

**IMPLEMENTATION OF LABEL CONTENTS OF GASTRONOMIC
TYPICAL PRODUCTS AS A TOOL OF SPREAD
OF ZONE CHARACTERISTICS:
FEASIBILITY ANALYSIS FOR SOME FINES
LOMELLINA RICES¹**

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Abstract

In addition to the mandatory contents, labels correspond to the information need of an increasingly mature and aware market. Among the communication strategies already present into labels of local products, the highlight of links with the territory becomes a further typical element of a product: the territory is capable of adding value to its local products, but typical products are also able to increase the attractiveness of an area, becoming, in turn, a valuable promoting tool of territory itself.

The Lomellina history and its socio-economic development are inextricably intertwined with the spread of rice growing and rice making, because rice is the product for excellence of the territory.

Therefore, this work aims to delineate the possible pathways for the introduction of a territorial labelling of the rice product, that can highlight typical features of the product but also provide visibility and recognition to an area, enhancing both the environmental and cultural richness.

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Riassunto

Oltre ai contenuti obbligatori, le etichette rispondono sempre più all'esigenza di informazione di un mercato via via più maturo e consapevole. Fra le strategie di comunicazione, contenute nelle etichette dei prodotti tipici, l'evidenziazione dei legami con il territorio esprime la "tipicità nello spazio": se da un lato il territorio è in grado di aggiungere valore ai prodotti tipici in esso realizzati, anche i prodotti tipici sono in grado di aumentare l'attrattività di una determinata area, diventando, a loro volta, un valido strumento di promozione.

La storia della Lomellina ed il suo sviluppo socio-economico si intrecciano inscindibilmente con la diffusione della risicoltura e fanno del riso il prodotto tipico per eccellenza del territorio.

Pertanto, il presente lavoro si pone l'obiettivo di delineare possibili percorsi per l'introduzione di una etichettatura territoriale del prodotto riso, capace di evidenziare la tipicità del prodotto stesso ma anche di dare visibilità e riconoscibilità ad un territorio, valorizzandone al contempo le ricchezze ambientali ed culturali.

Keywords: Rice, typical product, territorial label

The features and the role of rice growing in the Lomellina economy and culture

The Lomellina has a close connection with water, essential for the rice growing. This is evident at a territory first sight, because it is limited by the Po, by the low course of the Ticino, by the course of the Sesia and by a line connecting the Ticino and the Sesia, south of Vercelli and Novara.

The Lomellina includes a section of alluvial plain located south of a line of springs and resurgences, providing abundant water for irrigation, an unmistakable characteristic of whole area; between the main water courses there are the Agogna and Terdoppio streams and the two branches of the Cavour Canal.

Since the eleventh century, the Benedictine and Cistercian monastic order began the first works of land reclamation, draining waterlogged land and making the reflux water flow in a canal network, that has been

used for irrigation and promote the development of agriculture in the region (1).

The Lomellina history and its socio-economic development are inextricably intertwined with the spread of rice growing and rice making, because rice is the product for excellence of the territory.

The first Italian, or European in some author's opinion, experiment of cultivating the rice plant (brought from China by Marco Polo), was tempted in Villanova at the end of the fifteenth century. Villanova is a small country, which was part of a private estate of the Sforza family, and was particularly rich in water.

Under the domination of Ludovico il Moro, the rice cultivation was introduced in a systematic way, perhaps as an attempt to cope with the terrible plague, that dramatically reduced the population all over the continent.

Since then, the rice growing assumed an increasing importance in the whole of Lomellina, due to major schemes of water and remodeling of the territory.

The importance of this growing for the local economy is evident if we consider the areas under cultivation. The Lomellina extends about 106,678 hectares, 61,443 hectares being cultivated with rice (2006) and represents about 27% of land cultivated with rice in Italy.

The Lomellina is at the center of the so-called "rice triangle", constituted by the provinces of Pavia, Vercelli and Novara, which home alone over 81% of the Italian soil in cultivated rice (*Fig. 1*).

Over 56% of the European Union² rice comes from Italian territory, in particular, over 15% is found in Lomellina. The Italian production in 2006 (1,447,628 tons of paddy) represented over 55% of European production.

During 2007, the rice-planted area has increased by more than 1.7% (reaching 232,549 ha) with an output of 1,487,557 tons, close to 56% of the European total.

Most of the farms, which are in Lomellina are therefore characterized by small to medium size (*Fig. 2*). Over 66% of firms (847 firms over 1,278) operating in Lomellina take up from 10 to 100 hectares.

