

Hierarchization of the Italian Region on the Strength of the Agricultural Mechanization through Clustering Analysis

Lucia Mongelli^a, Simone Pascuzzi^{*b}

^a Istat, National Institute for Statistics - Apulian Territorial Office - Piazza Aldo Moro 61 - 70121 Bari - Italy

^b Department of Agricultural and Environmental Science (DiSAAT) University of Bari Aldo Moro, Via Amendola 165/A - 70126 Bari - Italy

simone.pascuzzi@uniba.it

The aim of this paper has been to study the organization of the Italian agricultural enterprises through a cluster analysis. Starting from statistical data, the Italian Regions were then classified into homogeneous groups in proportion with the size of the farms, their agricultural mechanization level and the manpower employment. The suitability of this arrangement was supported by the variability among the groups, which was greater than that within the groups. Generally each group is formed both by adjacent and non-adjacent Regions and also by Regions geographically distant. A concise but clear picture pertaining the different structure of Italian farms were was pointed out.

1. Introduction

The main structural characteristics, economic-productive and territorial Italian agriculture has been the object of remarkable studies as highlighted by the voluminous scientific literature (CREA, 2016). The agricultural sector in Italy is very composite due to the different typologies of farms and the tremendous variety of the professional activities, which require suitable mechanization levels and labour availability (Pascuzzi, 2013). Conversely, several agricultural operations still need the direct man's engagement, which is therefore subject to specific risk factors (Pascuzzi, 2015; Pascuzzi and Santoro, 2015; Pascuzzi and Santoro, 2017). The aim of this paper has been to study the organization of the Italian agricultural enterprises through a cluster analysis (Forgy, 1965). Therefore, starting from the statistical data available on the "Survey on the structure of farm production" carried out by Istat (Italian National Institute of Statistics) in 2013, the Italian Regions were classified into homogeneous groups in proportion with the size of the farms, their agricultural mechanization level and the manpower employment (Istat, 2017). This study was carried out taking into account of some different comparative variables connected to the main structural characters of the Italian agricultural system, in agreement with the availability of the ISTAT statistical data, only at regional level arranged, in turn extracted by broad sample surveys (Forleo, 2001).

2. Materials and methods

2.1 The employed variables

The analysis was executed taking into account of 14 different relative variables linked to the structural characteristics of the Italian farms, their resort to machines and manpower (MacQueen, 1967). In particular, three variables were connected to the size of the farms: 1) percentage of farms fitted with utilized agricultural land (UAL) small than 2 ha; 2) percentage of farms fitted with UAL larger than 50 ha; 3) average farm UAL. Further 5 variables signified in a different manner the farms mechanization level: 4) number of tractors over ha of UAL; 5) number of combine harvesters and other machines for mechanized harvest over ha of UAL; 6) number of cultivators, tillers, hoes and mowers machines over ha of UAL; 7) number of other agricultural machines over ha of UAL; 8) average rated power (kW) of the machines over ha of UAL. Finally, six variables indicated the recourse to the labour: 9) yearly work days over ha of UAL; 10) yearly work days over worker;

11) yearly work days over farm; 12) active contractors yearly days over ha of UAL; 13) passive contractors yearly days over ha of UAL; 14) overall contractors yearly days over farm.

2.2 Summary statistics

According to the Istat data and taking into account of the overall values pertinent to the Italian Regions, the summary statistics concerning the aforesaid variables, crucial for the ensuing analysis of the groups, was calculated and reported in Table 1: low, peak, average value, standard deviation and coefficient of variation (CV). In order to give equal weight to all the variables, their values calculated for each region, in turn inferred by the ISTAT data, were related in percentage to the respective national values (Forgy, 1965).

The coefficients of variation (CV) allow to assess the regional variability of the considered variables. In this connection the variable "active contractors yearly days over ha of UAL" is very differentiated at regional level (180.5 %), as also the "overall farm contractors yearly days (142.0 %) and the "number of cultivators, tillers, hoes and mowers machines over ha of UAL" (130.0 %). Conversely, very homogeneous are the regional variables concerning the "percentage of farms fitted with utilized agricultural land (UAL) larger than 50 ha" (31.9 %), the "number of tractors over ha of UAL" (38.7 %) and the "yearly work days over farmer" (38.9 %).

