



Implementations of Regulation 853/2004/EC on wild game in the Region Emilia Romagna (Italy) in the period 2006-2012.

A growth opportunity for hunters and official authorities in the interest of food safety and protection of the wildlife resource.

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The recurrence of wild ungulates in the Emilia-Romagna region

In the last 50 years many agricultural areas in the Apennines of Emilia Romagna (RER) have been abandoned and reoccupied by spontaneous vegetation, doubling the forest area and extending the bushy areas. This has encouraged the recent reappearance of wild ungulates, after a lapse of a few centuries. At the beginning of reoccupation, in 1989 have been hunted only n.1.640 wild boars, while in 2011 were slaughtered n. 37.697 wild ungulates, of which n. 20.949 wild boars, n. 15.419 roe deer, n. 931 fallow deer, n. 7 moufflons and n. 391 red deer (Fig. 1). At the end of the 80s the RER had foreseen the substantial changes in wildlife framework and introduced for hunters the obligation to attend specific official courses in order to manage censuses and implement hunting methods approved for the new situation (selective hunting methods required for cervids and bovinds).

Wild game, Regulation 853/2004/EC and training of hunters in hygiene and health

The first experience with the qualification of trained people (hunters) pursuant to Regulation 853/2004/EC, Coach III, Sec. IV, Chapter 1, took place in 2006, and was revised by a multidisciplinary team (veterinarians and wildlife technicians: most part of the Authors) which produced training material (distributed since 2009) and recommendations for guideline approved by the RER in 2012 on official courses on health and wild game meat hygiene, addressed primarily to hunters enabled to hunt local ungulates (roe deer, fallow deer, red deer, moufflon and wild boar) with selective methods. The objective of the training is not only to simplify sending of hunted large wild ungulates to an Approved Game Handling Establishment (AGHE) but above all to encourage the circulation between hunters a gyuide line of good hygiene practice for the management of the shoot game. The official training material consists of 7 files in *. pdf format containing n. 237 slides that can be used on PC, video projection, but also printed on A5 paper, in black and white or in color, which constitute the text to follow the lessons provided by the instructor (a veterinarian). With the aim of ensuring maximum integration with the objectives of regional Veterinary Services, infectious and parasitic diseases commented during the lessons are those included in the annual wildlife health monitoring plan of the RER, that basically includes some zoonoses (brucellosis, tuberculosis, Lyme disease, leishmaniasis, erysipelas, tularemia, rabies, avian influenza, trichinellosis, mange, echinococcosis, prion diseases, ...) and diseases important for the considerable regional livestock (dairy cattle, pigs, poultry) and wild populations too, for a total of over 63.000 samples examined (2006-2011); Complete the training package sufficient information about *post mortem* changes, contaminants, good handling practices and conservation for hunted game as well as a summary of the European, national and local standards. In order to facilitate access to all training materials and supplementary recommended readings (eg Winkelmayr et al., 2007, 2008), from 2011 the RER ensures free access to the pages of his official web site (see reference) where it is also possible to download the annual results of wildlife health regional monitoring, thus facilitating the dissemination of the objectives of veterinary public health, not only among the trained persons according to Regulation 853 / 2004/EC, Coach III, Sec. IV, Chapter 1, but also among hunters, veterinarians, wildlife technicians, consumers and citizens interested. Since 2006 about 500 people (7% of regional wild ungulate hunters, but also some non-hunters wildlife lovers) have been officially enabled to the examination of large wild game for its submission to AGHEs, but the extent of downloading and of participation to dissemination initiatives based on the material available on the official website of the RER (a unique opportunity at present in Italy) shows that the main interest of regional hunters (and many outside the region) is to adopt good practices for the proper handling and storage of hunted large wild game and to improve the possibility of using game meat more safely for private domestic consumption and to improve the gourmet utilization.

