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The Italian Wood Products Market: A Survey

Roberto A. Ligasacchi and Jay A. Johnson. 1988

Executive Summary

The Italian market is a high-value market for U.S. softwood lumber. One of the primary Italian uses of U.S. softwood is for the manufacturing of wood windows and doors. The preferred species for such manufacturing is Douglas-fir. The imported U.S. wood is resawn and shaped to produce Italian window and door components. Blemishes on the wood--checks, cracks, knots, and in particular, blue stain (an Italian anathema)—reduce the quality of the final product in the eyes of the demanding Italian customer. Fine-grained, knot-free wood from the Pacific Northwest region of North America is particularly well suited for this market.

Other areas of wood use in Italy include construction, packaging and furniture. Very little wood is used as structural members in construction except as scaffolding, temporary bracing and concrete forms. Wood used in these applications is of low quality and is supplied by Austria, Czechoslovakia and Russia. Packaging also consumes considerable amounts of low quality wood for crates, boxes and pallets. The furniture industry is large and requires a substantial amount of wood; most of which is tropical hardwoods and temperate hardwoods from Europe.

It appears that a “market orientation” approach to selling lumber in Italy is worthy of consideration. End-user needs should be understood and satisfied. Financial arrangements should be developed to insure long range partnerships. At present a “commodity product orientation” exists. North American firms produce sizes and adhere to standards which have some to the market but do not entirely satisfy customer needs. These practices are traditional and are probably resistant to change.

The opportunities for more wood exports to Italy are good. The country lacks an indigenous source of wood and will rely on exports to satisfy its raw material demand. The manufacturing capability of the country is very strong and over the past few decades the economy has been growing steadily despite periodic setbacks. This trend should continue into the future.

Wood export opportunities in Italy may not necessarily be similar to opportunities in North America. Many Italian products employ sophisticated design concepts. Utilization of design to add value is a national characteristic and may be crucial to finding new market niches for exported wood to Italy.

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