

INSTITUTIONAL EVOLUTION OF AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION IN ITALY

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The early times

As in other European countries (¹), the historical roots of informal agricultural education in Italy (²) go back to the second half of the XVIII, the Century of the Enlightenment, when a number of «Academies» were created all over the country, in those years still fragmented into many independent states. Rossini and Vanzetti (1986) recall the *Accademia dei Georgofili* in Florence (1753), the *Accademia Agraria* in Udine (1759), the Academy of Agriculture in Verona (1768), the *Accademia Georgica* in Treja (1778), the Agricultural Society of Torino (1785), the *Accademia Georgofila* in Foligno (1786) and many more (³). These academies were founded, funded and animated by very few «enlightened» landlords, aware of similar experiences abroad, who regularly met to exchange ideas and experiences and who also produced pamphlets and books about proper agricultural practices. In Southern Italy, 14 Societies of agriculture were established by Murat, appointed by Napoleon as Viceroy; only a few survived after the Emperor's fall. Later in Sicily, King Ferdinando II established the *Istituto per l'incoraggiamento della agricoltura arti e manifatture*, with 6 peripheral sections, but only the one in Catania survived until 1872. In 1829 the *Accademia Agraria* in Pesaro was founded. In 1834 the first agricultural school, later to become the Faculty of Agriculture of Pisa, was founded in his estate by the Marquis Ridolfi, also author of various books on agriculture. A national conference of Italian agricultural scientists was held in 1840 in Torino, were a few years later King Carlo Alberto established the Royal Academy of Agriculture, followed by the King's Institute of Forestry and by the Higher School of Veterinary

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(¹) Swanson and Claar (1984) quote True (1929), who probably described only the history of extension education in English and German speaking countries. Interesting experiences were also realized during the XVIII and XIX Century in Belgium, France and Italy.

(²) Most information about the origins and evolution of agricultural extension in Italy, until 1987-88, can be found in Contò (1990) and in Volpi (1990).

(³) Coletti (1900) also writes about an Agrarian Academy established in 1548 in Rezzato (Brescia), that could be the first in the world, but there are no other proofs about its existence; another forerunner was the *Accademia Fisiocratica* in Siena, created in 1548, whose agricultural activities were very limited.

Abstract

The history of agricultural extension in Italy is presented within an institutional framework, together with the establishment of schools, universities, research centres, co-operatives. The nationalization of all structures before WWII created a gap between producers and Institutions that was not solved by the Republic. Extension was mainly made by input suppliers, output processors (also coop) and financed to farmers' unions. After 1979, stimulated by some EC Regulations, Regional Governments have tried to strengthen the extension line within their over-staffed administrations, but still most advice is provided by non public Agencies. The present and the future of agricultural advisory is and will be very heterogeneous, with farmers at a center of a network of Agencies, increasingly obliged to charge openly for the services they provide.

Résumé

L'histoire de la vulgarisation agricole en Italie est présentée dans un contexte institutionnel, avec la création des écoles agricoles, des universités, des centres de recherche, des coopératives. La nationalisation de toutes les structures, avant de la deuxième Guerre Mondiale, a créé une fracture entre producteurs et Institutions, qui n'a pas été éliminée par la République. C'étaient les sociétés des moyens de productions ou les transformateurs des produits agricoles, même des coopératives, qui ont fourni la plupart de la vulgarisation, pendant que les syndicats des agriculteurs recevaient des subventions pour des programmes de vulgarisation. Après 1979, sous l'impulsion de plusieurs Règlements communautaires, les gouvernements régionaux ont essayé de renforcer le service de vulgarisation à l'intérieur des administrations, déjà lourdes en personnel, mais la plupart du conseil est encore fournie par des Agences non publiques. Le présent et le futur de la vulgarisation agricole en Italie sont pourtant très hétérogènes, avec les agriculteurs au centre d'un réseau d'Agences, qui de plus en plus feront payer ouvertement pour les conseils donnés.

Sciences. The same Ridolfi promoted the School of agriculture in Firenze, «aiming at promoting, especially amongst the land-owners, the knowledges needed for rural industry...» (Stringher 1900). In 1861 the Agricultural Society of Lombardia begun its activities. Rossini and Vanzetti write (pag. 435): «.. the academies, the societies of agriculture, the practical schools promoted scientific discussions, publications, public trials and didactic activities, that were certainly remarkable from the beginnings of the '800 until the Unification (1861), but, with the exception of a few privileged areas, these efforts remained limited to a few interested and enthusiast farmers and did not modify sensibly the existing practices». Some figures can probably better explain the limits of their impact: in 1870 there were all over Italy 281 *Comizi Agrari* (farmers' local associations), similar to the French ones, with about 18,000 members, out of a working agricultural population of about 11 million (67% of the total active population).

