

USDA Foreign Agricultural Service

GAIN Report

Global Agricultural Information Network

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Report Highlights:

Report contains agricultural news items of interest for Italy, the EU and the world for the month of February 2012.

General Information:

ITALY

Women in Italian Agriculture

While small Italian farms are trying to find creative ways to make a living in an increasingly globalized economy, women seem to be leading the way when it comes to “thinking outside of the barn.” In Italy, women manage more than one-third of all Italian farms. Most of them are branching out from their core business, in what observers call “multifunctional agriculture.” Agricultural tourism, farmers’ markets, organic farming, and direct sales run by women are all on the rise. Agriculture schools across Italy have also seen an increase in female enrollment. While preliminary 2010 Italian census data shows that, while the number of Italian farms has decreased by 32 percent compared to the previous decade, fewer women than men have decided to throw in the towel.

The Italian experience is by no means unique, but the Italian female farm work force is significantly higher than elsewhere in Western Europe. According to the most recent Eurostat figures, in 2007 Italy had a female farm workforce of 1.3 million, (well ahead of comparably sized European Union nations like France and Germany, neither of which reached 340,000). Women are way ahead of the curve when it comes to diversifying, as most small farms cannot sustain themselves through crops or livestock alone. The involvement of women in “multifunctional agriculture” has helped society in food security, rural development and the safeguarding of the natural landscape. Italian farms have also begun to offer day-care services in rural areas. However, women farmers often complain that the Italian Government fails when it comes to equal treatment and financial support because women are still vastly under- represented at a political and institutional level. *New York Times*

FEATURE ARTICLE

Harvesting the Benefits of Organics

The European Union and the United States have announced a historic partnership that will simplify trade in organic products, benefiting farmers and small businesses, and creating jobs on both sides of the Atlantic. The arrangement, which was announced on 15 February 2012 and comes into force on 1 June 2012, allows products certified as organic in the EU to be sold in the U.S. and vice versa, eliminating significant barriers for producers. At present, a separate, additional certification is required, meaning extra costs and bureaucracy for organic farmers. To help reduce paperwork and expenses, the new arrangement is simple: it recognizes that the EU and the U.S. have credible organic certification systems and share common perspectives about what constitutes the production of organic products.

The partnership also establishes a strong foundation from which we will promote organic agriculture and benefits to the organic industry on a global scale. By removing barriers to organic farmers and companies, we are giving our producers greater access to the world's two largest markets for organic products - valued at more than \$50 billion - whose 800 million consumers increasingly want high-

quality organic foods. Organic production is still small compared to overall agricultural production, but by making a greater variety and quantity of organic ingredients available, it will be easier to prepare organic foods and to find organic foods in restaurants and stores. The new arrangement demonstrates that the EU and U.S. can work closely and co-operatively on agricultural policy. The EU-U.S. partnership in organics is good news for farms and businesses.

Kathleen Merrigan is deputy secretary in the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Dacian Cioloș is the European commissioner for agriculture and rural development.

THE EUROPEAN UNION

Europe Needs Biotech

According to Dr. Julian Little, Chair of the Agricultural Biotechnology Council, Europe needs to use new technologies available in order to respond to food production issues. "Until Europe unlocks the potential of new technologies, farmers will be unable to play their part in meeting the challenges of food production." Unfortunately, farmers continue to be denied the choice to access certain types of biotechnology, which are now commonplace outside of Europe. This negatively affects their competitiveness in the global market while also preventing them from the opportunity to explore the potential environmental benefits and other positive traits this technology can offer. A science-based decision-making process on biotech crops in Europe must be implemented in order to allow farmers to have access to this technology as part of their toolbox in meeting the challenges of the present and the future.

Agricultural Biotechnology Council

Regulations on GM Field Trials in Europe

The Plant Biotechnology journal recently published an article on field trial regulations in Europe, noting that the European Union has the most stringent regulations in governing field trials in the world. Of note however, is that there has never been any negative environmental impact cases reported from any GM trial carried out in the EU. Thus, the journal recommends that the EU needs to demonstrate that the risk linked to GM crops has been "reduced to the level where it is regarded as acceptable within the narrowly defined limits of the regulations developed and enforced by national and regional governments. There appears to be no greater risk than growing an equivalent conventional crop."

The article also stressed that the involvement of national and regional competent authorities in the decision-making process can add multiple layers of bureaucracy to an already complicated regulation process.

Plant Biotechnology Journal

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

Tackling Food Security

Food security was a priority at this year's Davos summit, where world leaders gathered to discuss worsening economic conditions, and how to tackle the Euro zone crisis. "It is only in the past three to four years that agriculture has made a comeback on the Davos agenda, but unfortunately that has coincided with the financial crisis. I'm however, optimistic that we can help the world's one billion

hungry," said *Microsoft* founder and agricultural philanthropist Bill Gates. He also observed that of the \$3 billion the United States spends each year on research and development just 10% goes towards poor countries. "Given the central role that food plays in human welfare and national stability, it is shocking - not to mention short-sighted and potentially dangerous - how little money is spent on agricultural research."

Wall Street Journal

FAS Italy Regional REPORTING

IT1202-Italian Agricultural News for the month of January

HR1203-Croatian Fruit and Vegetable Juice Sector

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