² The producing countries are: Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Hungary

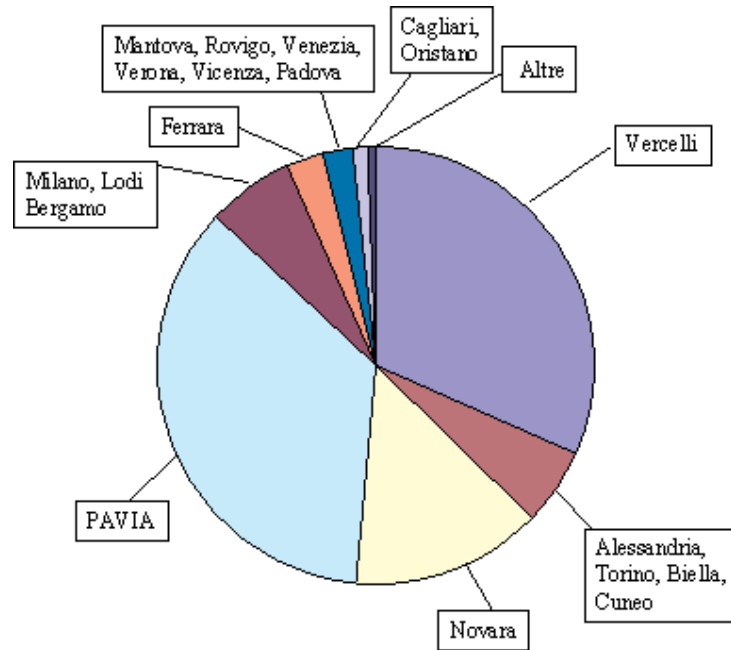


Fig.1 - Distribution of rice-planted area in Italy (year 2006).
(Our elaboration from ENR data)

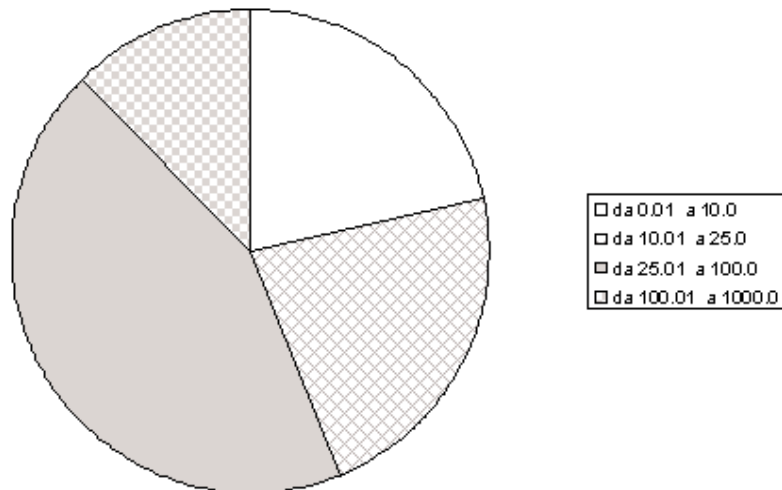


Fig. 2 - Rice companies operating in Lomellina divided by cultivated hectares
(year 2006).
(Our elaboration from ENR data)

Mosaic of Lomellina rice growing

In the National Register of rice³ varieties, there are 138 varieties of rice, so Lomellina rice is extremely diversified as varieties that can be cultivated.

For the purposes of this work, it is interesting to identify the territory most-characterizing rice varieties.

First, for the five years 2003-2007, the percentage of Lomellina area devoted to different rice varieties cultivation was calculated, in relation to the national total.

The values obtained are shown in Figure 3 allowing to select particularly significant rice varieties in the context of Lomellina rice growing. Among the finest varieties, the most representative ones appear to be: Cripto, for which there is a very significant growth, S. Andrea, Roma, Baldo, and Vialone Nano, whose amounts are constantly rising. The long rices are highlighting interesting performances.

The ground extension invested in the different rice varieties is another significant parameter (*Fig. 4*).

Among the precious rice varieties, the picture is partly different if we consider the previously evaluated parameter. In this case indeed, among the most-important rice varieties already cited, Indica, Aries-Dragon and Arborio-Volano are to add, while S. Andrea, Roma and Baldo variety are well confirmed.

The weight of Indica variety growing deserves a consideration, because it does not belong to the local gastronomic tradition. It responds to changing of market demands related to social variables (rices consumed by a community of immigrants from Asian), and to a diversification of food habits. Considering the traditional varieties and breeding data of Figures 3 and 4, S.Andrea, Roma and Baldo are the three most significant rice varieties, both in relation to the whole rice-cultivated national area, and to the whole rice-growing area in Lomellina.

In an experimental phase of the project, the territorial-labelling could be concentrated on these varieties, better representative of the area.

³ Published in the "Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana" 21/10/2002 n. 280

