POPLAR CULTIVATION IN ITALY: HISTORY, STATE-OF-THE-ART, PERSPECTIVES

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Specialized poplar plantations have existed in Italy for more than a century and remain a characteristic feature of extensive areas of both uplands and lowlands. The timber produced is an important raw material, in particular for the local primary timber industry with a focus on the plywood sector.

Even though the area under poplar cultivation is only 83,000 hectares, equivalent to less than 1% of the total forest area, it contributes more than a third of the annual national production of industrial roundwood, with a total volume of about 1 Mt of timber.

This article provides a general overview of this industrial chain, which is much appreciated and taken as an example on an international level. It describes particularities and its development over time with reference to the economic operators involved, i.e. the poplar growers, the harvesting companies and the industries which process the timber. The most important technological and economic issues, harvesting methods, final destinations and derived products, and report on recent trends as well as prospects in the medium term are also analysed.

Key words: poplar, wood, wood-based panels, industry, poplar cultivation, harvesting.

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