

#IYM2023

Dr. Schär is seeding a better world by preserving biodiversity.

VItaMì, a project recovering and promoting minor crops.

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On the occasion of the FAO proclaiming 2023 the International Year of Millets, Dr. Schär's presents VItaMì Varietà Italiane di Miglio, a project that aims to develop new millet varieties that will be grown by partner farmers to produce the Schär products of the future.

Biodiversity is one of the most precious resources on Earth. That's why **Dr. Schär**, global leader in food for gluten-free diets and special nutritional needs, **is committed to preserving it by protecting and promoting minor crops such as sorghum, buckwheat, and millet.**

Today, 40% of plant species are at risk of extinction. Rapid climate change, drought, deforestation, urbanisation, pollution and intensive monoculture are among the main causes of this impoverishment.

Sustainable agriculture, an 'accompanied' supply chain free of negative impacts on forests and the implementation of **research projects** aimed at the recovery of naturally gluten-free grains are among the elements underpinning the South Tyrolean company's strategy to oppose the climate emergency and seed a better world. A concrete example of this approach

is **VItaMi - Varietà Italiane di Miglio** - a project that aims to select new millet varieties adapted to European soil and climatic conditions.

Millet is a naturally gluten-free cereal. It has a high fibre, calcium and iron content along with a growth short cycle. It is tolerant to climatic stresses (heat and drought), pests and diseases. These characteristics make it **a nutritious, sustainable food source but also an opportunity to meet diverse dietary needs and support economic growth.**

*“Today, Italy and Europe in general are suffering from increasingly critical climatic conditions, and millet is a resilient, adaptable crop - explains **Ombretta Polenghi, Director of Global Research & Innovation at Dr. Schär** - Our goal with VItaMi is to obtain new, high quality millet varieties with improved agronomic, technological and nutritional characteristics, to be included in the supply chain, capable of responding not only to the new demands of an ever-changing environment and growing areas, but also to the needs of our consumers who have to follow a gluten-free diet. A project that strengthens our bond with the local area, the environment and society.”*

The VItaMi project started in 2020, with the first implementation of crosses between selected millet varieties, and continued over the following years with the greenhouse cultivation of around 6.000 millet lines from four different crosses and the selection of 1.000 plants to be brought into the field. In 2022, the first field trials and the initial selection and evaluation of the best lines began. A thorough and meticulous analysis process that will continue over the next few years with the aim of distributing the first seed to farmers, Dr. Schär's trusted partners, in 2025, and including the seed in the supply chain in 2026.

VItaMi is just the latest of the many projects carried out by Dr. Schär in support of biodiversity. In 2016, in fact, the Dr. Schär R&D Centre promoted Re-Cereal, designed to recover and promote minor cereals. Over the years, the company has also engaged in several variety trials involving gluten-free minor crops such as sorghum and buckwheat. In Poland, it is working to increase the presence of bees in the fields and stem the decline of pollinators. Finally, in partnership with Laimburg Research Center and with seed banks such as CropTrust and Genebank Tyrol, it has created Field100, one of the most biodiverse fields ever cultivated.

“We have made great progress and are proud to make a daily contribution to the sustainability of our environment with high quality products made from selected ingredients grown in harmony with the land,” comments **Hannes Berger, CEO of Dr. Schär**. *“At Dr. Schär, we care about the wellbeing of people and the planet and will continue to strive to pursue our mission.”*

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About Dr. Schär:

Our story began in 1922 in South Tyrol, the heart of the Alps, with a vision to improve the lives of people with special nutritional needs. Ever since the company was founded, proximity to the consumer has been our guiding commitment. Our core competence combines the specific, complex requirements placed on nutrition with dedication and joy of life. Responsibility, progress and proximity are the values that give us our stability and reliability. We are a family-run company with a global reach, with 18 sites in 11 countries and more than 1,600 employees worldwide. Our products are available in over 100 countries.

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