

CASTADIVA: BIODIVERSITY AND MULTI-FUNCTIONALITY OF THE CHESTNUT TREE. LEVERAGING GENETIC RESOURCES FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOMBARDY SUB MOUNTAIN AREAS

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chestnut, biodiversity, genetic resources, nutritional values, Lombardy

Over the centuries, the chestnut tree, cultivated for its fruits and timber, has become an essential element of subsistence for many societies in mountain and sub-mountainous areas, revealing its potential as a multifunctional species. Today most chestnut forests are in a state of decline and abandonment, mainly due to the depopulation of rural areas, global climate changes and recent outbreaks of exotic pests. With a view to the recovery and enhancement of chestnut genetic resources, the CASTADIVA project mainly aims to map the chestnut groves in pilot areas of the Lombardy Region (Municipality of Serle, BS and in the Varese Prealps, VA), evaluates the genetic diversity of chestnut stands, and genetically characterizes local varieties. In parallel, the project includes a characterization of the fruits through morphological, pomological, qualitative and nutritional analyses. CASTADIVA will require integration of data obtained from genetic and morphometric analyses with ecological, silvicultural, phytosanitary and possibly socio-economic data, in order to

identify the best practices and management criteria for the conservation and enhancement of chestnut genetic resources. Transferring information to local administrations and the agricultural stakeholder will be a final step of crucial importance. Preliminary results of genetic and nutritional analyses will be presented.