During the first years of the new Kingdom of Italy, the problems of a generalised agricultural education were clearly understood and the Government created new schools of agriculture and many experimentation centres: the first Experimental Station for Agricultural Chemistry was established in Udine in 1870, followed by some stations with general competence (Milano, Torino, Modena, Firenze and others) and by special-

ized ones: wine processing in Gattinara, silkworm production in Padova, cheese production in Lodi, plant pathology in Pavia.

Vocational schools for teen-agers were also opened, both for general education and for specialized curricula: animal husbandry in Bologna, olive growing in Bari, horticulture in Florence, etc., in most cases these were attached to an experimental station.

A first mistake was committed later in those years, when the agricultural schools were given to the new Ministry of Education, creating the gap between applied research and education that still persists today.

The Province of Napoli promoted the creation of a new Higher School of Agriculture in 1872; a Free School of Agriculture annexed to the University began its activity in Torino in 1894. In the following year the King's Agricultural Experimental Institute of Perugia was inaugurated, Rome followed in 1898.

The Savings Bank of Bologna financed in 1900 the setting up of the Agrarian School of the University. Most students were landlords' children or at least land-owners, wishing to improve the profits of their estates.

After their studies, a very high percentage went back to their holdings, others into research and/or teaching, while a few were employed by the Administration that was beginning to grow both in tasks and in size.

From 1886 to the Second World War

Still, there was the general feeling that most peasants were out of the main stream of progress and that they had to be taught «with words and experiences», with examples easy to understand and with some learning by doing, so as to overcome the barriers of tradition. The beginning of formally recognized agricultural extension activities dates back to 1886, when the first *Cattedra Ambulante* (Mobile Chair) was founded in Rovigo and a first agent was employed. Its purpose was that of promoting education among the peasants, then living in extreme poverty⁽⁴⁾, by organizing meetings, conferences, visits to farms and demonstrations, as well as publishing agricultural magazines, promoting farm trials and setting prizes and competitions. It was a completely independent body, financially supported by several sources: local banks, foundations, religious institutes, chambers of commerce and donations made by socially conscious wealthy citizens and open minded landlords. An appointed council representing the most important donors was responsible for the management of the activities.

Soon enough other people and institutions in other parts of the Kingdom followed this example and in a relatively short time, by 1899, almost the whole of northern and central Italy was provided with a total of 29 chairs, each one with a variable number of advisors. The emphasis on education was so great that most peasants used to call the extension agents «professor» and this tradition has lasted until a few years ago, 60-70 years after the «Chairs» have been replaced by the Inspectorates.

Only in 1904 the Ministry of Agriculture, then part of the Ministry of Industry and Commerce⁽⁵⁾, acknowledged these spontaneous initiatives and begun to play a two-fold role of co-ordination and development: by providing technical guidelines to be spread throughout the country and by financial contributions to the existing chairs. New ones were also created, entirely funded by the Ministry, especially in the Central and Southern Regions, as well as in the Islands, where the class of landlords was not very active⁽⁶⁾.

It was clear, since the very beginning of these activities, that the peasants did not need only to be informed about new techniques and new inputs, but that they also needed to have such inputs and implements available at an affordable cost, while they wanted their products, either as raw materials and processed food, to be sold at a good price. This led the chairs to favour the creation of co-operatives, groups, associations, the so-called *Consorzi agrari* (De Marzi, 1983). The first 15 *Consorzi* in 1892 joined in a federation named *Federazione Italiana dei Consorzi Agrari*, the first and biggest co-operative conglomerate. Their success was

Table 1 Cattedre, personnel and funding 1886-1927.

Year	Cattedre no.	Sections no.	Advisor no.	State funds %
1886	1		1	20
1905	98	30	180	33
1919	101	177	350	40
1926	101	357	600	64
1927	92	581	843	n.a.

Source: Volpi, 1990.

Table 2 Total and working population (millions).

