

# F.A.Q.

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## Topic and reasons

These are the most frequently asked questions about my life, from recent past to intended future. I am answering them in this document to avoid repeating myself. The document will shift as I move forward and evolve with the situation.

## Sources of income and how they came to be

I completed my Master's Degree in Marine Biology at the beginning of the Italian COVID-19 lockdown of 2020. With tourism being indefinitely suspended, I could not work as a naturalistic tour guide as per plan. I took on all the courses about web development and data analysis that were being offered for free amidst the lockdown. I moved from Ravenna to Malta to take advantage of the active job market, started or participated in several Open-Source projects as a side gig, and got a job as Quality Assurance Officer in a genomics company thanks to my "hybrid" role as biologist and programmer, ultimately becoming its software developer. I moved back to Italy, opened VAT, and now work remotely with the same company.

## Why leave Malta?

Due to concerns about the global economic, cultural, and environmental situation, I felt the need to focus on self-sustainability and independence from as many outside inputs as I reasonably can. 100% independence is not the goal, I just don't want to participate in what I see as an oppressive and manipulative system. For this project, I needed to own, not rent, a house and some land, but the real estate market of Malta, its weather, and its culture, excluded it as a viable option. I returned to Italy while looking for the best place for my project.

## Why buy the house there?

The property had to meet certain requirements.

It had to be located in the EU, for ease of bureaucracy and my personal enjoyment of its standards of living. Specifically, in a country whose climate was not too cold for me nor the crops I meant to grow, and whose language I could speak (Italy, Spain, Malta) or could confidently learn it fairly quickly (Portugal, Croatia).

Of these, Malta has too expensive land and is heavily prone to drought, among other issues; Portugal and Croatia would have been a good plan B if need be, but no need to search there first thing; Spain, my beloved, offered something similar to Italy, so I chose the latter to be able to stay close to my native cuisine (I'm a sucker for sfogliatella, mozzarella, friarielli, etc.), my family (whose members are the only individuals who, given the chance, have not disappointed me), to spend less on working on the renovations until the house was ready, and to avoid any possibility of bureaucratic ordeals or failed inclusion as a foreigner (Malta was enough).

Once Italy was chosen, which region?

- Remove those North of Tuscany and Emilia Romagna, as it is too cold for me.
- Remove those prone to drought (Puglia and Calabria).
- Remove those so isolated I might as well have chosen Spain (Sardinia and Sicily)
- Remove those prone to flooding (Emilia Romagna with its second flood in a year)

Remaining: Basilicata, Campania, Marche, Molise, Lazio, Tuscany, Umbria.

Among these, I searched for properties up to my budget in cash as I did not want to deal with the banking system, with at least 2000 sqm of agricultural land and 100 sqm of house surface, in a good state, within reasonable distance from the necessities (doctor, pharmacy, groceries, a bar that made good espresso), with no neighbours, with some form of internet access, electricity, and clean water. Bonus points for the area between Rome and Naples (two major airports, close to home so least expensive renovation costs), for fireplaces, for wells, for multiple smaller rooms rather than fewer larger ones.

What I found was well within the budget and in a surprisingly good state, with almost 10.000 sqm of land, 2 fireplaces, a masonry oven, closest permanently resident neighbour at 180m, and a stunning view. The town had all the necessities mentioned (yes, I taste-tested the espresso to check that box), and is halfway between Rome and Naples.

Mind you, I am not saying it is the best at everything I mentioned. There were larger/more beautiful/newer houses too high up in the mountains or too isolated, and better placed houses who needed much more work done. This is just the best compromise I was able to find, although by far.

## Are you vegetarian?

No, I just believe that the use of resources (land, water, time, effort, fuel, materials) for a meat-based diet under the current system is far too high. Since I want to own the means of my own sustenance, or at least most of them, while also employing my time and resources efficiently, I lean towards a plant-based diet.

## Do you drink alcohol?

Yes, I appreciate sweeter alcoholic beverages, like limoncello, nocillo, Bayleys. I don't appreciate most wine and beers.

## What plants will you grow?

I am not a farmer by profession. I don't care much for the profit of it. It is a backup plan to feel safe in these uncertain times. I personally feel calmer knowing that, if the food supply chain is interrupted, I won't starve. I still plan to buy what I like and do not produce myself.

### Qualities I seek in a plant:

- Reproducibility. The plant needs to be easy to reproduce. They reproduce by themselves? The best. I can simply take a cut of a branch/root and plant it? Great. They produce seeds in their first year? Good. If the plant needs to overwinter to produce seeds the following year, I don't want it. Disqualified: carrots.
- Storability. If I can't easily store it over winter, it's pointless to grow hundreds of kilos of it. If it can be picked and put on a shelf for months, like potatoes and pumpkins, it is the best. If it can be easily transformed like dried apricots or frozen spinach, it is a close second. Disqualified: cereals (need to be shelled, winnowed, ground, just to get the flour), lettuce.
- Taste. I only grow stuff that I personally eat. The lion doesn't concern himself with customer satisfaction. Disqualified: a whole lot of things.