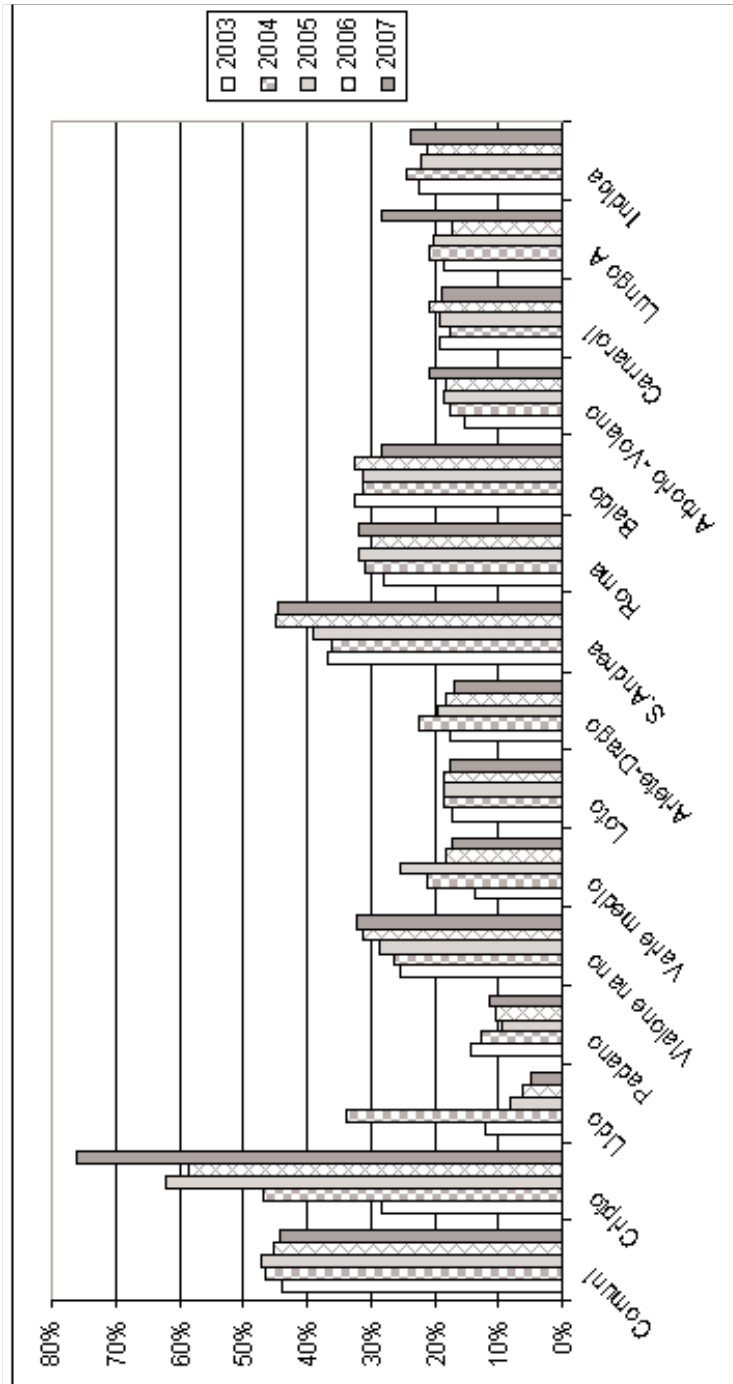


Fig. 3 - Percentage of area devoted to different varieties Lomellina compared to the total national.
(Our elaboration from ENR data)