Year	Total no.	Active no.	In agriculture no.
1861	27.4	15.6	10.8
1900	32.5	16.7	10.3
1938	43.6	18.6	9.0
1951	47.5	19.7	8.6
1980	57.1	20.6	2.8
1991	57.4	23.5	2.2

Source: Di Cocco, 1984 and ISTAT.

so great and stimulating that there were 405 *Consorzi* in 1905 and 953 in 1924, with more than 305.000 associates. The number of Cattedre and personnel grew steadily: by 1927 there were 92 chairs with 581 peripheric units and a staff of 843 (table 1). Compared with the millions of peasants at work in those years (table 2), it is evident that the advisors had to operate with a very classic top-down approach: the associates of the Cattedre and the first receivers of support were the innovators and the early adopters (Rogers 1983), among the large and medium size farmers and land-owners.

The *Cattedre* covered a wide field of activities: Volpi (1990, pag. 55) describes how the *Cattedra* operating in Fermo concurred to establish: the multi-purpose consorzio in 1902, a fruit marketing cooperative in 1904, a distillery coop in 1908, a tobacco growers coop and a coop bank in 1910, a cattle insurance society and a cattle improvement association in 1911, a plant disease coop in 1918. In the fiscal year 1924 this *Cattedra* had a staff of 11 people and its activities had included: 1,106 farm consultancies, 8 training courses lasting 32 hours each, 216 demonstration days, 44 competitions, 4 agricultural fairs and 6 booklets printed in 10,000 copies each. The *Cattedra* also operated a public library of agriculture, with 750 books and published a monthly bulletin, with articles written by its staff and by other contributors, which was subscribed to 21,424 farmers. It also promoted an insurance fund and a pension fund.

Following World War I and the turbulent post-war years, in 1922 Fascism prevailed

in Italy, with an economic policy that included self-sufficiency («the battle of the wheat»). The government had to ensure regular production of staple food and this could only be achieved by an expansion of agricultural land and by an increase of yields, via applied research and extension style propaganda. Home economics, nutritional and health programmes for rural women were also launched. All communication methods, media and strategies were used: field days, radio programmes, leaflets, posters, village mobilization, competitions. National and local leaders were requested to attend such events. Research and higher education were still supported, but nationalised: old and new experimental stations were put under the control of the Ministry of Agriculture in 1929. New Faculties of Agriculture were opened in Torino, Bari and

⁽⁴⁾ The miserable standards of living of peasants and of landless labourers in those years were very well known after a national survey co-ordinated by senator Jacini, re-printed in 1976. In the same years the socialist movement and the anarchists were organizing the first strikes and demonstrations all over Italy.

⁽⁵⁾ For a short history of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry between 1860 and 1982, see Civinini, 1982.

⁽⁶⁾ It must be remembered that Southern Italy was dominated for centuries by the Spanish Crown and therefore the structure of land tenure and the land use were quite similar to Latin America: enormous estates, absentee landlords living in town, extensive crops (mono-culture) and pastures, mini-fundios for the peasants (Ciasca et al. 1953). Central and Northern Italy were mostly cultivated by small owners, share-croppers, tenants and farm-managers, with much more intensive cropping patterns and relatively better incomes. For a general survey of Italian farming systems, see Bevilacqua, 1990.

Palermo, achieving the number of nine nationwide, under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education. The same happened to the *Cattedre*: initially the Ministry strengthened them, with more funds and more personnel, reaching the number of 1,070 advisors (Volpi 1990, p. 60). But as war approached, the government wanted to have fuller control of the situation: along with many other measures promoting land reclamation and reducing local autonomies, the chairs, already swamped with ever-increasing bureaucratic tasks, lost their independence and in the years 1935-37 they became part of the peripheric administration, with the name of Provincial Agricultural Inspectorate. They were entrusted with even more burdensome tasks, ranging from the technical supervision of agricultural credit applications (a special law had been promulgated in 1928), to statistical surveys. The co-operative movement had also to be put under control: in 1926 the elected board members were replaced by state-appointed managers, more than 1,000 little *Consorti* lost their autonomy and were absorbed within 90 Province-sized *Consorti*, homologue to the Inspectorates (Orlando 1984, p. 114).

After half a century, the spontaneous, self-managed and almost self-supporting chairs and the free, economically sound co-operative movement gave way to centrally managed, totally state-funded and state-controlled pyramidal organizations.

