

COMMON PROPERTIES IN AGRICULTURE: HISTORICAL EVOLUTION AND PRESENT SITUATION IN ITALY

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Land and property rights and land reforms continue to be a very important policy issue and a ground for discussion in academic circles.

Both in developing countries, from Latin America to Africa and Asia, and in former communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe, the debate continues about the best farm size and about which form of land tenure can ensure equity and productivity (Brooks & Braverman 1992, Kislev 1992, Lambert & Sindzingre 1995, Adesina & Djato 1996, Chamoux & Contreras 1996, de Janvry & Sadoulet 1996, Csaki & Lerman 1997, Herrera Riddell & Toselli 1997, Lyne Roth & Troutt 1997, amongst others).

The general move towards privatization of land rights and towards the individualization of farm management is sometimes contested, with research results showing that also common lands, properly managed, can provide good returns. Italy has a long agricultural tradition and has experiences of all types of land rights and many different sorts of land reforms, that have shaped the present farming systems. With this short paper we hope to contribute to the ongoing debate.

ORIGIN AND EVOLUTION

Common property rights in Italy date back to the night of times: they were a common feature during the Roman times (IV century b.C. - VI century a.C.), when the pri-

ABSTRACT

The origins and evolution of common property rights (CPR) farms in Italian agriculture are briefly explained. Most of CPR farms were established during the Middle Ages (XI-XIV century) and were later considered an obstacle for modernization. During and after the French Revolution (XIX century) most CPR farms were dissolved by law and the land was partly attributed to individual peasants and partly given to Municipalities.

This solution was greatly emphasized after 1927, when surviving CPR farms and other ancestral forms of access to natural resources were again submitted to a similar evolution. At present, only 3,461 CPR farms exist, with a farmland area of 100,952 hectares. They are mostly concentrated in marginal and montaneous areas. A survey made in 1992 indicates that in some cases the land productivity and the labour productivity of farms under CPRM (common property rights management) can be higher than in individually run farms.

RÉSUMÉ

L'article traite les origines et l'évolution, en Italie, des exploitations dont la propriété est indivisée. La plupart des exploitations en propriété commune furent établies pendant le Moyen Age (XI-XIV siècle) et furent plus tard considérées comme un obstacle à la modernisation de l'agriculture. Pendant et après la Révolution française (XIX siècle), la majorité des exploitations en propriété commune a été dissolue par des lois et les terres furent en partie données en propriété individuelle aux paysans et en partie attribuées aux Municipalités. Cette solution fut vigoureusement soutenue après 1927, quand les propriétés communes survivantes et des autres formes anciennes de faire valoir furent soumises à une évolution similaire. A présent, seulement 3.461 exploitations agricoles en propriété commune existent encore, comptant 100.952 hectares de terres agricoles. Elles sont concentrées sur des territoires de montagne ou de haute colline. Une enquête menée en 1992 suggère que, dans certaines situations, la productivité de la terre et la productivité du travail des exploitations en propriété commune peuvent être plus élevées que dans les exploitations gérées individuellement.

vate property "ager scripturarius" coexisted with the common grazing land "ager compascus", whose exploitation was decided by the council of the elderly. When Nordic populations invaded Italy (VI-VIII century), they did not change these existing rights very much and in some cases they created new common properties, called "al-menden".

During the Middle Ages, these common lands had different destinations: in most cases they became part of the estates owned by the Municipality (town or rural village), with the people keeping only the right of using this land (usus civicus); in other cases, the holders of the common property rights were able to maintain these rights and an official common property was somehow registered in the ancestor of the present land register. In the Middle Ages

and until the XV century, new common properties were also established for political and military purposes: virgin or empty lands, woodlands and pastures, unhealthy marshes, often at the borders between two belligerent "kings" were given to groups of settlers (sometimes forced), in order to establish a human presence in disputed territories. These settlers and their descendants were given the right of endless exploitation of the improved land "ad meliorandum": these are the so called "Societies of the originaries". Later in time, when new people arrived, the descendants of these first settlers defended their rights against the newcomers and in many cases they had the land recognized as a common property.

Rossini and Vanzetti (1986) state that, due to the lack of land registers, it is difficult to quantify the extension of

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agricultural CPR by the end of the XVIII century, but surely they were still relevant in some parts of Italy. In Piemonte, for example, they covered 1/6 of the whole territory; on the hills surrounding Padova, 7/8 of the area was managed with CPR farms.