Table 1: Summary statistics concerning the considered variables

Variables	Low	Peak	Average value μ	Standard deviation σ	Coefficient of variation CV
Percentage of farms fitted with UAL small than 2 ha	22,9	439,8	110.7	95.6	86.4
Percentage of farms fitted with UAL larger than 50 ha	54.1	188.5	104.6	33.3	31.9
Average farm UAL (ha)	30.2	260.5	122.4	64.2	52.5
Number of tractors over ha of UAL	28.9	185.0	106.9	41.4	38.7
Number of combine harvesters and other Machines for mechanized harvest over ha of UAL	0.0	265.6	104.8	77.9	74.4
Number of cultivators, tillers, hoes and mowers machines over ha of UAL	21.2	902.1	143.8	186.9	130.0
Number of other agricultural machines over ha of UAL	39.6	431.5	118.1	85.4	72.3
Average rated power (kW) of the machines over ha of UAL	28.1	202.5	110.8	45.5	41.1
Yearly work days over ha of UAL	48.5	649.5	126.7	126.9	100.2
Yearly work days over worker	59.4	266.5	125.7	54.4	43.3
Yearly work days over farm	63.9	211.5	118.9	46.3	38.9
active contractors yearly days over ha of UAL	0.0	1105.5	129.2	233.2	180.5
Passive contractors yearly days over ha of UAL	0.0	254.4	99.7	69.0	69.2
Overall contractors yearly days over farm	0.6	902.3	133.4	189.4	142.0

Source: Istat data bank. Survey on the structure of farm production, 2013. <http://agri.istat.it>

2.3 Cluster analysis

The "bottom up" agglomerative hierarchical cluster analysis was used to categorize the Italian Regions into 6 homogeneous groups, on the strength of the size of the farms, their agricultural mechanization level and the manpower employment (Forgy, 1965).

The hierarchical bundling method was used to make the classification, so that the initial Regions were merged into gradually larger groups up to be included in a single group.

The Pearson correlation coefficient (ρ) was used as similarity criterion:

$$\rho = \frac{\text{cov}(x,y)}{\sigma_x \sigma_y} = \frac{\sum(x_i - \mu_x)(y_i - \mu_y)}{\sqrt{\sum(x_i - \mu_x)^2} \sqrt{\sum(y_i - \mu_y)^2}} \quad (1)$$

where: $\text{cov}(x,y)$ is the covariance between the characters x and y ; σ_x is the standard deviation of the character x ; σ_y is the standard deviation of the character y ; μ_x the mean of x ; μ_y the mean of y .

The Pearson correlation coefficient can assume values in the range +1 (perfect correlation between the values of the variables inside the two considered Regions) and -1 (perfect discrepancy between the values of the variables inside the two considered Regions). Conversely, nearly null values highlight in average absence of

such relationship between the considered variables. Table 2 reports the proximity matrix arranged through the Pearson correlation coefficients (ρ) among the Regions.

Table 2: Proximity Matrix (Pearson coefficient of correlation ρ)

