



3 QUESTIONS TO

MARTA CORTEGANO

Associação Terra Sintrópica (Portugal)



**WINNER OF THE PRIMA WOMAN
GREENING FOOD SYSTEMS AWARD**



Forestry Engineer Marta Cortegano, co-founder of Terra Sintrópica association, has been recognized for her project “**BLOOM – Building Lives of Optimism and Opportunities for Women in the Semi-arid through Regeneration.**”

Working in Mértola, Portugal, one of Europe’s most sparsely populated regions, Marta Cortegano leads initiatives to combat desertification and land abandonment.

Her project implements collaborative governance models that foster community capacity-building and agroecological transition, creating positive impacts across social, natural, and financial dimensions.



What inspired you to launch BLOOM?

"My family migrated from Alentejo to Lisbon in search of a better life, convinced that Alentejo was a region of scarcity.

*When I look at this region—forgotten for many years—I realize that **its true richness and abundance lie hidden in its people and landscape**, urgently needing recognition.*

This can be achieved through inspiration, the pursuit of technical solutions, and, most importantly, a paradigm shift in how we collaborate with both people and nature.

*The work of Terra Sintrópica and Mértola as a Future Lab, initiated by committed women, proves that **it is possible to spark a movement for change**, from the local to the regional level."*





How does community participation and collaborative governance play a role in the success of your initiative?

*“From production to consumption, Terra Sintrópica has been implementing **collaborative governance models that foster community capacity-building and awareness-raising**, promoting the transfer of knowledge and best practices in alignment with the local agroecological transition strategy.*

Through activities in schools, involving children, parents, and elders; collaborations with research centers; initiatives with farmers and consumers; engagement with social stakeholders; and the crucial partnership with local authorities, the process embraces a collaborative governance system that is both intuitive and built on the continuous creation of trust, responsibility, and care (for both people and the Earth)”





In your view, how can agroecology help transform semi-arid regions like Mértola into more sustainable and thriving areas?

“Agroecology enables us to ensure food production while respecting the ecological processes, functions, and services of the ecosystem.

This knowledge is essential if we are to safeguard the planet's future capacity to produce food in both quality and quantity, while simultaneously ensuring access to water and other vital ecosystem services—a challenge that becomes even more pertinent in semi-arid areas.

In our case, systems such as succession agroforestry, syntropic agriculture, and regenerative agriculture are viewed as technical solutions with great potential, deserving of close attention from the scientific community.

*However, **agroecology goes beyond the way we produce food; it also considers how the entire food system is organized.** This is why Terra Sintrópica focuses on the food system and the agroecological transition from field to plate, developing alternative forms of relationships within communities and throughout the food system, all grounded in care as the central value to cultivate.”*





All Pictures: ©Marta Cortegano

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