



Opening speech

Good afternoon everyone. Welcome to Rome and welcome to this EU workshop on *“Responding to consumers’ needs: a qualitative assessment”*, organized within the OH-FINE project.

My name is Bianca Ferraiolo. I am the Head of Cittadinanzattiva-ACN's representative office in Brussels, and I am very pleased to be moderating this session today.

Let me start with a simple observation:

when we talk about organic farming, we often focus on production, innovation, and standards. But too rarely we start from the people who ultimately give meaning to all of this — consumers.

This workshop is precisely about shifting that perspective.

And I am particularly pleased to see such a diverse group in the room today made by 13 consumer organisations from 11 different countries. This is exactly the kind of European diversity and experience that can make this discussion truly valuable.

At the same time, I would also like to warmly welcome our speakers and project partners who are joining us remotely — your contribution is equally essential to bridging perspectives across the consortium.

The OH-FINE project is built on a very strong and timely ambition: to strengthen farmers’ capacities while at the same time responding to evolving consumer needs and expectations. And this is not just a communication exercise — it is a structural choice.

Because, if we want organic farming to scale, to be trusted, and to be sustainable in the long term, it must reflect not only what can be produced, but also what citizens value, expect, and are willing to support.

This is where the role of Active Citizenship Network comes in. As part of the OH-FINE consortium, we are committed to ensuring that consumer perspectives are not an afterthought, but fully integrated into the project’s approach and outcomes.

Over the next two days, this workshop will give us the opportunity to do exactly that: to listen, to exchange, and to co-create.

We will build on the work already carried out within OH-FINE — from the development of a European Organic Farming Learning Community to the creation of tools and platforms supporting farmers, consumers, and policymakers — and we will focus on one key question:

How do we make organic farming truly responsive to citizens' needs across Europe?

Today's session is designed not only to present the project, but also to actively involve you — as representatives of consumer organisations — in shaping key messages that will accompany its future development.

Let me briefly walk you through the agenda.

We will start with an introduction and a tour de table, to set the scene and bring everyone into the discussion.

We will then move to a presentation of the OH-FINE project, with Raquel Arroyo Palomares, coordinator of the project, who will guide us through how the project is working to connect farmers' capacities with consumer expectations.

This will be followed by a session on the Organic Farming Learning Community and the Community Platform, with Lieve De Cock and Ángel Adell, who will present how knowledge, innovation, and collaboration are being structured at European level.

After a short break, the second part of the afternoon will be more interactive.

We will move from discussion to co-creation, collecting your views and working together on key messages around organic products and consumer expectations across Europe.

This is really the core of today's work.

Because the objective is not only to talk about consumers — but to give consumers a voice, and to translate that voice into something tangible: messages, insights, and outputs that can travel beyond this room.

So, I would like to invite you to actively engage, challenge, and contribute throughout the session.

Let's make this a space for honest exchange and practical outcomes.

I would now like to invite Mariano Votta, Director of ACN, to give the opening introduction. Then we will move on to the tour de table, where everyone can briefly introduce themselves, their association and the country they are representing.

Mariano, the floor is yours.