Exactly at the end of the XVIII century, there was a growing consent, all over Europe, amongst the enlightened people (De Montvert 1789) thinking about role and future of agriculture, that all remnants of ancient habits and traditions had to be eliminated, because only the complete, direct and individual ownership of the land could allow both its improvement and the introduction of innovations.

The French revolution was a major breakthrough and when Napoleon invaded Italy in 1796, establishing the "Repubblica cisalpina", two laws, in 1797 and 1798, dissolved the existing common properties all over Northern Italy, but in some cases the local population recreated them after 1815, after the fall of the French presence in Italy.

Throughout the XIX century, the governments of various parts of Italy (the Country was then still divided into many independent states) tried to reduce the extension of common properties, stimulating fragmentation (Guidetti and Stahl, 1976).

An almost final word (Cencelli 1920) was written by Fascism, that strongly intervened in all aspects of agriculture: the law 16th June 1927 no.1766 established that all territories under CPR had to be registered and that a formal statute had to be written, with clear definition of purposes and of managerial rules.

PRESENT RELEVANCE AND ECONOMIC RESULTS

Until WWII, Italy was a rural economy and the demographic pressure on the land was very high. After the World War, in the preparation of a land reform, the National Institute of Agricultural Economics (INEA) did a survey on land tenure and 3,819 common properties were still counted, covering a total area (woodland included) of about 400,000 hectares: the number was probably underestimated, since, amongst others, in Friuli Venezia Giulia and in Toscana none were counted.

The territories exploited under CPRM were not affected by the land reform because they were considered to be already properly used by local population. On the other hand, some more common properties were also established during the land reform (mid-'50s), when

the government expropriated from absentee landlords about 800,000 hectares to be distributed to landless peasant families. In some cases, pastures and woodlands on mountains, unsuitable for individual cultivation, were not fragmented and they were attributed as common properties to groups of people "pro-indiviso". This development was most pronounced in the Southern regions of Italy (Sardegna, Sicilia, Calabria, Basilicata, Puglia, Campania, Molise and Abruzzo) and in part of Toscana, where the number of farms with CPRM strongly increased between 1947 and 1991 (**table 1**), whereas in all other regions the number of CPRM decreased.

The most recent figures date back to 1991, year of the latest agricultural census, when still 3,461 common properties were counted, with a surface of more than 100,000 ha of farmland (**table 2**). The figures presented in **table 2** clearly indicate that individual farming, mostly on owned land, is the general rule in Italy, whereas other typologies of ownership are almost irrelevant. CPR farms represent only 0.11% of the total farming structure, they occupy 0.67% of the farmland and produce an estimated 0.15% of the whole agricultural output.

Nowadays, surviving CPR farms are generally used for extensive animal husbandry (Romagnoli 1970, Rubino and Messina 1992), for the crops that do not require a very high soil fertility (Passero 1973) and for woodland exploitation (De Angelis 1972, Zanzucchi, 1982). It must also be stated that there is a general lack of actual micro-economic analysis about present performances of individual CPR farms. Managerial and social aspects of CPR farms have almost been completely ignored by present researches and the few publications about them

Table 1 Farms with common property rights in Italy.

Region	Year 1947		Year 1991		
	no.	Total area ha	no.	Farm-land ha	ha/farm
Valle d'Aosta			10	145	14,5
Piemonte	266	6.890	136	1.760	12,9
Lombardia	430	7.840	131	3.519	26,9
Trentino-Alto Adige	1.762	247.840	485	60.671	125,1
Friuli Venezia Giulia	*	*	75	706	9,4
Veneto	128	927	126	727	5,8
Emilia Romagna	175	17.391	70	563	8,0
Liguria	92	464	85	1.842	21,7
Toscana	38	278	162	1.309	8,1
Marche	297	29.674	200	13.169	65,8
Umbria	189	28.065	58	1.971	34,0
Lazio	408	59.428	289	1.750	6,1
Abruzzo	*	*	74	393	5,3
Molise	*	*	17	338	19,9
Campania	1	117	227	1.370	6,0
Puglia	*	*	351	2.477	7,1
Basilicata	*	*	70	851	12,2
Calabria	8	104	357	1.394	3,9
Sicilia	18	713	431	3.632	8,4
Sardegna	7	515	107	2.365	22,1
Italia	3.819	400.246	3.461	100.952	29,2

* missing data.
Source: INEA 1947 and INSOR 1993.