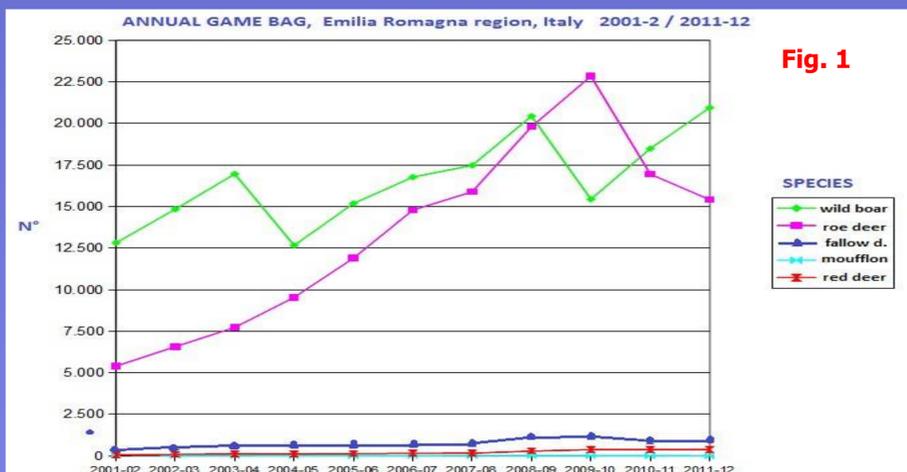


Fig. 1



bags of blurred pieces of game meat, unhygienic and badly frozen

Wild game and bad practices of handling and storage

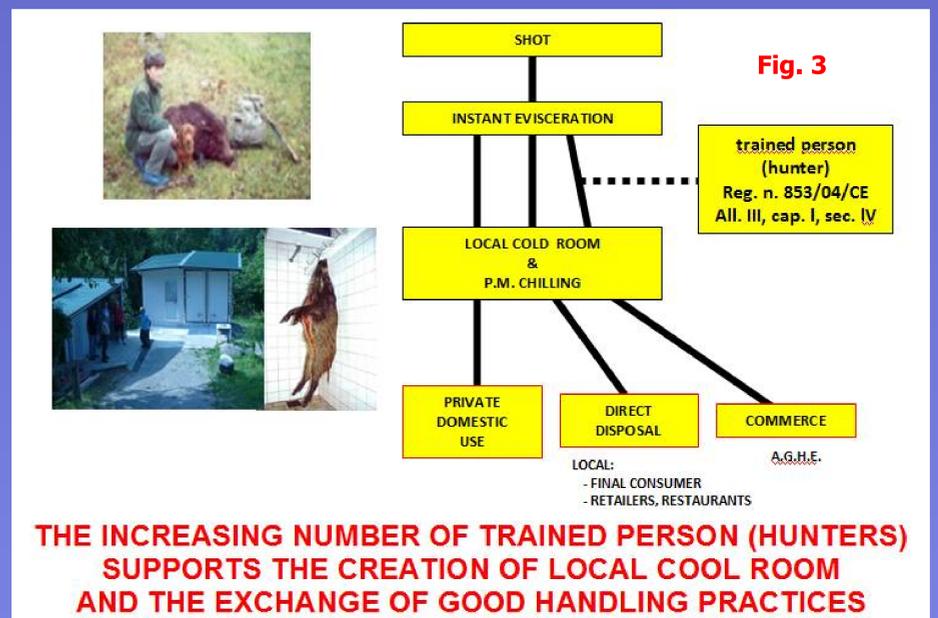
With the start of boar hunting, in '70, have rooted bad handling practices (delayed evisceration, butchering and hot portioning in inappropriate locations) then unfortunately extended to other wild ungulates, resulting in private domestic consumption and direct supply of game meat of very poor quality (Fig. 2) and favoring a pseudo-culinary tradition based on strong marinades and long cooking. Is not a coincidence that hunters, restaurateurs and consumers across Italy consider as typical and traditional basically two dishes cooked with hunted game: *pasta* and *polenta* <with game meat sauce>.

Wild game and good practices of handling and storage

The training courses seem to have a positive impact on an increasing number of regional hunters, spreading good standards in managing hunted game. In particular, up to approximately 2 years ago, almost all hunting lodges and hunters private houses lacked cold rooms for the hunted big game, but now their use is spreading (Fig. 3). In some of the 9 regional provinces (eg Modena, Bologna, Reggio Emilia, Parma) the availability of cold rooms seems to improve overall the safety and quality of private consumption, and this favors the first timid experience of change even in the local restaurants, thanks to n. 18 AGHE up now in business, a small initial network that seeks to meet the needs of a complex mechanism of evolution of knowledge, practices and culinary habits. It should be emphasized that, by implementing the Regulation 853/2004/EC, the Veterinary Services of the RER have chosen an integrated approach (Focacci et al., 2011) based on training and educating hunters, on encouraging the registration of cold rooms in hunting lodges, on the recognition of AGHE for placing game meat on the market, updating of public veterinarians working in AGHE establishments and/or involved in training of hunters. This is also encouraging the first researches about the high nutritional quality of local game meat for the excellent relationship between polyunsaturated and saturated fatty acids (Barbani et al., 2012), while the Region is working on ways to allow consumers to identify the peculiarity of the local game meat produced in accordance with good practice.

Critical issues and proposals

The course material approved by the RER for people (hunters) to be trained in health and hygiene of wild game is the first experience of implementation of Regulation 853/2004 (Ferri et al., 2009), so revisions and adjustments are recommended. It remains, however, unresolved the main critical point of the training of the Italian hunter, which obtains the first hunting license with a public examination but following a course delivered by not accredited instructors, and especially based on non-official material, lacking or inadequate in terms of health and hygiene. If you could include in the first license training, for example, a 5% of the material processed according official regional directions on health and hygiene, it may be possible to increase it, for example, to 10% in the preparation of the hunter of ungulates with selective methods; this would allow to improve and further elevate the quality of the preparation of trained hunters and people pursuant to Regulation 853/2004/EC. The direct consequence would be the emergence among Italian hunters of an awareness that is now missing, and that is to be to all effects primary producers, with responsibility for food safety to their own families and to consumers. An increase in the perceived value for the safety and quality of game meats can only positively influence the process of renovation of the hunters, the sustainability of selective hunting to ungulates and, ultimately, on their protection.



THE INCREASING NUMBER OF TRAINED PERSON (HUNTERS) SUPPORTS THE CREATION OF LOCAL COOL ROOM AND THE EXCHANGE OF GOOD HANDLING PRACTICES

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