to a world unknown to them.

## What did they help you with?

All the activities necessary for livestock management: leaving in the morning and taking the animals to pasture with the dogs, checking on the dogs and animals. If necessary, even milking and making cheese. Some also offered to help with other activities that had nothing to do with sheep farming, such as helping out on the farm bed and breakfast.

## Was it a problem having volunteers with no previous experience?

At first I thought so, but the selection is done very thoroughly, they were all people suited to the type of life that you lead on a farm.

## Do you think it is better to ask for experience?

No, it would go against the philosophy of the project that wants to bring people closer to a world that is new to them. It might be more comfortable for us, but it wouldn't convey anything.

## Do you think training for volunteers is necessary before starting?

Definitely yes. They should at least know the characteristics of this type of work: the rhythms, the weather conditions, the risks and dangers, safety training and how to resolve difficulties. No specific skills are needed, apart from physical resilience. The rest is taught on the farm.

## Did you need specific training to be a host?

No, but the association's technician came to inspect the farm to assess the situation, its organisation and suitability. She also assessed whether there were people suitable for this experience. You have to be patient and open.

## How do you integrate volunteers and assign tasks?

In the first three or four days we get to know each other and I try to understand what the individual person is best suited to. At that point I try to give them the best possible experience by adapting my requests to the attitudes they have shown. Always within the scope of livestock breeding, of course.

## Are there any safety protocols that have to be followed?

Yes, of course. All volunteers are insured and are provided with PPE (personal protective equipment such as safety shoes, waterproof wellies, safety gloves, etc.).

## Have there been any problems?

No particular difficulties. In four years of the project we have not had any problems with relationships or accidents or allergies. There was just one case of a volunteer with flea allergies, but compatible tasks were assigned.

## Were your expectations met?

Absolutely, yes – actually exceeded! At the beginning we were doubtful, but then we realised that it was going great!

## Has hosting volunteers been beneficial for you?

Definitely, yes, and I hope to continue with it in the coming years.

## Can you suggest any improvements to the project?

The only thing is perhaps the length of stay: instead of two weeks, maybe a month as the minimum stay would be less demanding for breeders. But this also depends on the needs of the people who come.

## Do you have any other comments?

I have nothing to add except that DifesAttiva and the active volunteer programme are fantastic and any small issues have always been sorted out.



Andrea Salieri with his father and three volunteers (Photo: Andrea Salieri).