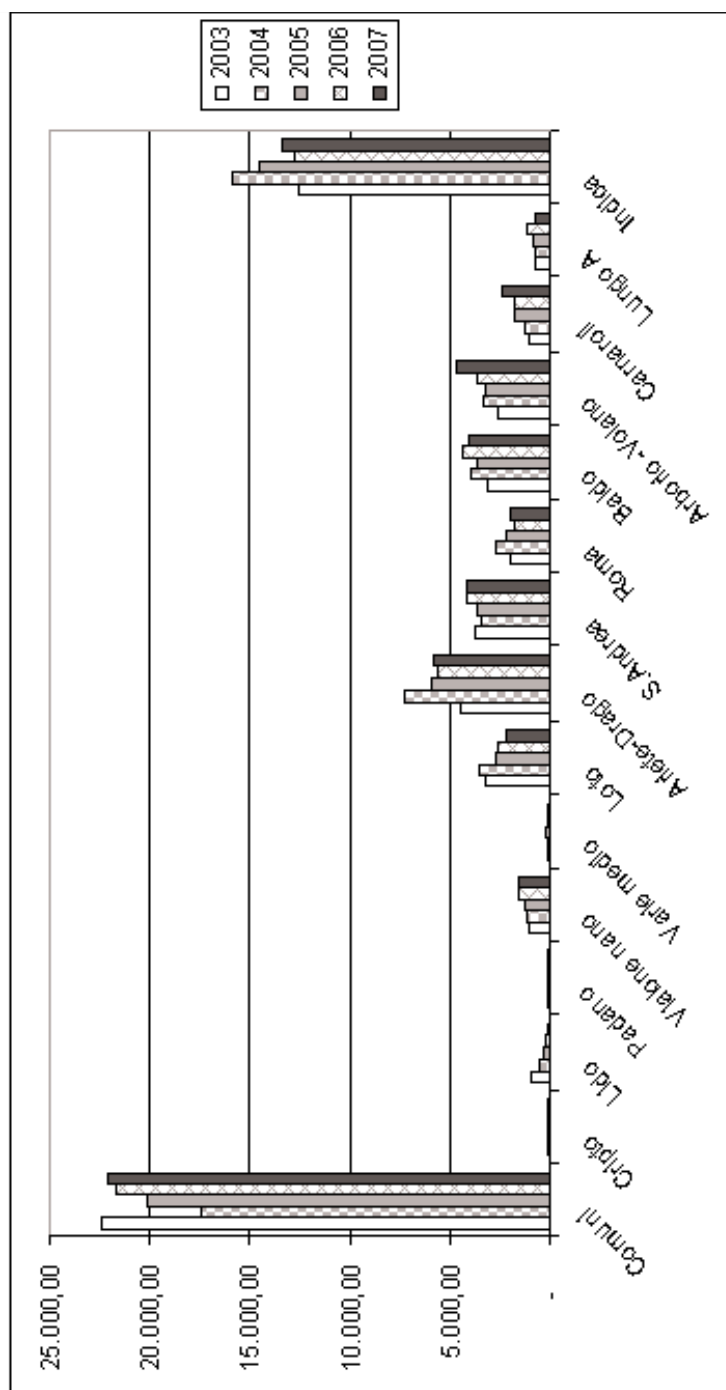


Fig. 4 - Area devoted to different varieties in Lomellina (values expressed in ha).
(Our elaboration from ENR data)

Labeling of food products

In Italy, labelling is regulated by Legislative Decree 27 January 1992, n. 109 implementing the DIR n. 89/395/CEE e n. 89/396/CEE on the labelling, presentation and advertising of foodstuffs. The Decree defines labelling “all the mentions, indications, trademark, pictures or symbols related to the foodstuff, that appear directly on the packaging” (art.1 c. 2).

The first function of the food labelling is to inform consumers about the characteristics of the product they are buying, so they can choose the most suited one to their needs and expectations. Thus, information can not be given which may mislead the buyer about the food property, quality and composition.

The labels of prepackaged food products must, however, show a number of indications ranging from name, list of ingredients, quantity, the minimum period of storage, until the indication of “place of origin or source, in case that the omission may mislead the buyer about the origin or source of the product” (art.3 c.1 lett. m).

For the purposes of this work, it is interesting to immediately note the importance of place of origin for food marketing.

The traceability concept is another factor that is assuming an increasing importance in agro-food production: it is “the ability to trace the history of a product through documented identification” (ISO 8402). The Legislative Decree 306/02, applied in 2003, provides for the obligation to indicate the origin of goods, especially for fruit and vegetables. The first objective of traceability is to meet food safety requirements, allowing the identification of the different responsibilities along the supply chain. However, it also enhances the production of good quality agri-food and the place of origin. In addition to the mandatory contents, the labels correspond to information needs of an increasingly mature and aware market.

This is the case of information on the presence of genetically modified rice: since 2006 the Ministry of Health reported the activation of the Community control measures for GMOs, and called for the adoption of a label that contains clear information, to allow consumers more conscious choices (2).

Together with the growing attention to environmental issues, a willingness to add labels on the environmental impact of goods has grown. Impacts are expressed in terms of carbon dioxide emitted to produce the product (3), with the application of the “Life Cycle Analysis (LCA)” instrument.

Tools to valorize the interaction between product quality and territory of origin

In the context of a strategy of territorial marketing, the focus on the typical-product labelling comes from the following conviction: the territory is capable of adding value to its local products, but also the typical products are able to increase the attractiveness of a determined area, becoming a valuable promoting tool themselves.

Among the communication strategies already present into labels of local products, the highlight of links with the territory becomes a further typical element of a product (4).

UE labels, like many others managed by private organisations or concerning, for example, with parks or nature reserves, tend to transfer the land values to particular characteristics of the product: the place of origin becomes a quality "guarantee" of the product.

A typical product has to be traditional, bond to a specific territory and owning authentic features.

It is, therefore, a typical feature, which lasts over time, space and way of production. This feature is expressed through communication links with history, territory and production context.

The labeling quality of community: the brands PDO and PGI

From 90s, within the food market there was a progressive recovery of attention to the typical food products and to the corner-products. This led to a revitalization of local food production.

European agricultural policy answered to this requirement, because it is characterized by a "strategy of quality" food, through a process of protection. All of the Europe is free filled with an immense variety of food products: when a product becomes well-known outside of national borders, it comes into a market, where other products are defined genuine and show the same name. This unfair competition not only discourages producers but it is misleading to consumers. That's why in 1992 the European Community has set up some systems known as PDO, PGI to promote and protect food products.

The Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) identifies the name of a product, whose production, processing and preparation must take place in a determined geographical area and it is characterized by an acknowledged

and established expertise. In the case of protected geographical indication (PGI), the link with the territory is present in at least one of the stages of production, processing or preparation of the product. In addition, the product has a good reputation. The product enhances the quality of rural areas and the production disciplinary add value to the product and its territory.

Currently, the regulation of PDO and PGI labels is contained in the Regulations CE n. 510/2006(5) and n. 1898/2006(6) (*Fig. 5*).



Red label



Blue label

Fig. 5 - Community symbol for "Protected Designation of Origin" and "Protected Geographical Indication" (Source: REG. CE n. 628/2008⁴).

Up to now, not many varieties of rice have carried one of the EU trademarks.

PDO Rices are:

- Riso di Baraggia Biellese e Vercellese (Italy)
- Arroz de Valencia (Spain)

IGP rices are:

- Riso nano vialone veronese (Italy)
- Arroz del Delta del Ebro (Spain)
- Riz de Camargue (France).

According to this work purposes, it is evident the lack of the prestigious recognition to at least one of the many varieties, that characterize the Lomellina rice growing.