Regions	Piedmont	Aosta Valley	Lombardy	Liguria	Trentino-Alto Adige	Veneto	Friuli-Venezia Giulia	Emilia-Romagna	Tuscany	Umbria
Piedmont	1.000	0.875	0.809	-0.303	-0.056	-0.309	0.475	0.688	0.722	0.178
Aosta Valley	0.875	1.000	0.651	-0.067	-0.249	-0.516	0.122	0.349	0.390	0.063
Lombardy	0.809	0.651	1.000	-0.531	-0.129	-0.458	0.584	0.796	0.660	0.128
Liguria	-0.303	-0.067	-0.531	1.000	0.136	0.164	-0.575	-0.596	-0.398	-0.323
Trentino-Alto Adige	-0.056	-0.249	-0.129	0.136	1.000	0.821	0.482	0.264	0.198	0.599
Veneto	-0.309	-0.516	-0.458	0.164	0.821	1.000	0.327	-0.056	-0.033	0.452
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	0.475	0.122	0.584	-0.575	0.482	0.327	1.000	0.770	0.754	0.442
Emilia-Romagna	0.688	0.349	0.796	-0.596	0.264	-0.056	0.770	1.000	0.817	0.482
Tuscany	0.722	0.390	0.660	-0.398	0.198	-0.033	0.754	0.817	1.000	0.129
Umbria	0.178	0.063	0.128	-0.323	0.599	0.452	0.442	0.482	0.129	1.000
Marche	0.256	-0.041	0.578	-0.719	0.233	0.041	0.679	0.814	0.435	0.601
Lazio	-0.149	0.004	-0.591	0.649	-0.219	0.053	-0.689	-0.620	-0.346	-0.390
Abruzzo	-0.419	-0.374	-0.611	0.322	0.460	0.701	-0.242	-0.431	-0.565	0.396
Molise	-0.450	-0.465	0.078	-0.337	-0.277	-0.180	0.039	-0.114	-0.296	-0.290
Campania	-0.469	-0.314	-0.768	0.798	0.019	0.275	-0.630	-0.729	-0.424	-0.398
Apulia	-0.700	-0.509	-0.654	0.457	-0.304	-0.143	-0.805	-0.602	-0.655	-0.384
Basilicata	0.763	0.868	0.775	-0.242	-0.302	-0.676	0.219	0.477	0.410	0.059
Calabria	-0.779	-0.485	-0.824	0.576	-0.254	0.057	-0.820	-0.943	-0.850	-0.472
Sicily	-0.197	0.196	-0.288	0.487	-0.413	-0.364	-0.467	-0.646	-0.323	-0.513
Sardinia	0.870	0.897	0.843	-0.341	-0.314	-0.617	0.264	0.603	0.493	0.164
Regions	Marche	Lazio	Abruzzo	Molise	Campania	Apulia	Basilicata	Calabria	Sicily	Sardinia
Piedmont	0.256	-0.149	-0.419	-0.450	-0.469	-0.700	0.763	-0.779	-0.197	0.870
Aosta Valley	-0.041	0.004	-0.374	-0.465	-0.314	-0.509	0.868	-0.485	0.196	0.897
Lombardy	0.578	-0.591	-0.611	0.078	-0.768	-0.654	0.775	-0.824	-0.288	0.843
Liguria	-0.719	0.649	0.322	-0.337	0.798	0.457	-0.242	0.576	0.487	-0.341
Trentino-Alto Adige	0.233	-0.219	0.460	-0.277	0.019	-0.304	-0.302	-0.254	-0.413	-0.314
Veneto	0.041	0.053	0.701	-0.180	0.275	-0.143	-0.676	0.057	-0.364	-0.617
Friuli-Venezia Giulia	0.679	-0.689	-0.242	0.039	-0.630	-0.805	0.219	-0.820	-0.467	0.264
Emilia-Romagna	0.814	-0.620	-0.431	-0.114	-0.729	-0.602	0.477	-0.943	-0.646	0.603
Tuscany	0.435	-0.346	-0.565	-0.296	-0.424	-0.655	0.410	-0.850	-0.323	0.493
Umbria	0.601	-0.390	0.396	-0.290	-0.398	-0.384	0.059	-0.472	-0.513	0.164
Marche	1.000	-0.809	-0.199	0.322	-0.757	-0.387	0.244	-0.717	-0.660	0.323
Lazio	-0.809	1.000	0.373	-0.520	0.814	0.447	-0.318	0.575	0.310	-0.303
Abruzzo	-0.199	0.373	1.000	-0.150	0.496	0.126	-0.551	0.417	-0.131	-0.537
Molise	0.322	-0.520	-0.150	1.000	-0.261	0.190	-0.129	0.183	0.014	-0.229
Campania	-0.757	0.814	0.496	-0.261	1.000	0.493	-0.485	0.713	0.463	-0.574
Apulia	-0.387	0.447	0.126	0.190	0.493	1.000	-0.492	0.742	0.190	-0.521
Basilicata	0.244	-0.318	-0.551	-0.129	-0.485	-0.492	1.000	-0.560	0.204	0.918
Calabria	-0.717	0.575	0.417	0.183	0.713	0.742	-0.560	1.000	0.486	-0.645
Sicily	-0.660	0.310	-0.131	0.014	0.463	0.190	0.204	0.486	1.000	-0.021
Sardinia	0.323	-0.303	-0.537	-0.229	-0.574	-0.521	0.918	-0.645	-0.021	1.000