From 1948 to 1979

In 1948 Italy became a Republic, but maintained the scientific, educational, technical and bureaucratic structures set up during the Fascism. All through the years of reconstruction (late '40s and '50s) and also after the implementation of the European Common Market, until the mid 80's, Italian peasants and farmers have been a very strong political lobby, most of them supporting the party of relative majority, the Christian Democrats. Consequently, Italian agricultural policy has been mainly based on «easy» measures, such as capital grants, low interest credit schemes, premiums, subsidies and prices' support, almost no taxation. (Orlando 1984, Fabiani 1986). Under such circumstances, the administrative tasks of the Provincial Agricultural Inspectorates

grew to the extent that, in spite of the Zonal Agricultural Offices created in 1961, it was almost impossible (and relatively useless) to carry out any educational activity, except on casual and random occasions. All kinds of innovations were adopted, although often misused, sometimes even over-adopted, because they were relatively cheap and the market situation almost always bright. The true extension agents and the extension line within the Administration became a marginal minority, because they did not control any grant and/or any agricultural credit.

The 50's mark two major Government initiatives, whose consequences are still in effect: a set of actions called the «Agricultural Reform» and the establishment of the *Cassa per il Mezzogiorno* (CASMEZ: Authority for the Development of Southern Italy).

Within the framework of the the Agricultural Reform, aiming at achieving social justice and political stabilization in the countryside, 817,000 hectares were expropriated in nine areas of several Regions (mostly in Southern Italy) and in these areas, due to the poor situation of the Inspectorates and given the huge tasks ahead, nine special Authorities were created: the *Enti di Riforma*. They had to expropriate the land, generally swamps, pastures and low quality soils, from absentee landlords, to make all needed land improvements, to shape new farms and to distribute them to 44,000 landless families (?). These ones obviously needed support: experiment stations, training centres and real extension activities were also financed (Ente Maremma 1966, Bandini Guerrieri Sediari 1989).

During the '60s, the CASMEZ was also financing agricultural (mainly irrigation based) and integrated rural development projects in the South and in the Islands. In many cases, instead of supporting the existing Inspectorates or the *Enti di Riforma*, the CASMEZ decided to create new independent units: over 169 Centers for Agricultural Technical Assistance (CATA), with 327 advisors working in 365,000 hectares (table 3).

In both cases (land reform and CASMEZ irrigation projects) the financing of extension activities (personnel plus running costs) was not realised through the ordinary budget, but with ad hoc funding, subject to yearly approval.

An important turn-around moment came in 1972, when 15 new Regions were added to the four existing ones and the two Autonomous Provinces already existing since 1948. Agriculture was among the authorities delegated by the National Government to the Regional Governments and consequently all Provincial Inspectorates, all CATAs by the CASMEZ and all Agricultural Development Authorities were slowly transferred to the Regions. The '70s were therefore a decade of profound and difficult changes, with a new class of local policy makers trying to understand how to administer these new realities, with the old bureaucrats adapting

Table 3 CATA by CASMEZ in 1970.

Region	CATA no.	Advisors no.
Lazio	6	12
Abruzzo	12	25
Molise	8	15
Campania	14	29
Puglia	19	27
Calabria	42	66
Basilicata	10	12
Sicilia	24	50
Sardegna	34	91
Total	169	327

Source: Volpi, 1990.

and/or resisting vis-à-vis a new generation of public employees, who were not any longer Rome - dependant.

In the meantime, the whole Italian society was changing: the industrialization of the 50's and the 60's had attracted millions of people into towns and from the rural South to the industrial North; the active population in agriculture dropped from 8.6 million in 1951 to 2.8 million in 1981; the two energy crises of '73 and '81 ignited a debate about the role of agriculture in an industrialized country. Consumption patterns were evolving, with consumers demanding more processed food and therefore eroding the contractual power of the farmers, who for the first time had to learn that the food industries were more powerful than they themselves. The political situation was also changing, with the traditional allies of the peasants progressively losing their leading position.

Every Region, though under different names, had to establish its own Department of Agriculture, with political and administrative responsibilities and its own Regional Agricultural Development Authority, in charge of the technical intervention. Extension was therefore differently structured in each Region: some have entrusted its management mainly to the ADA. Other Regions, instead, have allocated public funds to farmers' unions, co-operative movements and producers' associations, which had already developed their own technical services. In this moment the EEC Directive 161/72 for socio-economic information in agriculture (Law 153/75) was heterogeneously applied: some Regions issued their own laws in a relatively short period of time and employed socio-economic experts in different ways, while other Regions were able to use the available funds only after ten years.