⁴ "In base all'esperienza maturata a seguito dell'adozione dei simboli comunitari DOP e IGP, appare opportuno agevolarne la distinzione, agli occhi del consumatore, ricorrendo all'uso di colori diversi per i simboli relativi (fatto salvo un periodo transitorio fino al 1 maggio 2010)." (Regolamento (CE) n. 628/2008 della Commissione del 2 luglio 2008 che modifica il regolamento (CE) n. 1898/2006 recante modalità di applicazione del regolamento (CE) n. 510/2006 del Consiglio relativo alla protezione delle indicazioni geografiche e delle denominazioni d'origine dei prodotti agricoli e alimentari) published in the "Gazzetta Ufficiale della Repubblica Italiana" 21/10/2002 n. 280

The collective geographical community mark

It becomes crucial for the establishment of a system to ensure that competition is not distorted. This will promote a harmonious development of economic activities in the Community, a continuous expansion and the smooth functioning of an internal market, with similar conditions to those of a national market.

To satisfy this need, EC Regulation No 40/94 (7) and subsequent amendments, established a Community Trade Mark that, according to a single procedure, gives companies the right to acquire CTM. These trademarks should assure a standard protection and produce their effects throughout the Community.

Title VIII establishes the Community collective trademarks, with the objective of ensuring the origin, nature and quality of products, through compliance with a disciplinary that provides production requirements, controls and sanctions. To register a Community collective mark it shall be necessary to deposit a regulation of use, indicating the persons authorized to use the mark, the conditions of membership of the association, and the conditions of mark using.

For the purposes of the present work, the feature of greater interest is the possibility of registering also signs or indications as collective marks, which may serve to designate the geographical origin of products or services.

Unlike the trade mark, the collective mark may contain information concerning geographical origin, because ensures *historical, geographical and environmental conditions*-related quality.

As a mark of quality, it plays a dual nature related to identity and distinctiveness, as well as the source of the area is declared and guaranteed. (8)

With regard to this, the Industrial Property Code (9) (art.11) provides that “notwithstanding Article 13, c.1 lett, b, a collective mark may consist of signs or indications which may serve in trade to designate the geographical origin of products or services”.

However, the regulation of use of the geographical collective mark must allow people, whose goods or services originate in that geographical area, to become members of the association of mark holders. So the organization requesting the registration of a collective geographic mark must have an open structure.

There are numerous entities (often the Chambers of Commerce or Associations of producers) that have already registered brands aimed at

protecting all kinds of typical products, ranging from materials for handicrafts like "Alabastro di Volterra", "Pietra piacentina", until the quality-product food and wine like "Vino Nobile di Montepulciano", "Cozze di Taranto" or "Carciofo di Cupello".

The unique characteristics of the Lomellina territory and its secular traditions, related to the rice growing, lead to the hypothesis of a collective geographic mark "Lomellina Rice".

The municipal designation of origin

The municipal designation of origin (DE.C.O.⁵, afterwards) is a town brand of quality, that certifies the origin of a product (of the gourmet industry or handicraft) from a particular territory. It is regulated by the laws governing the collective marks, does not generate incompatibility with European designation, it is an additional tool to enhance the area.

The steps, to implement DE.C.O., start from a reconnaissance of the territory and its typical products, identifying those especially related to the history of the area. It is explicated the product looking for maximum involvement of citizens and stakeholders (10).

So the DE.C.O. arises from a simple municipal act, that lists the products identifier of a territory, for which the mark is studied and the registration is carried out.

Field professionals stress out that the success of the initiative is linked to activities done by the City Council for the involvement of all stakeholders. One of the objectives of DE.C.O. indeed is to develop a cultural process of recognition by the community of the cultural values of its territory (11).

There are hundreds of municipalities have started DE.CO and lately this mark is growing in Lomellina too. Currently the certified products are four. The first to take action was the City of Cilavegna, that in 2005 granted the DE.CO to the "pink asparagus"; in 2007 it was the turn of the Municipality of Sannazzaro de' Burgondi for "bakery products with rice flour", in 2008 was recognized with the mark to the "Bertagnina Gourd" from City of Dorno and to the "Red Onion" (12) by the City of Breme.

At the same time with the development of ecotourism demand, many protected areas, especially Natural Parks, have developed their own "Park

⁵ "Denominazione Comunale d'Origine" - italian language

Brand", whose use is granted for the labelling of all typical products or goods made in the internal area, respecting the sustainable policy of the park itself.

Rice market characteristics and opportunities of vision of the territory of origin

Lomellina hosts on its own territory numerous rice companies, some of them being relevant both at national and Community level. They export abroad significant amounts of their production. Therefore, it is considered that territorial labeling could spread the image and could lead to area identifiably beyond national borders too.

Figure 6 highlights the importance of the Community market for the Italian rice growing, that sells in European Union countries about 60% of its production. The main countries of destination of Italian rice are shown in Figure 7; more generally, it should be remembered, that a significant 31%, of the total distributed rice in community countries, taking place in countries which are also producers.