Source: Istat data bank. Survey on the structure of farm production, 2013. <http://agri.istat.it>

The adopted aggregation technique is the average bond in which the distance among groups of Regions is defined as the arithmetic average of the distances among all possible couples of Regions or groups of Regions (Forgy, 1965; MacQueen, 1967). The distance between two Regions or groups of Regions, $d(i, h)$, was calculated through the Euclidean metric:

$$d(i, h) = \sqrt{\sum_j (x_{ij} - x_{hj})^2} \quad (2)$$

In Table 2, as aforesaid, the highest positive values signify high similarity, whereas the lowest negative values indicate antinomy and then dissimilarity. Therefore, as example, the structural characters of the agricultural system of Piedmont is very similar to that one of Valle d'Aosta (0.875), whereas it is dissimilar from that of

Calabria (-0.779). Similarly the farms features of Aosta Valley are like those of Sardinia (+0.897), but are very different from those of Veneto (-0.516), and so on.

3. Results

3.1 The bundling into 6 groups

The results highlighted 6 groups of Regions as shown in Table 3. The first group comprised 5 Regions (Piedmont, Aosta Valley, Lombardy, Basilicata and Sardinia); the second group comprised 5 Regions (Liguria, Lazio, Campania, Apulia and Calabria); the third group included 4 Regions (Trentino Alto Adige, Veneto, Umbria and Abruzzo); the fourth group included three regions (Emilia Romagna, Tuscany and Marche), the latter two groups included only one Region: the fifth group Molise and Sicily the sixth one.

Table 3: Bundling parameters concerning the obtained 6 groups of Regions.

Groups of Regions	1	2	3	4	5	6
Number of Regions	5	5	4	4	1	1
Variance inside the group	34162.4	206384.0	16087.2	9204.8	0.0	0.0
Lowest distance from centroid	95.0	138.5	52.4	63.9	0.0	0.0
Average distance from centroid	160.7	335.2	103.9	80.5	0.0	0.0
Largest distance from centroid	199.3	786.2	150.5	115.3	0.0	0.0
	Piedmont Aosta Valley Lombardy Basilicata Sardinia	Liguria Lazio Campania Apulia Calabria	Trentino-Alto Adige Veneto Umbria Abruzzo	Friuli-Venezia Giulia Emilia-Romagna Tuscany Marche	Molise	Sicily

The cartogram reported in Figure 1 points out that predominantly the groups of Regions comprise adjacent Regions but also some non-adjacent Regions and sometimes geographically distant ones.



Figure 1: Italy partitioned into 6 homogeneous groups of Regions.

The groups of Regions have different inside variability: obviously the groups formed by a single Region have nothing variability; the second group is the most heterogeneous, whereas the variability of the other three groups (first, third and fourth) is limited.

A synthetic evaluation about the obtained classification in 6 groups is given splitting the total variability into two parts: the one calculated inside the groups and the other one estimated among the groups. The classification is considered satisfactory if the variability among the groups is higher than that inside the groups. In the case

under study, almost 60 % of the total variability is recorded among the 6 groups that therefore appear well differentiated (Table 4).

Table 4: Splitting of the variance concerning the classification

Source of variability	Variance	Percentage
Inside the groups	74147.3	40.2
Among the groups	110155.8	59.8
Overall	184303.1	100.0

3.2 Centroids of the groups analysis

Table 5 reports for each group the centroids, that is the average values, of the considered variables, obtained from the analysis. These centroids, taking into account of the greater or lesser incidence of the values of the respective variables allow to define the features of each group.

It is clear that for the groups formed by a single Region the centroids matches with the values of the pertaining Regions.

Table 5 - Centroid of the considered variables for each group of Regions.

