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Truffles market in Piemonte: chain valorisation and spillover effects

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Piemonte Region, in Northern Italy, has great traditions in the field of white truffle (Tuber magnatum Pico) and a significant potential for black truffles development (T. melanosporum Vittad. and T. aestivum Vittad.). This work summarises main results of a research aimed at enhancing territorial outcomes of truffles, describing market system, value-chain and economical results of truffles cultivations

Research topics

Market: prices and quantities analysis and related problems
Supply chain: definition of the involved actors for white and black truffles
Trade fairs: characterization and proposal for their valorization
Processing industries: survey and comparison of Marche and Piemonte regions
Plantations: economic evaluations of black truffle plantations
Rural development: spillover effects on marginal areas

Only black truffles are at present cultivable, while white truffle is gathered naturally. The black truffle plantations are made by planted mycorrhized trees and appropriately cultivated

The market

The total amount of truffle production in Italy is about 82 tons, including 70 tons of black. Piedmont is only the 9th Region for quantities (2.5 tons/year) but the first for quality, based on the average prices recorded. The import of truffle is about 10 tons/year for fresh and 17 for transformed ones. Export amount respectively to 50 and 17 tons/year

Statistics are unreliable, due to market characteristics which is based on informal transactions. Therefore quantities are largely underestimated. An attempt to realistically quantify Piemonte truffles production has been made starting from the number of truffle diggers, and leads to a production of about 6 tons/year (1, 5 kg for each of the 4000 registered diggers) far exceeding official data

Truffles prices are subjected to high fluctuations during the season, according to product availability. Indicatively, the black T. aestivum ranges between 50 and 200 €/kg (from July to September), the T. melanosporum between 500 and 1000 €/kg and the white truffle (T. magnatum) from 2000 up to 5-6000 €/kg (according to season and size)

The value chain

The chains of white and black truffles have only some common structural features, because the black are cultivable and also suitable for industrial transformation

Actors of the black truffle chain:
Nursery
Farmers
Diggers
Dealers
Owner/chefs
Food Industry
Consumer

Actors of the white truffle chain:
Diggers
Dealers
Owner/chefs
Consumer

Truffle fairs

Truffle fairs are interesting channels for territory promotion and are constantly increasing in Piemonte. We have thus identified several objective parameters to assess the importance and the impact of such fairs, promoting their coordination and growth by the way of specific funding connected to obtained results

Truffle plantations

A direct survey has been conducted on a sample of firms involved in truffle processing in Marche region, where this industry is more established, and in Piemonte region. The comparison shows a integrated “system” in Central Italy and some excellence examples, but isolated, in Piemonte. This sector is composed by small firms with very interesting economic results and an average turnover exceeding 200,000 €/work unit. This industry does not seem to suffer effects of the economic crisis, thanks to the production of high-end and niche

Truffle plantations are designed to produce black truffles, with light differences between truffle species, according to their ecological characteristics.

Economic assessments were calculated considering all input costs: land, cultivation, searching, dog management and adopting prudential values for productions, in the light of high uncertainty. The results are largely positive in terms of Net Present Value for T. melanosporum and positive for T. aestivum

Regional truffles production

The development of Piedmont truffle sector needs a greater integration of actors and a careful direction to address critical issues still existing. For the white truffle it is necessary to increase market transparency improving customers’ trust. For the black ones, particular attention should be devoted to nursery production, which currently limits new plantations diffusion. At the same time a qualification of the product is crucial as well as the mobilization of local resources, based on supply aggregation and marketing promotion. Finally, these chains are able to promote rural development, thanks to the recovery of non-productive woods and to the valorisation of unused land resources