To the purposes of this work, it is particularly interesting to note that among the largest importers of Italian rice there are nations from which a significant proportion of tourists come to visit our country: France, Germany, Great Britain. Thus, the "territorial label", aimed to give visibility and recognition to Lomellina area, could have success because it fits into a context where an interest is already present.

This would stimulate curiosity about alternative routes, pointing on the more easily accessible zones, not far from the main axes of tourism. We must remember that the most eastern Lomellina area is crossed by the highway Milano-Genova, while the road linking Vercelli to Pavia crosses longitudinally the Mid-North part of Lomellina, following a part of famous Via Francigena.

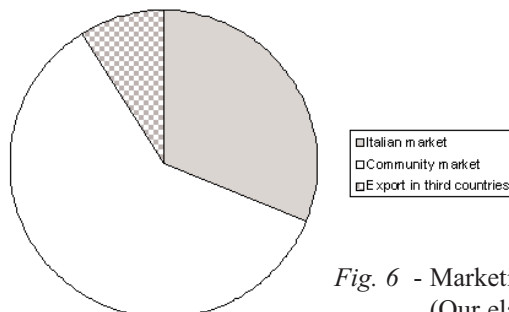
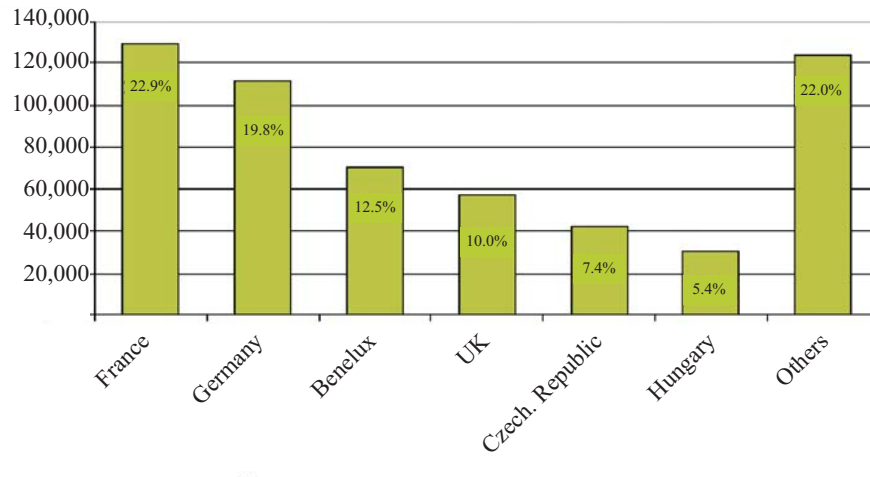


Fig. 6 - Marketing 2006-2007 - Budget placement.
(Our elaboration from ENR data)



*Fig. 7 - Deliveries of rice to the other EU member states to 31/08/07 (values expressed in tons of manufactured rice).
(Our elaboration from ENR data)*

The export to non-EU countries (this is a market not reaching 9% of total) is still concentrated in the European area (just under 47%) and of Middle East (over 32%), as explained by Figure 8, showing the main non-EU importers of Italian rice.

As we have been able to observe, the link between agro-food product and its place of origin has become more and more an added value, a characteristic of quality. However, there is feeling that in all quality labels the image of the territory is functional to the excellence of the typical product.

However, it should be stressed that the effectiveness of this policy depends on the visibility which the area has to the final consumer. This is a kind of virtuous circle, by which the trade of a typical quality product comes from a territory to which environmental values are recognized. The typical product conveys a positive image of the territory, ensuring a return in terms of sustainability.

In the case of Lomellina, we propose to attempt the start this virtuous circle, exploiting an emblem-of-the-territory product, the rice, a typical product sold throughout the country and exported to many countries in Community, through qualitative and quantitative levels achieved by the Lomellina rice growing.