As a matter of fact, after World War II the farmers' unions and the co-operative movements, which Fascism had silenced, recovered their strength and started to expand

(?) The average farm was about 10 hectares. 204,000 hectares were given to another 45,000 families who already owned some land. 55,000 hectares of pastures and woodland ha were distributed with common rights. It must be stated that the land reform heavily improved these territories: 44,000 new houses, 162 million trees, 436 irrigation systems, 3,000 kms of pipelines, 9,600 kms of roads, 191 new villages, 485 public buildings are amongst its realizations, that strongly stimulated all other economic sectors (Bandini, Guerrieri & Sediari 1989). After 30 years, the number of farms has dropped by 22%, that of active population by 25%, allowing the surviving ones to expand their operations by 25% (INSOR 1979), but still the land reform is considered to have boosted the economic performance of such areas.

again, also by recruiting field personnel. These could be divided into two categories: the political and unionist category, whose action has aimed at stimulating members' participation in facing other social forces, and the technical and administrative ones, whose job has been very similar to an extension agent. Both the farmers' unions and the co-operative movements had been accustomed to operate with their own (small) resources and with the funds annually granted by the Ministry of Agriculture. After 1972, most Regions continued along this line, simply replacing the Ministry as annual source of funds.

Very much of the progress achieved by Italian agriculture is surely to be attributed to the advisors employed by input-producing firms. Also these advisors can be divided into two sub-groups: those agents who are mainly commercial, whose contacts are almost exclusively with the owners of agricultural stores, supporting their sales with some technical information, and the mainly technical advisor, who periodically visits major clients, organizes field days, excursions, conferences and other initiatives, with the purpose of stimulating the final demand of his company's products. A 1981 survey estimated the total number of such advisors to be at least 4,300 (Mazza, Santucci & Volpi, 1981).

In between the co-operative movement and the private companies, there were the old *Consorzi*, and their *Federazione Nazionale*, that had never fully recuperated their co-operative soul (Rossi Doria 1963). *Federconsorzi* was Italy's major agri-business at all levels: from applied research to input productions, from processing to output marketing; it had the largest network of agricultural stores all-over the country and the biggest storage facilities, since the time of food rationing, during and after WWII. In 1979 its technical personnel amounted to at least 3,000 persons, out of which about 1,500 were in direct contact with farmers (Federconsorzi 1979).

After 1979

In 1978 a conference was held in Rome to evaluate the situation of public and semi-public extension services (ITPA 1978). The figures and situations revealed during that meeting were quite negative: nationwide, public expenditure in extension activities amounted to 0.33% of the Gross Agricultural Product, against an EEC average of 0.73%. There were Regions with almost no public extension service at all. There was a growing awareness (Saltini 1979, Volpi 1980, Sturiale 1981 and many others) that public and semi-public extension had to be strengthened and re-organized on a completely new basis (table 4).

In February 1979, within the so-called «mediterranean package», the EEC issued the Regulation 279/79, a far more binding provision than the previous socio-economic

Table 4 Public and semi-public advisors.

Region	1976 no.	1984 no.	1987 no.
Piemonte	100	253	376
Valle d'Aosta	5	34	41
Lombardia	120	564	392
Veneto	90	524	n.a.
Friuli Venezia Giulia	135	150	n.a.
Liguria	15	34	47
Emilia Romagna	200	260	471
Bozen	25	33	n.a.
Trento	50	73	58
Toscana	80	148	201
Umbria	30	88	76
Marche	30	267	204
Lazio	85	215	n.a.
Abruzzo	20	51	69
Molise	10	102	23
Campania	107	n.a.	265
Basilicata	30	71	141
Puglia	150	384	316
Calabria	126	57	67
Sardegna	153	108	108
Sicilia	106	229	n.a.
Total	1.667	3.645	n.a.

Source: Bartolelli and Sauda, 1988.

Directive 161/72, for the development of extension in Italy. It provided 66 million ECUs over a period of 12 years, for the training and for a share of the salaries of approximately 2,000 new extension agents, 60% of whom were to be posted in the South and in the Islands, where the needs were greater. This figure was later increased to 3,500 and some more funds were allocated by the EEC Regulations 1760/87 and 2052/88, matched by Italian sources (national and regional).

