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HAZELNUT RESEARCH IN PIEDMONT (NW ITALY): STRATEGIES FOR THE IMPROVEMENT IN YIELD AND QUALITY

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Abstract

Hazelnut plantings in Piedmont (NW Italy) have increased in the last 5 years and the crop is spreading outside the traditional area of cultivation. This trend is accompanied by a strong demand for nursery plant material and by a renewed interest in improving cultivation techniques. The Regional Administration is funding a 3-year project (CORIFIL) aimed at: developing techniques of propagation for the construction of a modern system of nursery production; testing the susceptibility of cultivars to pests and evaluating new selections and clones; evaluating the impact of irrigation on yield and quality of Tonda Gentile delle Langhe (TGdL); testing innovative storage methods to increase the preservation time.

Research on propagation is being carried out using the cutting technique and the micropropagation as means to improve the processivity of nursery plant production and favour the spread of selected material and new cultivars.

Irrigation is not common in Piedmont, but the dry climate trend of the last years caused a decrease in yield and nut quality in some areas. Different irrigation regimes are being tested in order to define the minimum amount of water required for a good orchard performance.

Cultivar susceptibility to main nut pests is being evaluated in field trials in order to develop new defence strategies based on the breeding of resistant or tolerant genotypes. Post-harvest research is aimed at estimating composition and structure, sensory features, conservation and technological attitudes of hazelnut cultivars and selections: TGdL (clones MT5 and PD6), Daria, L35 and Ennis (for table consumption). Controlled atmosphere techniques are also tested as means to prolong the conservation time of TGdL.