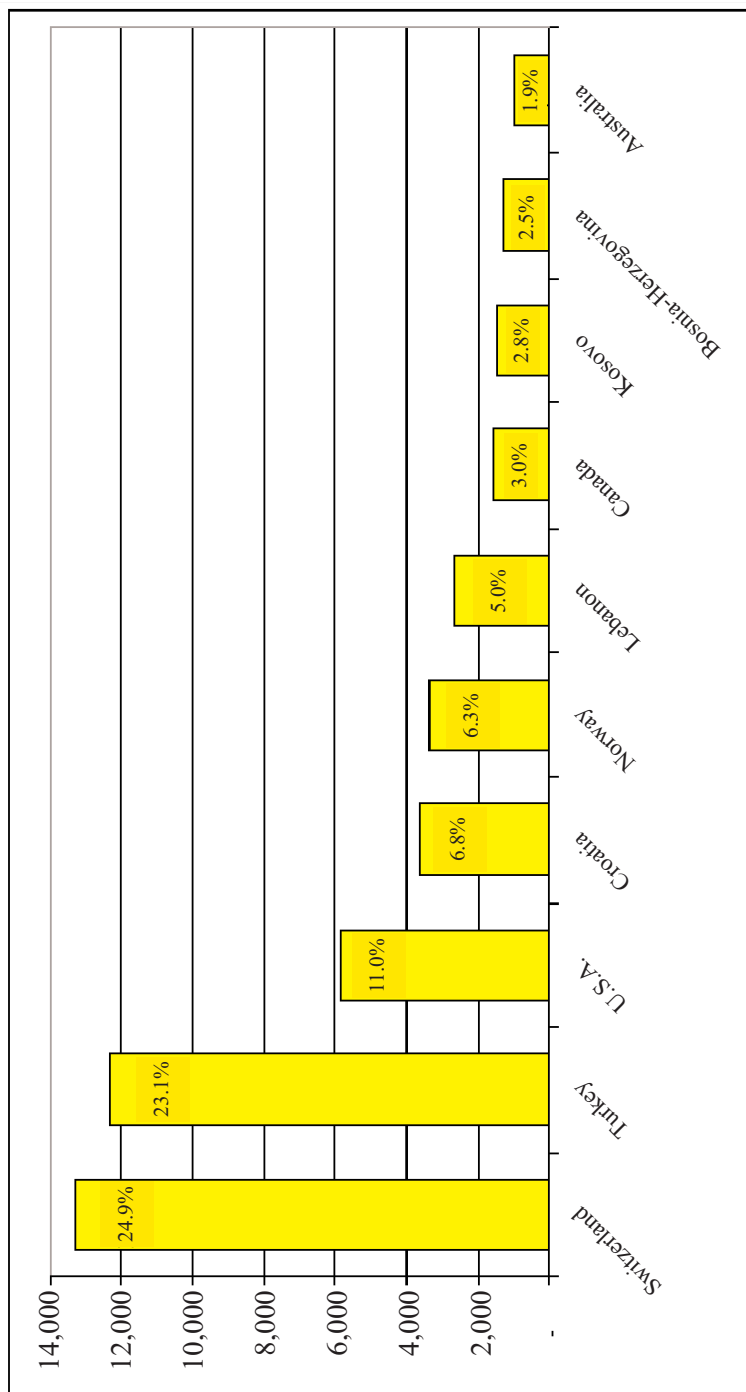


Fig. 8 - Major countries to which it has developed the export trade 2006/2007 (values expressed in tons).
(Our elaboration from ENR data)

Definition of a case of possible strategies for the distribution of land image

In Lomellina, the rice is perceived as an element of local culture, as typical of a territory which represents as a symbol.

In territorial marketing experiences it has been furthermore highlighted how it is important that the territory show a morphological and cultural homogeneity, in addition to a geographical limitation. In the case of Lomellina territory, one can even say that the morphological homogeneity is functional to rice growing. Throughout the territory, over the centuries, deep changes have undergone, aimed both to create a system of abundant water and land levelling, in order to provide suitable areas for growing rice. Through the territorial labelling of rice produced from the area, an identification of the Lomellina territory as one could be pursued and this could be able to convey information about particular areas of cultural and environmental interest.

We analyzed the information on packaging of a significant sample of rice trademarks, present in the large distribution. This made it possible to highlight that information requirements related to product, nutrition and conservation timing are mainly concentrated on the sides of the pack. The back of the packs normally carries information on other products of the same company.

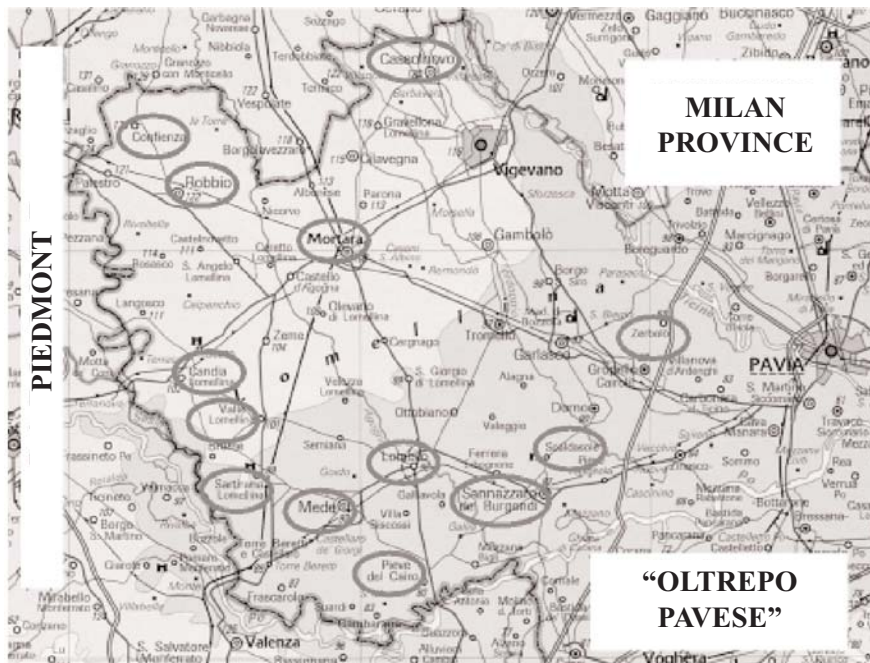
In our opinion, territorial labelling should appear on the front of the pack with a mark bearing a stylized map that could help the recognition of the Lomellina area, recalling the relationship between the product and its territory. It would be appropriate that image was always the same style, regardless of the manufacturer or the varieties of rice in the pack, so that it could be a kind of brand area recognition. On the back, the mark could be recalled into a space aimed to bring eco-tourist information and information illustrating the local cultural heritage.

