

Stefania BUFFA RISO



We grow, the right way

OUR STORY

The land has always been a member of the Buffa-Ridone family. A good and generous land that has shaped the lives of three generations, especially the lives of the women in our family.

It all began with Renza, born in 1933, the daughter of the man who was known as the “*capo cavallante*” — the person responsible for looking after horses on farms at the beginning of the last century. This occupation forced the family to move every year from one farmhouse to another in search of work and a way to support the whole family. It was a family made up of many women, whose value and contribution were recognised by their great-grandfather in a way that was rarely seen at that time.

Grandmother Renza thus “migrated” from her native hills of Novara to Robbio, in the province of Pavia, surrounded by rice fields — endless rice fields — a world that none of them had ever known before.

Those were harsh and difficult years, and Renza began working as a “*servetta*” (a young domestic helper) for the owner of the farmhouse at the time. In 1955, together with her husband Alessandro Ridone, she began their life as farmers. Little by little, they acquired more and more land, which from then on, they would dedicate exclusively to rice cultivation.

It was there that Renza discovered the mission of her life: becoming a *mondina*, a rice field worker. A mission she truly carried out until the age of 80.

Renza and Alessandro had two daughters, one of whom is Rosella Ridone.

The Buffa branch of our story begins with Valentino, born in 1918, Stefania's grandfather. In 1965, he showed a rare courage and entrepreneurial spirit, especially unconventional for the agricultural world of the Pavia area at that time.

He entered the competition to lease Cascina Casalè — the farmhouse where the Buffa family still lives today and manages its land — and, against all expectations, managed to convince the broker to entrust the property's management to him, despite competing with families who were far wealthier and more influential at the time.

A true pioneer, considered by traditional farmers to be a little crazy (but this is often the destiny of all innovators), Valentino moved the entire Buffa family — his wife and his children Pierantonio and his daughter — to Casalè di Sotto. There, he began cultivating forage and rice while also raising dairy cattle.

In 1970, at just 14 years old, Pierantonio was already managing the farmhouse's cattle barn after school. In 1977, he inherited his father's same unconventional entrepreneurial spirit: he travelled to Arkansas, USA, for a month to study, understand and adopt new breeding and artificial insemination techniques, which were not yet available in Italy at the time.

And it was during this period that the paths of the Ridone and Buffa families crossed: Rosella and Pierantonio met in 1976, and in 1982 they married, joining not only their lives but also their shared passion for the land and for rice cultivation.

In 1988, they decided to focus all their efforts and investments on the agricultural side of the business, which was proving to be more profitable, and they discontinued the dairy farming activity. In 1990, their first daughter, Federica, was born, followed by Stefania in 1993.

However, fate had a difficult challenge in store for their young family: in 1992, Pierantonio was involved in a serious road accident which, after leaving him between life and death for almost a year, resulted in permanent tetraplegia.

Despite his disability and the immense challenges they faced, Rosella and Pierantonio, with the invaluable support of maternal grandmother Renza, managed to successfully run the farm and raise their daughters with strong values rooted in love and respect for the land.

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Between 1994 and 2020 — the year Pierantonio passed away at the age of just 64 — they transformed the farm, continuously acquiring new land and increasing production.

Their innovative and pioneering spirit never left them. In fact, they were the first in their area to access ISMEA funding (2003/2004), further demonstrating their forward-thinking approach and commitment to the growth of the agricultural enterprise.

Today, the farm, now extending over 370 hectares, almost entirely consolidated into one single area (compared to the original 60 hectares!), is managed by Stefania, the younger daughter, who has lived and breathed rice farming since early childhood.

Placed in the care of her grandmother Renza at just six months old, following her father's serious accident which required Rosella's full dedication to his care, Stefania grew up with a childhood that could be described as that of a "Heidi of the rice fields": taken to the fields by bicycle by her grandmother, with the songs of the *mondine* and their stories accompanying her, at the age of nine she built her very first rice field, a one-metre-by-one-metre miniature version.

As the years passed, her passion only continued to grow.

After mornings spent at classical high school, Stefania would rush to the farm in the afternoons, climbing onto the tractor and asking Giovanni, the tractor driver, to take her with him into the rice fields she loved so much.

Her academic journey could therefore only lead her towards a degree in Plant Production at the University of Milan (*Università degli Studi di Milano*). During her studies, she travelled to Texas, where she visited vast agricultural enterprises and discovered technologies that would only reach Italy in the following decade.

In 2015, she completed her thesis at the Syngenta research centre in Lausanne. She graduated and passed the state examination in 2016, becoming a qualified agricultural scientist (*Dottoressa Agronomo*). In 2018, she was awarded a scholarship to attend the SDA Bocconi Master's programme in "Management in Agribusiness".

Then, in 2019, Stefania took full responsibility for the family farm, which today proudly bears her name.

In 2025, Stefania completed her Master's degree with a double degree in Crop Protection, with a thesis focused on LCA (Life Cycle Assessment) applied to rice cultivation.

In the little free time she has left, she dedicates herself to volunteering as an emergency medical responder for the 118 service at Croce Azzurra Robbiese.

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