

Soybean production in Italy: agronomy, economics, and policy

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Why Italy is the largest producer of soya in EU?

Since 1940 there have been attempts to introduce the soybean in Italy but the results have been disappointing. In 1980 the situation changed dramatically. The EEC had become completely dependent on imports of plant-based protein flour of which soybean represented about 60%. In addition, a surplus of grain was being produced with consequences on prices. In this context, promoting soybean production became not only desirable but vital. In addition, Italian farmers were looking for an alternative crop for rotations that would generate revenues (traditional beet-wheat rotation); alfalfa was becoming less profitable.

More importantly, the Italian processing industry, capable of processing more than 2 million tons of seeds, was interested in national soybean production (Ferruzzi-Montedison). The alignment of these interests created the conditions necessary for the testing, introduction, and popularization of soybean in Italy.



Figure 1. Second-harvested soybean seeded on wheat stubble with the Kverneland Optima HD e-drive seeder. Source: <http://www.ilnuovoagricoltore.it/>.

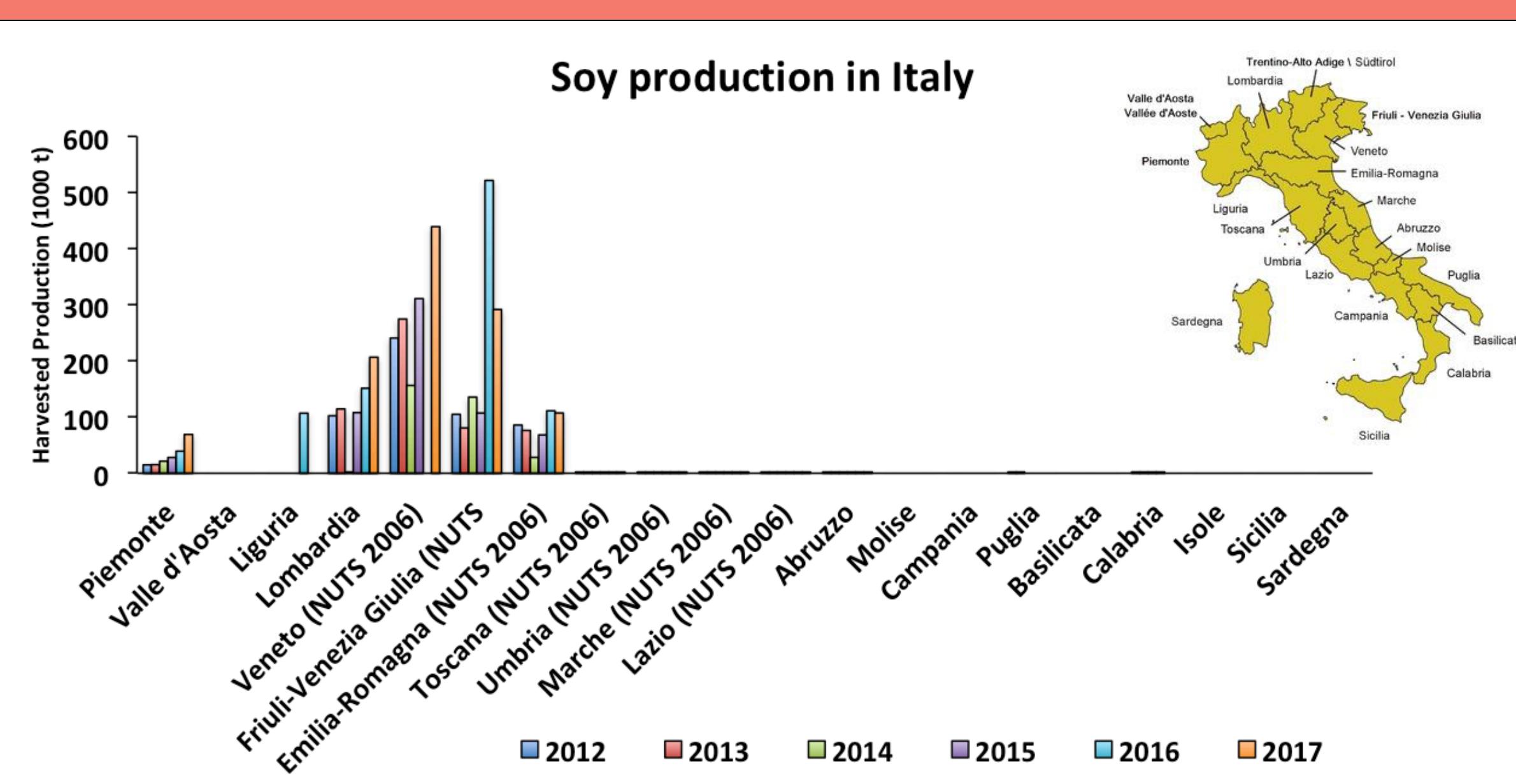
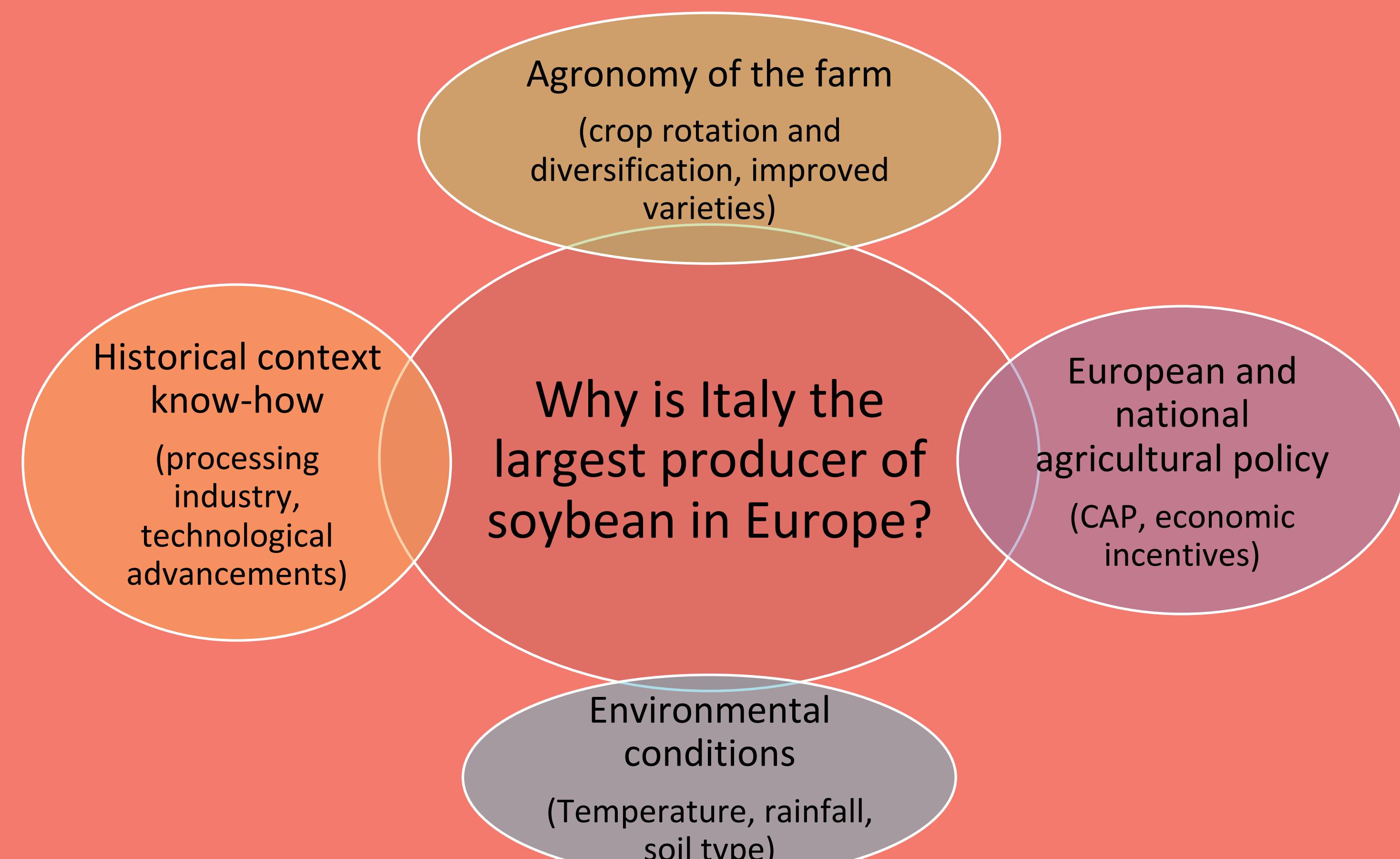


