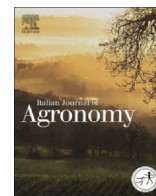




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Italian Journal of Agronomy

journal homepage: www.sciencedirect.com/journal/italian-journal-of-agronomy

Editorial

The Italian Journal of Agronomy has started a new partnership with Elsevier as publisher. The previous publisher, PagePress, managed its publication for the past 13 years, from 2011 to 2023. During this period, the official journal of the Italian Society of Agronomy (SIA) achieved some of the most significant advancements in its long history. From 2008, the journal's articles have been made available gold open access online. In 2011, the Italian Journal of Agronomy was indexed by Scopus and, in 2015, by Web of Science (WOS). Since then, the Italian journal of Agronomy has experienced continuous growth in international rankings, reaching the first quartile of the Agronomy subject category in WOS in 2023. We acknowledge PagePress for the professional support provided during this successful pathway.

This milestone comes after a long story of the official journal of the Italian Society of Agronomy, formerly *Rivista di Agronomia*, that was firstly published 58 years ago, in 1967, one year after the SIA foundation. The journal was originally published in Italian language until 1989, when abstracts and captions started to be available in English. In 1997, the SIA started the publication of a new international journal beside the *Rivista di Agronomia*: the Italian Journal of Agronomy. For more than 10 years the two journals were published by two different Editors in chief and publishers. None was indexed by WOS or Scopus yet, while this was becoming a pre-requisite for researchers and research assessments. In 2005, after some 40 years of continuous publication, the SIA did not publish any article on both journals. As a consequence, the SIA General Assembly then decided to merge the two journals into one, published by Forum in English. The new journal was called Italian Journal of Agronomy/*Rivista di Agronomia*. In 2008 the new SIA Steering Committee was established and in 2010 started the partnership with PagePress, the first open access publisher in Italy. This decision transformed the Italian Journal of Agronomy into an open access, online journal, with the ambition to achieve a more international visibility and a good ranking in the Scopus and WOS databases.

During the extraordinary session of the General Assembly on 11 October 2023, the SIA members decided to invest in the future of the journal by developing the new partnership with Elsevier. The main reason for this decision is the ambition for the Journal to gain more visibility in the global agronomy scientific community, and to combine the editorial policy of one of the most lively scientific societies in agronomy with a top professional profile of a publisher like Elsevier. The ownership of the Italian Journal of Agronomy will remain with SIA, which continue to be responsible for its editorial policy, through its Editor in Chief and editorial board, nominated by the SIA Steering Committee. Therefore, the new partnership with Elsevier will not change the independent editorial policy and the non-profit nature of the Italian Journal of Agronomy (Perniola et al., 2020).

The decision of the SIA General Assembly was well considered, following a careful evaluation of several proposals received from authoritative world scientific publishers. The final decision was made by selecting the publisher that could provide top editorial quality, highest international visibility, and the capacity to support the journal future development on a global scale. Elsevier will therefore play the fundamental roles of promotion, support and professional advice on the journal development strategy, in a critical period of rapid transition of the international scientific publishing arena.

With this new partnership, the Italian Journal of Agronomy editorial policy and scopes will be further enhanced to attract more international contributions on a wide range of topics of scientific interest for agronomy and crop science. The Editorial board is being reinforced, in the perspective to extend the range of skills and competences, ensure a high quality of the review process and minimize the timing between submission and acceptance. In 2023, the average time between submission and acceptance was 2 months. In the past three years, the articles of the Italian Journal of Agronomy were published by authors from 42 countries, mainly from Europe (58%), including 33% from Italy, both with a significant decreasing trend) and Asia (24%), with about one third of the published articles arising from international collaborations.

The partnership with Elsevier was recommended by the SIA General Assembly also to support the Journal development in the difficult contingency of the highly dynamic Gold Open Access (GOA) publishing arena, with a focus on Agricultural sciences. The increasing interest of both authors and readers of scientific papers on GOA journals is evident: some 50% of scholarly articles are now GOA (Dudley, 2021). The gross revenues associated with Gold Open Access (GOA) publishing grew +67% from 2020 to 2023 when it was over 2.1 billion USD, of which agricultural science represents some 5% of the total. In agricultural sciences, over 85% of the total revenues from GOA papers and 52% of the articles are from journals with an Article Processing Charge (APC) higher than 2000 USD. The increasing trend in GOA publishing revenues is more than proportional with respect to the +36% increase of the total number of GOA articles in the same period, hence APC rates have substantially increased in the recent years (Morrison, 2018). Interestingly, the APC rate is closely correlated with the Journal's Impact factor and hence also with author's publishing preference (Gray, 2020). These trends apparently reached a plateau in 2022–23, indicating that the transition pathway to GOA is possibly approaching an end (Crawford, 2024).

While many research programs (e.g. all research projects funded in the EU) require that all published papers are GOA, the ongoing debate on the side effects of GOA publishing is lively (Gray, 2020; Dudley, 2021; Ma et al., 2024). The linear proportionality between the number

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijagro.2024.100007>

Available online 17 July 2024

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of published articles and publishers' revenues and the "publish or perish" paradigm informing the research practice of many PhD students and young researchers worldwide have been strong drivers for some commercial GOA publishers to create new spaces for "fast and easy publishing". In this context, GOA journals owned by non-profit and independent scientific societies like the Italian Journal of Agronomy somehow navigate against the tide and provide alternative publishing spaces where quality is the priority vs. quantity. Some 63% of total GOA articles are from journals publishing more than 150 articles per year: it is not difficult to identify single GOA journals owned by commercial publishers releasing thousands of articles a year. There are no specific statistics available on the web about the differences in journals' metrics of GOA journals owned by scientific societies vs others. However, the sharp target differences and the benefits of publishing in scientific society-owned journals are evident (Chytrý et al., 2023; Gigante et al., 2020). The choice made by SIA is also consistent with the principles of "bibliodiversity" and open science (Ma et al., 2024).

In this dynamic context, the new partnership between the SIA-owned Italian Journal of Agronomy and the top ranked publisher Elsevier is aiming to generate a rare authoritative publishing space in Agronomy and crop science, for authors and readers. Until 2023, SIA has financially supported the Journal to keep the APC as low as possible. However, this was not sustainable in the long run and somehow is not aligned with authors' preferences and expectations. However, the APC with Elsevier is being set up in agreement with SIA considering net publishing costs vs. the quality of the service. From the SIA side, all revenues will be invested in the journal development and SIA statutory missions.

Last, but not least, for the new cover of the Italian Journal of Agronomy we chose a beautiful shot taken by Dr. Marco Toderi, a member of the Italian Society of Agronomy and researcher at the Polytechnic University of Marche in Ancona (Italy), who sadly passed away two years ago. Marco had a special capacity to combine interdisciplinary science practice with the art of photography. The photo

shows how Marco perceived the beautiful hills of the socio-agricultural landscape of the Marche region in Italy, near Castelleone di Suasa, his birthplace. Courtesy of Marzia Lorenzetti, Edoardo, Giulio and Maddalena Toderi.

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