

LIFE ON STARTUP FARM

On a 1,150-hectare soya farm and vineyard overlooking the lagoon near Marco Polo Airport in Venice, around 450 entrepreneurs and students are coding, 3D printing and crowd-sourcing their way to what they hope will

be a modern Venetian renaissance. This is H-FARM, possibly the world's most aesthetically pleasing startup incubator, built on the lush, robotically trimmed lawns of Treviso's Ca' Tron estate. Now in its tenth year, H-FARM is showing Italians that they too can be part of Europe's self-starting culture of fast-growth, high-value tech businesses – and it's planning an IPO.

Tony Fadell of Nest Labs dropped in recently; so did Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi just days after taking office in February. Of the 67 startups incubated here, seven have had successful exits, including H-ART, LogoPro and Wishpot, acquired by companies such as WPP and Lockerz. But founders Maurizio Rossi and Riccardo Donadon have ambitions beyond simply investing in and incubating 20 live-in startups a year. Through H-FARM's residential Digital Accademia it is training primary-school children and corporate executives in the new rules of digital entrepreneurship; through hackathons and innovation days it is helping recalibrate businesses

1. FABIO DAL COLLE
Art director/project manager, Desall

2. DAVIDE SCOMPARI
Founder, Desall

3. MANUELA PIPINO
Cofounder, LumiFold

4. MARIN DAVIDE
Cofounder, LumiFold

5. FILIPPO MAGNANI
Marketing, GoodAppetito

6. FABIO MARAN
Cofounder/CFO, Self

7. FILIPPO ZANELLA
Cofounder, Self

8. ALESSANDRO CARRARETTO
Project manager, H-umus

9. SILVIA MION
Sales manager Italia, Zooppa

10. SARA TONON
Graphic designer, LogoPro

11. MICHELE LORENZONI
Content editor, Grow the Planet

12. CINZIA CONDO
Manager, SHADO

13. DAVIDE BARTOLUCCI
CEO, SHADO

14. DIEGO PIZZOCARO
Cofounder, Self

15. MASSIMILIANO VENTIMIGLIA
CEO, H-ART

16. MAURIZIO ROSSI
Cofounder, H-FARM

17. RICCARDO DONADON
Cofounder, H-FARM

18. ENRICO GRABER
Project manager, H-umus

19. ALESSIA BELLON
CEO, LogoPro



such as Porsche Italy, SAP and Diesel; and within months it plans to open a second campus a kilometre away to take Italy's reputation for design and craftsmanship into the mobile-internet age.

"The world is not Silicon Valley," says Rossi, 50, whose family background is in luxury goods, including the Fratelli Rossi shoe business. "You need to look inside the assets you have in a region – and we have local advantages in food, fashion, and other verticals where there are traditions here. You can grow big trees here if you leverage the local value – say, in reinventing jewellery as wearables. It's super easy for us to talk to Giorgio Armani about partnering. In fact, the Google Glass partnership with [Milan-based eyewear

company] Luxottica was signed here."

Signs on the campus' low-built glass-sided barns declare this to be a "human thinking park". A Steve Jobs quote is affixed to a central building: "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life." At 5pm an ice-cream-van melody signals time for an afternoon break.

Depop, a mobile marketplace, launched here before moving to Shoreditch; Zooppa, which crowd-sources ad campaigns, expanded from H-FARM to build a Seattle HQ. "Living in H-FARM has helped a lot. We have all the services a young company needs, mentorship, and the chance to meet lots of big brands," says Zooppa's marketing manager Silvia



Mion, one of seven employees still on the farm. "There's a football team, a basketball team - and if you have a problem you can email people here." In another building, Lumifold's team is creating a foldable 3D printer; nearby, XYZE is helping fashion retailers take consumers' measurements digitally. At Desall, an open innovation platform for product design, clients such as Alessi and illy post contests for its 38,000 registered designers. "Chicco wanted some containers for baby meals - the winning entry came from an Italian guy born in 1987," says Desall's community manager Jacopo Zanon. "He wouldn't have been heard if he'd written directly to Chicco. The 'made in Italy' factor is important."

H-FARM cofounder Donadon, 47, formerly with Benetton, sees the region's design mindset as a core asset. "We believe there's an opportunity to create a new IDEO today," he says. "The trouble is, Italy is indifferent to what's happening with digital. Not many people here know who [Yoox founder and WIRED 09.14 cover star] Federico Marchetti is - the public debate is about things that are old and dead. So H-FARM is not just a business but also a mission."

Rossi concurs. "This is the richest region in Italy, with the highest concentration of entrepreneurs in Europe. Remember, the Venetian republic lasted 1,000 years," he says. **David Rowan** h-farmventures.com

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APPS OF THE MONTH



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WIRED



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TRACES

From WIRED2013 speaker Beau Lotto, *Traces* lets you hide digital messages for others to discover in the real world - pictures, video or sound. If another user arrives where you left the message, maybe they'll uncover a secret. *iOS*, free traces.io



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