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ITALIAN APICULTURE

A Journey Through History and Honey Diversity

SILVIO GARDINI, INNOVATOR AND FATHER OF MODERN BEEKEEPING

Silvio Gardini was born in San Pierino di Ravenna on 30 April 1872. His father, Ignazio, worked at the Ghezzeo farm, one of the most advanced and modern farms of that time. When he was young, Silvio attended the *Regia Scuola Pratica di Agricoltura* (Royal Practical School of Agriculture), where he obtained his high-school degree as an agronomist in 1888. Later, he became a teacher of agricultural disciplines. Silvio Gardini was one of the masters of modern Italian beekeeping in the early 1900s. Because he left no written material, his profile is based on documentation provided by his family.

The protagonists of the Gardini company were two brothers: Silvio, a brilliant innovator, and Pietro, more suited to the practice of beekeeping. Their activity took place in the agricultural context of Romagna, where agricultural entrepreneurship began to flourish, at the end of the 19th century. The Gardini farm was started in 1895, with the use of 'Sartori' hives. Subsequently, they developed a modern hive called 'Gardini hive', probably taking inspiration from the 'Marche' hive, with the difference that it had identical 22 cm frames in the super and in the brood box (nest). In Romagna, some beekeepers still use this model, which they consider more suitable for honey production than other hive models.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Gardini farm reached 200 hives and reared queen bees. The Gardini brothers were pioneers in the practice of the modern migratory beekeeping, by using for the first time a truck (an adapted Fiat 18 BL truck) (Fig. 92) to transport of hives, in 1902, as attested by Prof. Carlini and Zappi Recordati. With this truck they are able to transport 100 hives quickly, to reach abundant forage and obtain high production of French honeysuckle (also called Italian sainfoin) honey and alfalfa honey. It is interesting to note that in the USA the Dadant family, well known in the world of beekeeping, transported hives in lorries for the first time in 1918, 16 years after Gardini. The success of the Gardini brothers favoured the foundation of the first beekeeping consortium, in Ravenna in 1902. In a fair held in 1904, with two days dedicated to beekeeping, the new consortium organised a national congress in which 300 beekeepers from all over Italy took part. On that occasion, the *Federazione Apicoltori Italiani* (FAI) was founded as a cooperative based in Ancona for the marketing of honey.

Silvio Gardini's personality and his successes in running the business made him a leader for Italian beekeepers, including the organisation of apprenticeship activities in his apiary and laboratories. Gaetano Piana, a beekeeper, greatly admired Silvio Gardini, from whom he got useful indications for the breeding of queen bees and inspiration for the foundation of the Bolognese Beekeeping Consortium. Gardini's work in beekeeping ended at the end of the 1920s. Afterwards, he moved to Ravenna to acquire farmland and reclamate land in the valleys, which then constituted the valuable heritage left to his famous nephew Raul Gardini (Ridolfi, 2004).

Figure 92
Truck to transport hives of the
Gardini farm (1902).

