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Persimmon cultivation in Campania (Italy): Production and marketing

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SUMMARY – The first persimmon orchards in Italy were set up in the Salerno area at the beginning of 1900. The Campania region (and namely the provinces of Naples, Salerno and Caserta) has always been the largest producer of persimmons and, at present, with a yearly production of about 21,000 t represents 50% of the Italian production. Over 60% of its production is obtained from old plantations, where persimmon trees are mixed with other fruit species. The remaining 40% is produced in new orchards cultivated with modern and rational techniques. The most frequent cultivar is 'Kaki Tipo', a Pollination Variant Non Astringent (PVNA) cultivar, that in the presence of the pollinators produces vanilla-coloured fruits ready for consumption at harvest. In absence of pollinators the fruit needs over-ripening or astringency removal. There is also a certain diffusion of local cultivars, differentiating both male and female flowers, principally used as pollinators of 'Kaki Tipo'. The main difficulty in persimmon cultivation is the attack of the Mediterranean Fruit Fly (*Ceratitis capitata*) since very few pesticides are registered for this crop. Pollinated fruits of 'Kaki Tipo', and also those produced by local pollinators, are absorbed by southern Italy's markets. Northern Italy's markets prefer seedless fruits, to be eaten soft. Traditionally appreciated in Campania for their peculiar taste are the fruits of 'Cioccolato' variety (PVNA). Unlike other fruit species, which are marketed in other regions, persimmons are processed and marketed exclusively by single or cooperative structures in Campania.

Key words: Persimmon, marketing, production.

RESUME – "Culture du plaqueminier en Campanie (Italie) : Production et marketing". Les premiers vergers de plaqueminier en Italie ont été installés dans la zone de Salerne au début des années 1900. La région de Campanie (et plus précisément les provinces de Naples, Salerne et Caserte) a toujours été le plus grand producteur de plaqueminiers, et à présent, avec une production annuelle d'environ 21 000 t, elle représente 50% de la production italienne. Plus de 60% de sa production provient de vieilles plantations, où les plaqueminiers sont mélangés à d'autres espèces fruitières. Les 40% restants sont produits dans de nouveaux vergers cultivés selon des techniques modernes et rationnelles. Le cultivar le plus fréquent est 'Kaki Tipo', un cultivar à Pollinisation Variante Non Astringente (PVNA), qui en présence de pollinisateurs produit des fruits couleur vanille prêts à être consommés à la récolte. En l'absence de pollinisateurs le fruit nécessite une surmaturation ou élimination de l'astringence. Il existe également une certaine diffusion des cultivars locaux, en différenciant les fleurs mâles et femelles, principalement utilisées comme pollinisateurs de 'Kaki Tipo'. La principale difficulté de la culture du plaqueminier est l'attaque de la mouche des fruits méditerranéenne (*Ceratitis capitata*) car il n'y a que peu de pesticides brevetés pour cette culture. Les fruits pollinisés de 'Kaki Tipo', ainsi que ceux produits par les pollinisateurs locaux, sont absorbés par les marchés du sud de l'Italie. Les marchés du nord de l'Italie préfèrent les fruits sans pépins, à consommer tendres. Les fruits de la variété 'Cioccolato' (PVNA) sont traditionnellement appréciés en Campanie pour leur goût particulier. Contrairement à d'autres espèces, qui sont commercialisées dans d'autres régions, les plaqueminiers sont conditionnés et commercialisés exclusivement par les particuliers ou les structures coopératives en Campanie.

Mots-clés : Plaqueminier, marketing, production.

Introduction

The first persimmon orchards in Italy were realized in the Salerno area at the beginning of the twentieth century; since then Campania has always been the principal producer of persimmon; currently with around 21,000 t annually and it represents 50% of the national production. Over 60% of the production originates from old orchards in the provinces of Naples, Salerno and Caserta while the remaining 40% originates from young and rational orchards.

The most diffused cultivar is 'Kaki Tipo', a Pollination Variant Non Astringent (PVNA) cultivar, that in the presence of suitable pollinators produces fruits with brown flesh ready for consumption at

harvest; in absence of pollinators it gives fruits that need softening. A good diffusion of local cultivars does exist and they are used mainly as pollinators of 'Kaki Tipo'.

Materials and methods

The research was conducted in the main persimmon producing areas in the Campania region: the Sele plain and the areas of Nocera and Sarno in the province of Salerno; the areas of Campi Flegrei and of Acerra in the province of Naples; the areas of Maddaloni, Carino and Sessa in the province of Caserta.

The main centres of harvesting and packing (in the areas of Nocera, Sarno Acerra and Maddaloni) were surveyed.

Results and discussion

The productive typology in the Campania region is quite complex: new rational orchards managed at palmette or low vase coexist with old and very tall persimmon trees at globe, for which cultural practices are very difficult. The cultural practises (fertilization, weed control, harvest) in persimmon orchards are similar to those of other fruit tree species; in some orchards pruning is carried out every two years.

A specific problem of persimmon is linked to insect control, and in particular the Mediterranean Fruit Fly (*Ceratitis capitata*), since in Campania environments the attack is early and the number of generations till late autumn is high. Hence control requires about five to six treatments but the choice among the registered protection products is limited to Malathion. Currant clear-wing (*Synanthedon tipuliformis* Cl.) and *Metcalfa pruinosa* are two other harmful insects for persimmon.

The harvest of persimmons in Campania starts in mid September and ends at the end of November. Fruits of local varieties (used as pollinators sometimes in a high ratio –almost 25%– in relation to 'Kaki Tipo') are collected before 'Kaki Tipo' and they are quickly marketed.

The system of harvest and marketing in Campania is diversified. Small and single producers who collect and introduce their product on the local markets exist together with large structures (namely packing houses) that manage the harvest and the marketing.

The product, divided for index of physiological maturation, is introduced into cells that speed up maturation. Ethylene, one of the main activators for tannin removal, is allowed (D.M. no. 80 of 15.2.1984) for this operation with a maximum dose of 2% (pure ethylene to 98%). In some small firms the maturation is effected by introducing boxes of apples (15-20% in comparison to the boxes of kaki). 'Red Delicious' or 'Annurca' cultivars are mostly used. In some cases the dregs of pressed grapes, a residual of wine-making, are successfully used for maturation of persimmon fruits which take on intense coloration.

The fruits extracted from the cells are manufactured in different typologies and introduced on the local markets, and exported to the markets of northern Italy and Europe.

Packing uses polystyrene containers whose dimensions vary according to the fruit size and which are positioned in wood or PVC boxes. The rectangular containers hold three fruits for a total of 15-18 large fruits called "*fioroni*", to each box; the square containers contain four to six fruits for a total of 24 fruits per box.

Research is in progress to improve the shelf-life of the fruits through employment of selective plastic films in addition to specific adsorbents.

The price offered to the producer varies in relation to the fruit size and quality, the orchard management and the training system, since generally the cost of harvest is passed on to the buyer. Mean price for picked fruits is 0.26 €/kg, 0.13-0.16 €/kg for hanging fruits in rational plantations

(palmette or small vase) and 0.05-0.08 €/kg for hanging fruits in old orchards with big trees and in mixed orchards.

Conclusions

The persimmon finds in Campania one of its historical and ideal environments for cultivation. The production relies mainly on the pollinated PVNA cultivars (and namely 'Kaki Tipo' and 'Cioccolato'). The organoleptic value of persimmons from Campania is very high, with sweet and very good taste, and the attractiveness of fruits is also much appreciated due to the brilliant colour of the skin.