- Independence. Perennials have much lower yield than annuals, but require minimal maintenance to reproduce, resist diseases and insects, they help soil structure and biodiversity. This means trees, many spices, brushes, and even garlic and some onions. Plant once, harvest forever, just don't expect to automate and sell on a large scale.
- Hardiness. The plant needs to be able to grow at temperatures occasionally dropping slightly below freezing. Yes, I can use greenhouses, but they require work and upkeep, so I am not considering them for thousand of square meters. Maybe one for a little patch of warm-enjoying, fragile plants (tomatoes, tobacco, tomato). Disqualified: many citrus.
- No risk of cross-pollination. Closely related plants may pollinate each other. If they do, the fruit is still good, but its seeds will produce a hybrid of the parent plants, which is not always fertile itself nor is sure to maintain the taste and properties of the parents, making me waste time and seeds. For this reason, many pumpkins and melons, or different varieties of corn, cannot be grown together. I pick the one I prefer and that's it.

In conclusion:

Does it need lots of processing? Out. Does it take lots of care? Out. Do I not like its taste? Out. Does it cross with other selected plants? Out. (If perennial) Does it die at -5°C? Out.

Exceptions:

Some excluded plants are grown at a much smaller scale, like tomatoes and tobacco in a greenhouse, and figs, pomegranate, and prickly pears because my parents like them.

The plants so far.

## **Annuals**

Group A (5 Sisters): Corn, Squash, Beans, Sunflower, Amaranth

Group B (Legumes): Beans, Peas, Peanuts.

Group C (Starch): Potatoes

Group D (Green leaves): Spinach, Friarielli

Sweet potatoes separately (they need very low nitrogen)

## **Perennials**

Trees: apples, persimmons, figs, prickly pears, pomegranate, walnuts, chestnuts, carob, apricots, orange (or other hardy variety), lemon (or other hardy variety)

Other perennials: perennial kale, bietola, rucola, asparago, good king henry, garlic, Egyptian onions, grape (for raisins, not wine), many "spices", strawberries, blackberries, raspberries, Jerusalem artichokes

## **Will you have animals?**

For the reason explained in *Are you vegetarian?*, I plan to have chickens, for eggs. That's a very good utility per land usage ratio and utility per amount of work ratio. Other animals require a larger use of land or a much

higher degree of responsibility and involvement that I do not plan to have, as I am not doing this professionally. It is easier to find someone to check the chicken feeder and the drip irrigation while organising for a holiday than it is to find someone who can manage a herd of sheep/goats, care for a donkey/horse.

For similar reasons (finding someone willing, not the land use) I most likely won't get bees.

Animals are a huge responsibility.

## Will you get a tractor?

I don't plan to. As can be deduced from *What plants will you grow?*, I will rely heavily on permaculture (favoring plants that overwinter, self-replicate, are resilient, etc.) and no-till agriculture (favoring biodiversity in the topsoil by not tilling yearly but rather letting life do its thing), so I will just take it at my own speed and see what I can manage by myself with tools I can reasonably expect to be able to fix (or to find someone who can).

Yes, weeds will grow, and they will give a three dimensional space to biodiversity to thrive in, while keeping the soil from eroding, and even fixing carbon dioxide into biological matter that will sooner or later enter the food cycle.

No, I won't be able to plow the whole hectare with my manual tools, but neither do I need to, as large parts will be left wild and used for growing firewood trees, other parts will be the orchard, so not to be plowed, other parts closer to the house will be lawn/garden, so just mowed, and then some parts will be for annuals (that's where the tools will mostly be used).

## Will you open a B&B?

I may. The house has a separate area that could be used for that purpose. If anything, I will see whether people have interest in the type of activity or stay I will be able to effortlessly provide, and if that interest is at a price that counterweights my burning passion for some peace and quiet.

## Will you get better internet?

People seem to believe that, in order to work remotely, one needs hundreds of Mbps. That is not the case if you are not consuming several different forms of media at once to avoid the fleeting chance of an original thought occurring. A video call takes around 2 - 6 Mbps up/down load, a 1080p video in streaming takes just as much. Messaging takes breadcrumbs.

I have worked on the literal road with 3 Mbps from my phone's hotspot with no issue whatsoever.

You don't think it's possible? Skill issue.

Now, for the comfort of it, I even considered the idea, and the sheer incompetence of Internet Service Providers bewildered me, but my rage at the current state of the capitalist machine can barely be contained in this pamphlet or expressed with words, so I would rather broadcast my rejection of their terms in 144p than my acceptance of them in 4k.

## It just takes a little bit of extra work to...

If you would like to provide that little bit of extra work for free, be my guest. I plan to read, nap, travel, create, chill, fuck, and fill my time with whims.

## How do you know this stuff?

I read a lot. I take notes. I do calculations based on those notes. They may not be the most accurate, but this is all I can do.