A committee was set up at the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry, with regional delegates, unions' representatives and some experts, who together wrote the implementation plan, that was approved by the Commission in 1981. Each Region had to re-define, by a regional law, its own extension system, which could either be entirely public or semi-public, entrusted to agricultural associations, co-operatives, unions and producers' associations. In this latter case, however, it has to be co-ordinated by a regional committee. Advisors, once at work, were to follow annual programs devised at regional level and co-ordinated by a national committee (CIDA = *Comitato Inter-regionale per la Divulgazione Agricola*), mainly responsible for the use of EEC funds. Five newly established training centres, called CIFDA (*Centro Inter-regionale per la Formazione in Divulgazione Agricola*), under the joint management of groups of

Regions, are responsible for the training of the new agents, with a nine month training course⁽⁸⁾. Each center had to have a standing staff of 4-5 persons, previously trained in a six month course, held by the Training Centre of the CASMEZ and selected among candidates with a least a three year experience in agricultural extension. This personnel were to be responsible for the training of the young extension agents and for research aiming at up-grading the effectiveness of the service⁽⁹⁾.

The implementation of the EEC regulation has been very difficult and time consuming in many Regions: unions and co-operatives have been fighting to maintain an important role for themselves and therefore to receive the funds; many Regions delayed the approval of their own Regional Laws, *conditio sine qua non* for the allocation of EEC funds⁽¹⁰⁾. The trainees' education took place during 1984 and the first course for new extension agents was held at the CIF-

⁽⁸⁾ EEC Regulation 1760/87 allows farmers' unions to organize their own courses; two unions have used EEC funds for such purpose.

⁽⁹⁾ This function has been never activated because all human and financial resources have been absorbed by the courses. Only some conferences and round-tables have been organized.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Two Regions, Puglia and Sardegna, have not as yet (1994) promulgated a regional law about the organization of agricultural extension: the training of new advisors has therefore been very limited and financed with other funds.

DA *Centro-Italia* in Foligno only in 1985, 6 years after the 270/79 EEC Regulation. Compared with the 3,500 targeted new extension agents, the most up-to-date official figures (CIDA 1993) reveal that only 1,556 new advisors had been trained by December 1993 (**table 5**).

This figure obviously does not cover the entire extension personnel already at work (probably about 5,000) for two reasons: many agents were already at work in 1979-80 and they have only received some retraining. Furthermore, many administrations used other resources and other tracks to strengthen the extension service. Nevertheless, the total number at the present is unknown even to the CIDA ⁽¹⁾, which limits its co-ordination in an administrative management of EEC funds.

Last but not least, it must be stated that the «extension line» represents only a small portion of the public and semi-public agricultural bureaucracy: Nomisma (1992) quantified the personnel of public institutions related to agriculture up to 37,772 (**table 6**), but it was not possible to quantify the personnel working for the co-operative movements, for the farmers' unions and for the producers' associations, who are certainly some tens of thousands.

The effectiveness of the «extension component» is a variable depending upon the functionality of other components of the system, and a growing number of experts speak about «Integrated services for the agricultural development» (CNEL 1987, Saccomandi 1988, Fanfani & Petriccione 1989), depicting a reality where co-ordination and co-operation are still a distant goal.

According with Rossi (1987), three main organizational models of the extension line, almost entirely funded with public resources, can be found in Italy:

- a) Regions that have the extension service entirely within the Public Administration;
 - b) Regions where the field workers are employed by farmers's groups, producers' associations and/or co-operatives, whereas the specialists and the back-up services are within the Public Administration, that also co-ordinates the activities of field agents;
 - c) Regions where the advisors, the specialists, and the back-up services can be either within the Public Administration or managed by some farmers' organization.
- In the meantime, while the public and semi-public extension services were restructuring their organization, inserting new people into these activities, trying to recuperate efficiency and competitiveness, a number of changes was occurring during the late '80s and early '90s.

⁽¹⁾ This unfortunately leaves unanswered the question of the real amount of human resources devoted to public and semi-public agricultural extension in Italy: certainly they are far more than 1,500. In little Umbria, for example, the CIDA counts only 32 trained and 28 at work, but there are at least 74 other advisors working for the farmers' unions within the framework of the regional programme. In Emilia Romagna, the newly trained are 141, but those at work, paid by regional funds, were already 471 in 1987.

Table 5 Training of new advisors with funds.