In fact, since the territory of Lomellina is especially rich in artistic, architectural, cultural and environmental resources, there might be an intervention aimed at enhancing the values close to the place of rice manufacture.

Of course this goal resembles achievable only as a result of agreements between local producers, with the support of the local authorities as a part of a wider policy to promote the area.

The efficiency of local institutions is recognized by the literature as a winner competitive factor. In the absence of links and coordination

The main rice farms of Lomellina are located in 13 different municipalities, distributed throughout the territory (*Fig. 9*), each of those containing examples of centuries or even millenary-old history, in some cases even today visited.



As an example, following a rapid reconnaissance, both artistic and natural monuments have been identified, linked to cultural events, that could be appropriate enhancement as part of a territorial label.

There are countries that have a thousand-years history, like Mede, whose significance is attested by the discovery of important findings,

Cassolnovo, whose origin is dated on first century B.C. or Lomello, which in the second century was already a well-known centre and occupied an important strategic, political and economic position in the region.

Many castles can be found in the plain, like that near Pieve del Cairo, that is one of the largest in the province of Pavia. It seems to represent an intermediate step between the ancient castles, with a single central tower, and the subsequent, with corner towers.

Robbio Castle, only example of its kind in Lomellina, stands on a natural terrain fortification and its construction dates from the ninth century, at the time of the incursions of the Huns. Sartirana Lomellina Castle instead was built by Gian Galeazzo Visconti, according to the characteristic quadrilateral plant with moat, courtyard and four corner towers.

Scaldasole Castle is one of the most interesting examples of Lombard construction of the tenth century.

In the territory there are architectural monuments, that document the stylistic evolution through the ages: the Santa Maria del Castello church, in Valle Lomellina, is of Romanesque style; the Santa Maria Maggiore Basilica (XI century), in Lomello, is a remarkable construction of the first Romanesque Lombard period, the Santa Maria Church, in Candia Lomellina, is in a fifteenth-century classical style. Jewels of Gothic architecture are present, like the San Lorenzo Basilica, magnificent building, erected between 1375 and 1380, the Church of the Carmine, in Confienza, or the Parish Church of Sannazzaro de' Burgondi, built in 1400.

The Via Francigena, historical itinerary leading to Rome from Canterbury, crossed Lomellina the north-west to south-east and valuable architectures are preserved along the old path, like the Sant'Albino Abbey, in Mortara, that, in the medieval period, has hosted crowds of pilgrims. Dating back to V century, the abbey was rebuilt on the site of the battle, in which Charlemagne defeated the Lombard King Desiderio (773 d.C.).

From a naturalistic point of view, noteworthy is the conservation in the territory of 11 Garzaie, or damp areas in which the ardeide (heron family) nests. These areas are almost all recognized Regional Natural Monument, IBA⁶ and SIC⁷.

The municipality of Scaldasole hosts a nature reserve, which is one of the few remaining forest areas of Lomellina. The municipality of Zerbolò hosts the Integral Nature Reserve "Bosco Siro Negri", property of

⁶ Pu IBA Area of European importance for wild birds, inventoried by International Council for Bird Preservation (ICPB) and International Waterfowl and Wetlands Research Bureau (IWRB)

⁷ SIC - Site of Community Importance proposed by Italy to the European Community

the University of Pavia.

The area represents a unique natural reality because it is entirely occupied by forest vegetation and does not suffer from human intervention, at least seventy years.

In the Lomellina area, many festivals take place devoted to typical gastronomy of Lomellina, like the “Sagra⁸ del Salame d’Oca”, culinary specialty of Mortara, that has received the recognition of the mark PGI (13), the Sagra del Riso Lomellino of Sannazzaro de’ Burgundi or the “Sagra della rana” in Sartirana Lomellina.

Conclusions

In our opinion, if the territory is capable of adding value to its local products, typical products are also able to increase the attractiveness and visibility of a given area, becoming a valuable marketing tool.

This property, specially if it is produced in limited areas and exported in domestic and community market, is an important element to build a policy of territorial marketing for implementation of eco-tourism and enogastronomic routes.

In this context, therefore, the adoption of a development strategy would be desirable for the area of Lomellina as an agreed strategy among rice-sector business operators, local authorities and all stakeholders in the area.

Given the multiple possibilities of implementing the territorial labelling, as above described, the path to be followed should be defined as part of the development strategy and it may be implemented in a gradual way. The goal should be a widespread territorial labelling, with the characteristics outlined in the work, to be shared with stakeholders. The involvement of stakeholders would allow to make a selection of environmental values of greatest interest to the visibility of the area.

Thus the relationship between the agro-food quality and environmental quality of the territory of origin appears to be increasingly inseparable and it appears necessary to be capable to "sell the land along with the products", by communicating the historical, cultural and environmental values and adopting a strategy that makes the product an instrument of knowledge and visibility of its area.

⁸ In Italy, a sagra is a local festival, very often involving food, and frequently a historical pageant and sporting events

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