

Submitted Abstract

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Abstract

Agriculture and forestry have shaped European landscapes for centuries, transforming native forests into a mixture of woodlands, grasslands and crops with multiple benefits to farmers, environment and society. However, the more marginal areas are now generally abandoned or underexploited, especially in the mountains, because of their low productivity, which results in insufficient profitability for the farmers. Furthermore, the transfer from the productive lowlands to the mountains of unsustainable business models not based on the product quality and disconnected from the territory, as well as inheritance laws promoting agricultural land fragmentation, are relevant causes of this situation occurring almost all over Europe. Fragmentation increases agricultural production costs, generally higher in harsh conditions, and, coupled with the low productivity, further limits the possibility for farmers to have sufficient profits from their activities. In this context, updated strategies of land management have to be urgently adopted to widen managed farmland, make the management easier, promote quality products, improve farmers' profitability, set an environment where young people are encouraged to relocate or start with a new enterprise, and definitely preserve or restore agricultural landscapes. Among the strategies implemented in Europe, land consolidation associations (LCs) were proposed for pastures in France in the 1970s to encourage land parcel aggregation and simplify the management while increasing parcel monetary value. Taking a cue from France, some LCs have started to establish since 2010 also in Piedmont (NW Italy), where the regional government enacted a law to promote them in 2016. LCs are associations of private and public owners of the parcels included in a given area who decide to join together to enhance the value of their parcels, for the general interest of the community, and to contrast abandonment. LCs have to draw up a management plan of pooled parcels and identify an agricultural holding to be entrusted with the application of the good agricultural practises proposed by the plan and the achievement of its goals over a well determined time span. The law states the property rights of all LC members, limits land parcel adverse possession, and sets the rules to include in LC register those parcels whose owners are unknown or untraceable (the so called 'silent land owners'). The beneficial impacts of the law, the opportunities offered by it, and its possible drawbacks after six years from its enactment are discussed in this contribution.