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Map production in Albania - Traditional cultivation and challenges for sage and lemon balm

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Abstract

Medicinal and aromatic plants (MAP) have traditionally been used for food purposes and are now also used as ingredients in cosmetics, health products and medicines. *Albania* is one of the most important suppliers of the herbal raw material and is ranked 16th in the world. MAP production is an important part of the Albanian economy. According to USAID studies, around 20,000 families are involved in MAP collection in natural stocks and 4,000 in MAP cultivation. At least 95 percent of total production is destined for export. Two of the most cultivated plants are sage (*Salvia officinalis*) and lemon balm (*Melissa officinalis*). The goal of the ALBAMAP project is to develop standards for MAP production in Albania, integrating both scientific expertise and traditional knowledge. Thus the quality, which is important for the world market, shall be consistently increased, making cultivation more interesting and thus reducing the pressure to exploit natural stocks. The focus is on sage and lemon balm, two economically important plants. In order to gain traditional cultivation knowledge of these two plants, 30 farmers in 5 different areas (Perrenjas, Pogradec, Elbasan, Gramsh and Shkoder) were surveyed. The focus was on questions of field preparation and management (fertilisation, irrigation), but also on traditional knowledge regarding harvesting and processing and on assessing the suitability of different locations. Emphasis was also placed on the difficulties and main problems farmer face. The findings from this study will contribute to a better understanding of the current cultivation practices of lemon balm and sage in Albania and it will also give useful ideas and basics for future research and development in this area.

Keywords: Medicinal and aromatic plants, *Melissa officinalis*, questionnaire, *Salvia officinalis*