Table 2 Relevance of various farm typologies in Italy, 1991.

Farm typology	no.	%	Farmland (ha)	%	Output *	%
Individual farmer	2.999.666	99,18	13.120.050	87,20	49.831	91,11
CPR management	3.461	0,11	100.952	0,67	83	0,15
Cooperative farm	2.749	0,09	170.595	1,13	1.154	2,11
Share company	1.622	0,05	108.253	0,72	643	1,18
Other societies	8.549	0,28	414.216	2,75	2.607	4,77
Public entities	8.297	0,27	1.131.832	7,52	375	0,69
Italia	3.024.344	100,00	15.045.898	100,00	54.693	100,00

* Billions of lire.
Source: INSOR 1993.

mostly cover juridical aspects, in case a non agricultural utilization may arise (housing for touristic development, ski slopes, parking lot, etc.).

Comparing the economic results of farms under CPR management with other farm typologies is very difficult and to some extent meaningless, because of a variety of reasons: CPR farms are very few while individual farms almost amount to three millions, the locations are very diverse, soil qualities also vary, and supposedly, the activity mix is more limited.

However, thanks to a recent investigation made by National Institute of Rural Sociology (INSOR) using data from the Farm Accounting Data Network of the European Union (EC-FADN) and data from the 1991 agricultural census, it is possible to present some figures, that should be taken with great care, because they are based on standard incomes and not on direct surveys.

The land productivity (**table 3**) of these farms, nationally speaking, is lower than in individual farms: 824,000 lire/ha versus 3,798,000 lire/ha.

This is due to the marginal locations that do not allow to grow high income irrigated crops neither intensive animal husbandry.

Some notable exceptions also exist: in five regions the CPR farms show a better land productivity than the average farms run by individual farmers and in four regions the figures are almost the same for the CPR farms and for the individual farms.

Also the comparison with other managerial typologies show interesting results: public estates generally perform very poorly, worse than CPR farms.

In 8 regions, the labour productivity (**table 4**) of the CPR holdings is higher than in individual farms, while in five other regions it is almost the same. In the farms owned by institutions, the number of agricultural workers is general excessive and therefore the labour productivity is lower.

CPR farms show very heterogeneous results (**graph 1**), with good returns to land and labour in Lazio, where this type of farm still exists on good soils, and very negative returns, far below the national average, in Marche, Umbria, Basilicata and Trentino Alto Adige, where only the worst soils and plots have never been individualized.

CONCLUSIONS

The historical evolution has left Italy with only a handful of farms under CPR.

Table 3 Land productivity in 1991 (000L/ha), by region and farm typology.

