Healing herbs



MAPs

Medicinal and aromatic plants (MAPs) represent the cheapest base for medicine production and are essential in our everyday life. Up to the 19th century chemistry development, medicinal plants were the only cure; even today more than 80% of the world's population depends on herbal medicine for their primary health care, thus increasing the demand on the international market. Due to diversity in climate and soil types, Europe has all the necessary natural geographic conditions needed for successful cultivation (about 70,000 ha, mainly in France, Hungary and Spain) and wild harvesting of medicinal plants: at least 2,000 species are used on a commercial basis, 90% of which are still wild-collected (particularly in Albania, Turkey, Hungary and Spain). Fifty years ago, medicinal plants were mainly wild-harvested, while today, because of market demands, they are cultivated. The cultivation depends on plants' genetic structure but also on agro-ecological conditions such as geographic latitude, climate, hydrographical and pedological conditions.

Production

The current trend is the development of organic agriculture to fulfil market's demands for healthy products, reducing the use of chemical compounds to a minimum, in order to preserve all the medicinal characteristics of the plants.

Nowadays, the fields dedicated to the cultivation of medicinal and aromatic plants in Italy represent a small part among the entire agricultural area; this is due to high production costs and to the consequent competitiveness of extra-European countries.

Nevertheless, cultivation of MAPs in Italy has a long tradition. The last available data indicate that in Italy there are about 3,300 ha cultivated, of which half are herbaceous species (bergamot orange, manna ash, sweet orange flowers) cultivated in the south regions of Italy (Calabria, Sicilia). The Piedmont Region plays a key role since its cultivated surface represents 38.6 % of the total national land of herbaceous MAPs: the most cultivated species in this area are *Mentha piperita*, *Anthemis nobilis*, *Artemisia pontica*, *Cannabis sativa* and *Lavandula angustifolia*.



The Green Planet - Copyright © EDISCO Editrice - Vietata la vendita e la diffusione

The farm approach in terms of cultivated species, agricultural techniques and systems, production chain and market target changes according to the location: on the plains the major part of the species are cultivated for flavours, for liquor and beverage production industries. In the hills and in the mountains, they are cultivated for more diversified targets: the farmers sell the final product directly to the consumers, through retail shops, to herbalist's shops, to wholesalers, to cooperatives which handle the commercialisation phase, and even to local restaurants. With appropriate development, organic cultivation of medicinal plants could become an important economic activity.

The production of medicinal plants is labour intensive but very profitable activity as the final product can reach a high price. It can be recommended for small family farms that can combine it with other activities, contributing to the increase of low farm income, as well as to the return of people to rural marginal or abandoned areas, especially related to organic farming systems.

Lastly, there is a new approach to the tourism market, where the products can be sold as autochthonous souvenirs, following the example of France where lavender has become an important tourism product.

1 Answer the questions.

1. When did conventional medicine start replacing herbal remedies?
2. What does MAPs stand for?
3. Why can medicinal plants successfully grow in Europe?
4. Where are MAPs mainly wild-collected?
5. What factors influence the cultivation of medicinal plants?
6. In which Italian regions are MAPs mainly cultivated?
7. Who are usually the purchasers of MAPs cultivated in the hills and mountains?
8. Is the production of MAPs not remunerative?
9. Why should this farming activity be encouraged?
10. Do you know any examples of connection between MAPs production and tourism market?

2 Find in the text above the antonyms of the following terms.

1. The most expensive: .....
2. Unnecessary: .....
3. Decreasing: .....
4. Unproductive: .....
5. Enhancing: .....
6. Large: .....
7. North: .....
8. Insignificant: .....
9. Least: .....
10. Buy: .....
11. Negligible: .....
12. Low: .....
13. Urban: .....
14. Intensive: .....
15. Non-native: .....

The Green Planet - Copyright © EDISCO Editrice - Vietata la vendita e la diffusione