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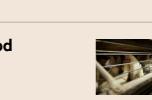
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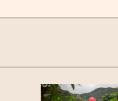
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## Farmers fear for their land as hazelnuts spread across Italy's hills

Nutella maker's push to shorten its supply chain stokes environmental backlash in rural communities





**176** Davide Ghiglione in Vignanello and Emiko Terazono in London AUGUST 22 2021

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The land around where he farms in the municipality of Vignanello used to be planted with a diverse mix including olives, vines and hazelnuts.

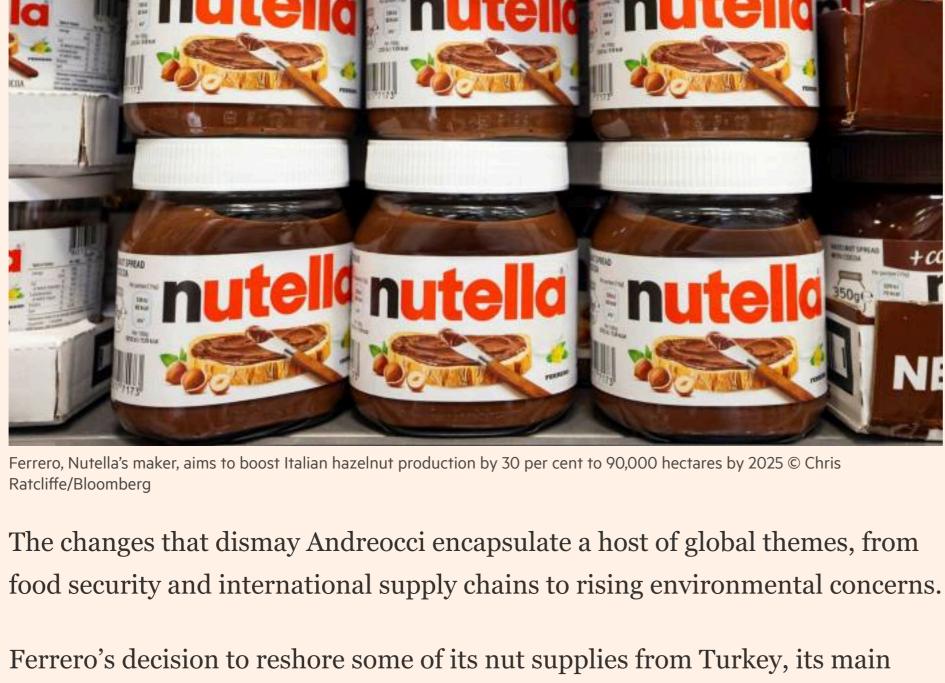
Giacomo Andreocci, who runs a small organic farm in the hills north of Rome,

said he feels like part of a dying breed — thanks to a chocolate spread loved by

But lately, under a drive by Ferrero, the Italian company that makes Nutella, many of the surrounding valleys have been turned over to intensive hazelnut farming, with monoculture plantations replacing grassy pastures, small farms

and rows of vines. "Hazelnut cultivation has exploded massively, triggering such rapid change in the ecosystem around us that nature is no longer able to sustain it," said

Andreocci, walking along a track on the farm where he cultivates a range of crops. "Hazelnut trees are now planted everywhere . . . and they are sucking up all our land's resources."



shorten supply chains, boost local production, and raise the monitoring of sustainability and labour rights.

"Consumers in general are becoming more aware about how their product is

produced and where it comes from," said Ishan Das at Freeworld Trading, a

UK nut trader.

supplier and the world's largest producer, answered calls for manufacturers to

But Ferrero's shift has stoked environmental concerns and divided local communities into those who welcome the chance to maximise their incomes versus those who believe the resultant monoculture will create an environmental dead-end.