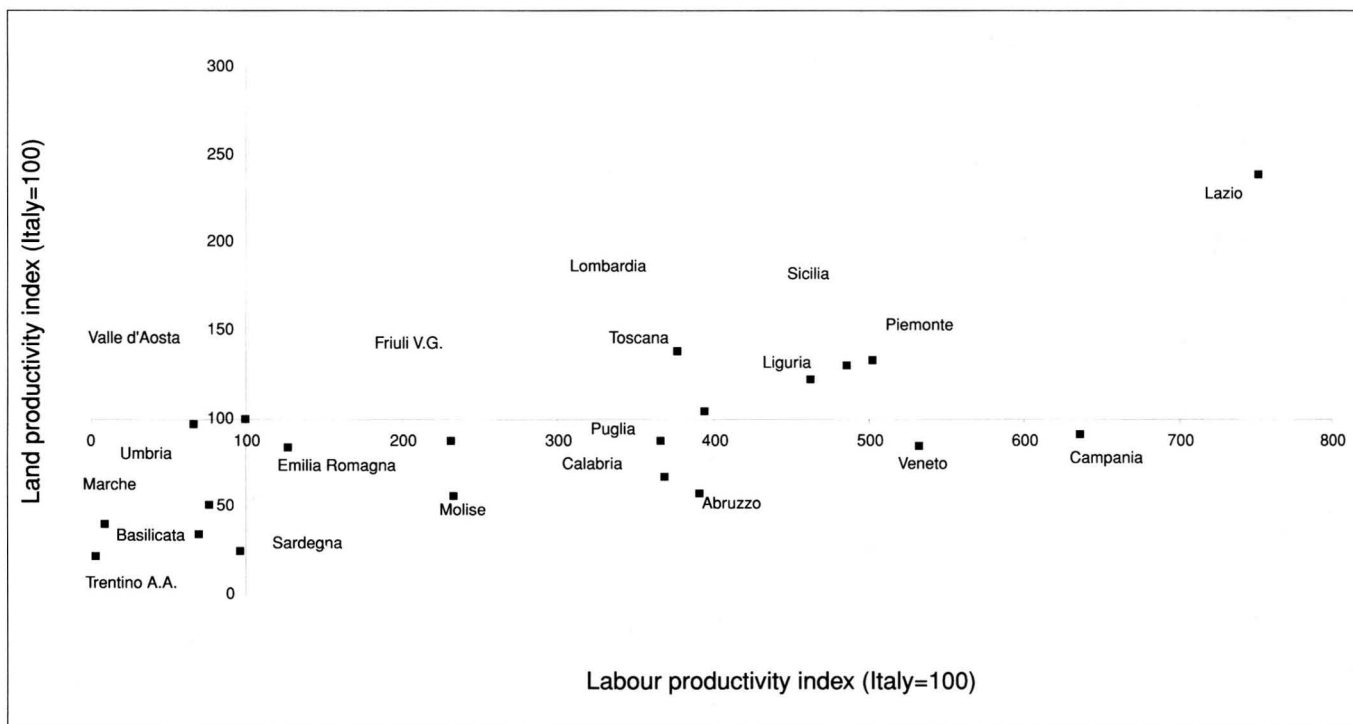
Region	Individual	CPR	COOP	Public
Valle d'aosta	781	792	na	15
Piemonte	4.362	4.139	4.707	51
Lombardia	6.220	3.106	32.515	95
Trentino-Alto Adige	5.476	29	2.168	180
Friuli Venezia Giulia	4.625	1.911	4.915	278
Veneto	6.824	4.389	20.856	627
Emilia Romagna	11.605	1.049	1.961	413
Liguria	5.894	3.814	7.819	3.908
Toscana	2.551	3.254	2.422	1.965
Marche	3.001	73	4.535	1.016
Umbria	2.565	549	3.049	417
Lazio	4.369	6.198	4.426	187
Abruzzo	3.733	3.224	2.000	25
Molise	1.981	1.923	1.436	238
Campania	7.079	5.244	5.675	670
Puglia	2.879	3.018	6.140	1.145
Basilicata	958	574	1.226	183
Calabria	2.492	3.042	3.760	672
Sicilia	2.827	4.002	5.852	525
Sardegna	1.113	627	1.681	208
Italia	3.798	824	6.769	331

Source: INSOR 1993.

Table 4 Labour productivity in 1991 (000L/day), by region and farm typology.

Region	Individual	CPR	COOP	Public
Valle d'aosta	37	36	163	16
Piemonte	106	193	298	74
Lombardia	192	201	680	44
Trentino-Alto Adige	98	32	114	82
Friuli Venezia Giulia	135	127	246	50
Veneto	151	122	379	123
Emilia Romagna	180	121	342	367
Liguria	80	177	194	81
Toscana	87	151	192	103
Marche	113	58	314	249
Umbria	117	140	270	60
Lazio	107	346	328	96
Abruzzo	80	83	312	62
Molise	76	81	172	76
Campania	93	132	436	96
Puglia	103	127	353	96
Basilicata	59	50	102	47
Calabria	62	97	238	10
Sicilia	112	189	333	6
Sardegna	74	74	169	21
Italia	113	145	358	45

Source: INSOR 1993.



Graph 1 - Economic efficiency of CPR farms in Italy (1991).

The aggregated data used by INSOR reveal that they always perform better than the farms managed by Public Entities. In some cases, they even show better results than farms run individually by private farmers. At present, new pressures on CPR farms exist due to non-agricultural forces like housing, touristic development and leisure activities.

These pressures were not foreseen by the statutes written during the '30s.

After 70 years, since the 1927 law, the time has come for another adaptation in order to satisfy the needs of the CPR holders, who are increasingly out of farming. ●

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