Variables	Groups					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Percentage of farms fitted with UAL small than 2 ha	74.1	128.9	94.4	64.9	82.3	103.6
Percentage of farms fitted with UAL larger than 50 ha	268.3	41.4	72.0	149.1	62.1	79.2
Average farm UAL (ha)	204.7	55.6	100.0	142.6	96.0	79.9
Number of tractors over ha of UAL	65.9	107.8	158.2	113.9	119.9	60.3
Number of combine harvesters and other machines for mechanized harvest over ha of UAL	40.7	190.8	65.3	86.0	265.6	67.8
Number of cultivators, tillers, hoes and mowers machines over ha of UAL	51.9	316.9	142.6	64.5	106.7	96.1
Number of other agricultural machines over ha of UAL	72.8	204.2	92.8	92.8	121.3	113.1
average rated power (kW) of the machines over ha of UAL	64.5	129.9	156.6	108.6	118.5	64.1
Yearly work days over ha of UAL	75.0	237.9	104.6	87.6	106.2	94.2
Yearly work days over worker	165.7	117.2	93.0	120.7	160.1	85.7
Yearly work days over farm	151.5	104.7	106.4	123.7	102.0	75.3
Active contractors yearly days over ha of UAL	46.3	88.3	88.1	89.9	1105.5	93.1
Passive contractors yearly days over ha of UAL	62.3	47.5	160.1	171.2	58.9	60.6
Overall contractors yearly days over farm	95.3	48.1	99.6	145.1	902.3	70.3

The first group is characterized by a significant number of large farms, i.e. fitted with UAL greater than 50 ha, and therefore also by a respectable average UAL. Furthermore the substantial impact of the yearly work days over both operator and farm is clear in this group.

The second group is typified by the large number of small farm, that is with UAL small than 2 ha, by a strong employment of mechanization, as well as by a large number of yearly work days over ha of UAL. The third group is individualized by the number of tractors over ha of UAL which is higher than the national average, as well as by the substantial average rated power (kW) of the machines over ha of UAL. Furthermore, it is also outstanding the passive contractors yearly days over ha of UAL. The fourth group is characterized by a hefty number of large farms higher than the national average and then high average UAL. Respectable is also to resort to labour, in particular passive contractors over ha of UAL and in any case to make use of overall contractors. The Molise (fifth group) is typified by the high value concerning the active contractors yearly days over ha of UAL, whereas the other variables are not far from the corresponding national averages. Also the Sicily (sixth group) is characterized by levels of the variables close to the corresponding national averages.

3.3 Distances of the groups centroids by each other and by the national centroid

Table 6 reports the distances of the groups centroids by each other and by the national centroid, measured through equation (2). For example, the first group of Regions is very close to the fourth group (210.3) and far from the fifth, that is the Molise (1375.3). Conversely, the second group is near the third one (315.6) and the

farthest is still the Molise (1358.2). The two closest groups of Regions are the third and fourth (151.6), the two most distant groups are the first one and Molise (1375.8).

Table 6 - Distances of the groups centroids by each other and by the national centroid

Groups	1	2	3	4	5	6	Italy
1	0	477.6	309.3	210.3	1375.8	268.2	246.7
2	477.6	0	315.6	398.1	1358.2	323.4	313.5
3	309.3	315.6	0	151.6	1318.9	182.2	119.8
4	210.3	398.1	151.6	0	1290.3	195.9	124.8
5	1375.8	1358.2	1318.9	1290.3	0	1330.6	1300.2
6	268.2	323.4	182.2	195.9	1330.6	0	91.0
Italy	246.7	313.5	119.8	124.8	1300.2	91.0	0

4. Conclusions

The arrangement of the Italian Regions into six groups, taking into account the size of the farms, their agricultural mechanization level and the manpower employment, showed clear picture of the structure of the Italian farms.

The first group of Regions (the ones of North-West, Sardinia and Basilicata) is characterized by a significant number of large farms and a considerable impact of the yearly work days over both operator and farm.

The second group (Southern Regions and Lazio, except Basilicata) is characterized by the high presence of small farm, as well as by a large number of yearly work days over ha of UAL. The third group (Trentino Alto Agige, Veneto, Umbria and Abruzzo) is typified by the great number of tractors over ha of UAL and the high passive contractors yearly days over ha of UAL. The fifth group (Molise) is characterized by high mechanization levels and large active contractors yearly days over ha of UAL. The fourth (Emilia-Romagna, Tuscany, Marche and Friuli-Venezia Giulia) and the sixth group (Sicily) have less distinct characteristics and the values of all the variables very close to the corresponding national averages.

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