Hazelnuts have been grown around Vignanello since the 1960s. But under a

2018 plan dubbed Progetto Nocciola Italia, or Italian nut project, Ferrero set

Pressure had been growing for the world's largest buyer of hazelnuts to

about boosting national production by 30 per cent to 90,000 hectares by 2025.

increase local procurement, with Italian politicians criticising the privately owned group for its reliance on Turkish supplies. Ferrero has also faced competition from Italian food group Barilla, which launched a spread made from "100 per cent Italian hazelnuts".

Ferrero has said its reshoring plan focused on regions where hazelnut orchards

could be integrated with other crops, adding that it also wanted to prevent non-

Italy is the world's number two hazelnut producer 2019 hazelnut production (%) Global total: 1.1m tonnes Turkey 69 Italy **8.8** Azerbaijan

4.8

Georgia Iran

US **3.5** 

University in Viterbo.

cultivated agricultural land from being abandoned.



insects, resulting in the greater use of pesticides and herbicides. Yet the Italian government's national recovery plan has a €6.8bn agricultural component, part of which seeks to boost organic farming, improve biodiversity and reduce chemical use.

"When there's biodiversity . . . you have a perfectly balanced system," said

Ferrero strongly rebuffs claims that its actions damage the environment.

Fernando Testa, an agricultural technician who works in Vignanello.

The environmentalists also say monocultures help spread plant diseases and

return," said Goffredo Filibeck, an environmental researcher at Tuscia

"Hazelnut cultivation is not destroying the Italian countryside; in fact, the country has a long history of hazelnut cultivation and is one of the main producing countries, with Italian hazelnuts being used by companies across multiple industries," it said in a statement to the Financial Times.

The company said it has brought together agricultural and scientific experts to

address sustainability challenges and that it promoted best practice through its

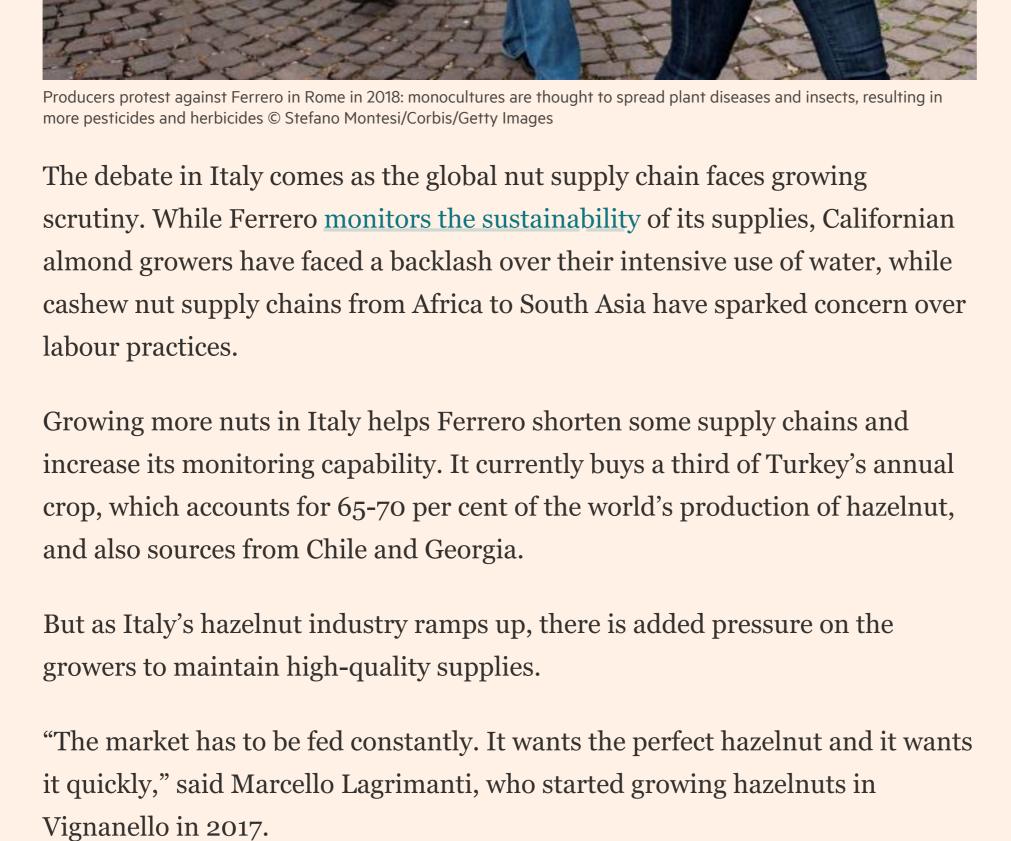
sustainability programme. Many Italian farmers have also welcomed the

income that nut growing provides.