Region	Need (*) no.	Target (**) no.	1993 (***) no.
Piemonte	400	224	134
Valle d'Aosta	12	11	7
Lombardia	372	164	133
Veneto	476	253	85
Friuli Venezia Giulia	88	68	23
Liguria	107	58	42
Emilia Romagna	486	192	143
Bozen	138	27	1
Trento		31	0
Toscana	317	151	83
Umbria	126	63	32
Marche	275	96	47
Lazio	334	246	126
Abruzzo	248	137	109
Molise	86	54	49
Campania	558	334	162
Basilicata	105	98	26
Puglia	451	427	39
Calabria	234	234	173
Sardegna	163	141	26
Sicilia	602	491	116
Total	5,578	3,500	1,556

(*) ITPA 1978 (**) MAF 1987 (***) Data from CIDA 1993.

Table 6 Personnel of agricultural institutions, 1992.

Institutions	Personnel no.
Central offices of the Ministry of Agriculture	1,547
Forest police (*)	7,067
Inspectorate against food frauds (*)	907
Agencies within the Ministry's umbrella	1,807
Regional departments of agriculture	11,933
Regional authorities for the development of agriculture	4,738
Other regional institutions	1,767
Land reclamation and irrigation authorities	8,006
Total	37,772

(*) Belongs to the Ministry.
Source: Nomisma, 1992.



The whole Common Agricultural Policy has gone through a complete change, also in order to find a final agreement acceptable within the GATT talks started in Uruguay in 1986. The CAP and the Italian agricultural policy had been devised after WWII, with a huge number of farmers, low productivity, irregular supply. During the 80's the new goals of the CAP and therefore of the national policies have been painfully re-shaped and progressively implemented: freeze on prices, quotas for most products, stabilizers, minor market interventions, quality instead of quantity, environmentally sound agriculture, defense of rural incomes through direct payments and integrated rural development programmes.

The *Federconsorzi* has collapsed under the heavy burden of mismanagement, political interference, its own debts and those of member *Consorti*; controlled companies have been sold, restructured or simply closed (Picardi 1992, Saltini 1993). This has been a trauma for many people, both within and outside the conglomerate and for thousands of farmers, but it has left more occasions for other input-delivery firms, processing companies, healthier co-operatives.

The integration between agro-food companies, modern distributors and producers is increasing: through contract farming (MAF 1988) producers must respect an integrated package of input, know-how and processes, with continuous guidance by advisors. A full set of services is actually provided to farmers by contractors (Fanfani 1989, Salvini 1993), who originally limited their field of action to plowing and harvesting and who have now expanded and diversified their offer, according with the various needs of their clients.

There is a growing number of integrated,

multi-disciplinary consulting firms, providing managerial expertise, technical and financial support, marketing advice, etc., as to satisfy the needs of the most innovative, market oriented farmers, who are not served by the public and semi-public extension services and who are willing to pay for such high-level advice. An example is provided by the biological producers, whose number is increasing and who have been obliged to recuperate the origins of autonomous extension activities, financing their own experiments, their own training and advisory system, because the official ones were completely against such movement (Santucci 1993).

Also the two biggest co-operative movements and the four most important farmers' unions are facing financial problems and are openly discussing the possibility of merging or at least starting some joint-operation. Associates and clients are paying more and more openly for the services they receive, beginning to follow the same path that was already taken by other European countries years ago. This could also reduce the fragmentation of the semi-public extension services at regional level.

Research institutions and higher education are also beginning to rethink their roles and their organizations, because there are too many duplications and overlappings that only increase costs without leading to any real benefit. 17 institutes and 25 centres managed by the National Research Council, 23 research institutes with many substations within the Ministry of Agriculture, other research centres with national coverage, research centres supported by Regional Governments, 72 vocational schools, 63 technical agricultural institutes, 19 faculties of agriculture and 13 faculties of veterinary sciences would appear to be too many in

a country where the number of farmers is declining every year.

Italian tax-payers are increasingly concerned about the costs and the inefficiency of many Institutions and in 1993 the majority of voters ruled for the abrogation of the Ministry of Agriculture⁽¹²⁾, that had not been able to justify its existence. Even the proposal of a national plan for agricultural services (MAF 1992) set off a strong debate (Saraceno 1990) and its top-down verticistic approach was strongly criticized by Santucci (1992) and Volpi (1993). A modern state with international obligations obviously needs to have at least a central coordination and therefore a new Ministry for Resources in Agriculture, Environment and Forestry (MIRAAF) has been established, whose tasks have been once again reduced and to some extent transferred to the Regions.