Figure 2. Soybean production (1000 t) in Italian regions from 2012 to 2017. Source: Eurostat.

Table 1. Harvested production and cultivation area of soya in European countries (average 2015 -2017). Source: Eurostat.

	Harvested production (1 000 tonnes)	Cultivation area (1 000 ha)
EU-28	2440,1	892,9
Bulgaria	40,3	34,5
Czech Republic	20,2	12,3
Germany	19,2	8,0
Greece	4,4	2,0
Spain	4,1	1,3
France	334,2	122,0
Croatia	196,4	88,9
Italy	1 1170,0	309,0
Lithuania	1,8	2,6
Hungary	145,9	72,0
Austria	136,2	56,9
Poland	8,8	6,2
Romania	262,0	128,1
Slovenia	4,7	1,7
Slovakia	62,1	43,4
Switzerland	4,1	1,7
Albania	0,5	0,2
Serbia	454,4	184,8
Turkey	150,0	37,0
Bosnia and Herzegovina	10,4	7,0

Italian processing industry. 1980 - Gruppo Ferruzzi provided technical assistance to farmers and purchased soybean at a guaranteed fixed price prior to seeding. Soybean production area increased nearly tenfold in 1983 and then by 37% in 1984. Since 2008 - Sipcam and Cortal Extrasoy funded "Soia Italia" a non-profit to organize and support farmers and to guide them through agronomic and market decisions.



The European soya declaration is a very important policy action for the increase of soybean production.

How is soybean included in the CAP?

Greening payment + rotation (crop diversification) = paired payment about 54-97 € ha⁻¹. As a rule, a diversifying crop is present in the field from April 1st to June 9th; soybean fits the schedule. The payment for soya is destined to northern Italy, southern Italy receives greening payments for vegetable proteins other than soybean (Fig 2). There is an increased demand for non-GMO soya in the EU.

Agronomy of the farm. Improved varieties, clear agronomic advantages of soybean because of N fixation, rotation crop on strip tillage (Fig. 1) for cost reduction and reduced need of plant health interventions. In Northern Italy soya is irrigated. Breeding for new improved varieties occurs in Friuli and Lombardia.