A growing set of measures promoted by the European Union in order to accompany the restructuring of agriculture is project-based and requires that the existing advisory services partially change their own role, becoming more involved in creating awareness, stimulating people's participation and creativity, so as to imagine and to define development projects, community based and/or product oriented.

Conclusions

A number of surveys have been done, either with a national coverage (TECNAGRO 1985, Bartolelli & Sauda 1988, FIDAF 1991, Giacomini & Martorana 1993) or with a regional focus (IRER 1981, Fraser 1984, ERSAL 1986, TECNAGRO 1987, Santucci 1989, Buccioli 1991, Nasuelli & Setti 1993, ERSAL 1993, Corradetti 1993, Pieroni 1993), in order to verify the impact of public, semi-public and private extension activities, the role of information in farmers' decision making, the advisors' job satisfaction, the methods and media most used and most appreciated by farmers: the return to public investment in extension. It is therefore possible summarize these findings, at the end of this short history of the Italian experiences in agricultural extension.

It must be clear that Italian agriculture is extremely diversified, as De Benedictis wrote some years ago (1984) and that there is no easy solution, nor any blanket recommendation: according to INSOR (1993) which combined data from the 1991 agricultural census and from the EC-RICA network, out of about three million «production units», the largest 1% are able to realize 40% of the output, while the largest 10% produce 76%. Very large, capital intensive, market

⁽¹²⁾ Italians also voted to cancel two other minor Ministries. It must be remembered that in the last two years investigations all over Italy have revealed a jungle of bribes and corruption inside public institutions, state-controlled companies and state banks. The discovery of such a level of corruption is motivating a true political revolution, whose effects are not yet fully known.

oriented, specialised holdings (either family farms and capitalist farms) managed by highly qualified farmers coexist with very small, generally part-time, marginal holdings. The productivity of land, of labour and the return on investments can be extremely different. Situations vary all along a continuum and it is really impossible to generalize: valid farms, innovation oriented, able to produce high incomes can be found everywhere in the country, bordering on extra-marginal production units, multi-income families and price-unelastic farmers, who even ignore the existence of a Common European Market.

There is a huge number of innovations still waiting to be accepted by the majority of potential adopters (CESTAAT 1988, INEA 1993): research centres, public and private, national or regional and universities are producing innovations at a rate that is faster than the financial and cognitive capabilities of most producers.

Farmers could use an enormous variety of sources and channels of information, but most of them are relatively uninformed (ISMEA 1993b). Circulation of good quality farm magazines is low, attendance to meetings, conferences, fairs, etc. also not very high. Modern information technology is present in a very small portion of the most advanced farms: computer aided management and video-text systems are almost non-existent.

The advice provided is normally fragmented and very specific, lacking the general overview that should be necessary. The integrated services for agricultural development are still far away, because of conflicts inside single institutions and among the various institutions which play a role in zonal planning, vocational education, applied research, environment, health protection, agriculture and food industry. Some measures of the new CAP and the development of biological agriculture will push towards a more integrated vision of the farm.

In the future, a network of organizations will coexist, with some huge structures still providing most of information and innovations: the input suppliers and the output processing companies, in many cases Italian branches or subsidiaries of cross-national companies, will orient the production and the processes of the largest market-oriented farmers. Public and semi-public extension agents will be more involved in the practical implementation of the CAP and of the other structural, social and regional policies, providing this type of information, helping farmers in their applications, devising projects to be financed. Free-lance advisors, multi-disciplinary consulting firms, contractors, serving either individual farmers or institutions, will continue to cover all the room left unexplored or poorly served by the other agencies, compensating for their small size with the great elasticity typical to the small structures.

Cost consciousness will be another key word, in the public, semi-public and private

sectors: for those who manage extension services, for policy-makers, and for the farmers, who are going to be clients, rather than beneficiaries. In turn, price-conscious farmers, progressively independent from the political farmers' unions, will be able to shift their demand for information and/or services from one agency to another.

Italy will continue to be a vast laboratory of experiences, failures and successes, choices and experiments, as it has been in the past, throughout 250 years of informal and formal agricultural education. The heterogeneity of soils and climates, of the landscapes and products, of the farming systems and of the social structures, will make it impossible to individualize a single Italian model, whose only possible feature will be that of accepting a great diversity. ●

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Paper produced within the research «Servizi di sviluppo agricolo», MURST Grant 60%, 1992.