"This debate is surreal," said Lorenzo Bazzana of Coldiretti, the Italian farmers' union. "Monoculture, whether of wheat, maize or vines, is nothing new . . . It is up to each entrepreneur to make their own choices, and have the responsibility to pursue correct agronomic techniques."

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"But what do we leave to future generations? If we continue to plunder the land as we're doing, there will be nothing left but desert." Climate Capital

Surveying the farms around him, Andreocci said he understood the

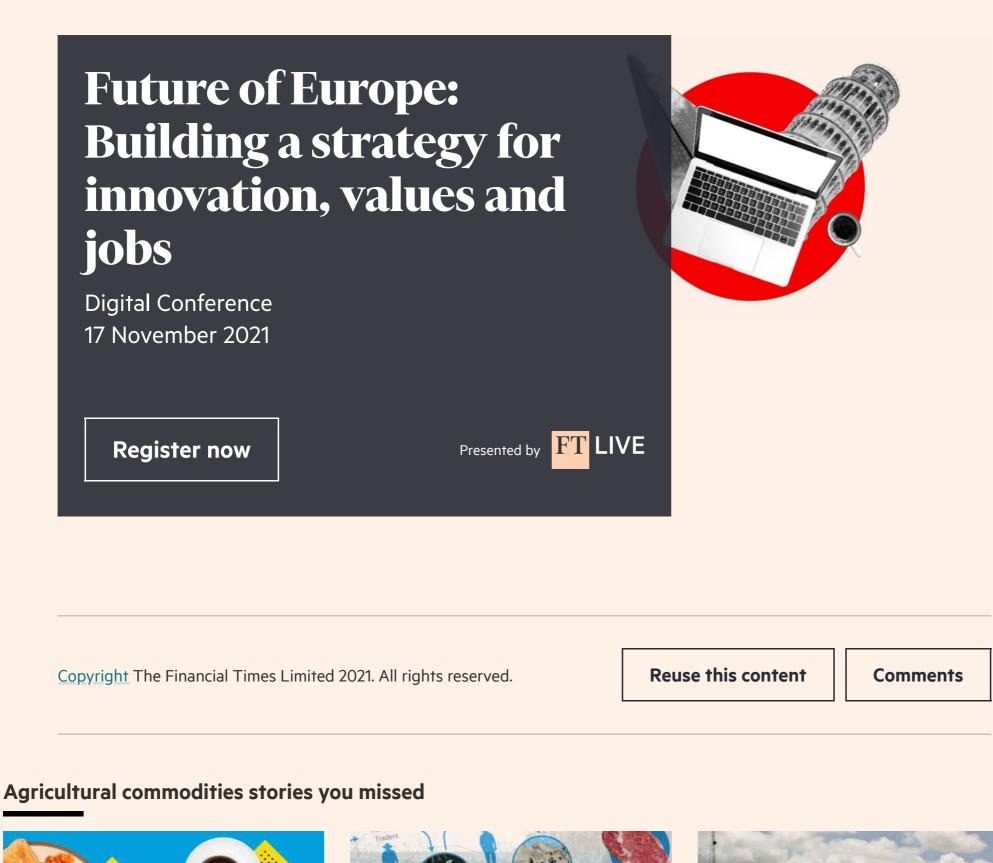
"From an economic point of view, right now [this] is the best thing there is.

When a major company arrives, the local community focuses on a product that

motivations of his neighbours but feared for what it would mean.

pays off. Jobs and wealth are created," he said.

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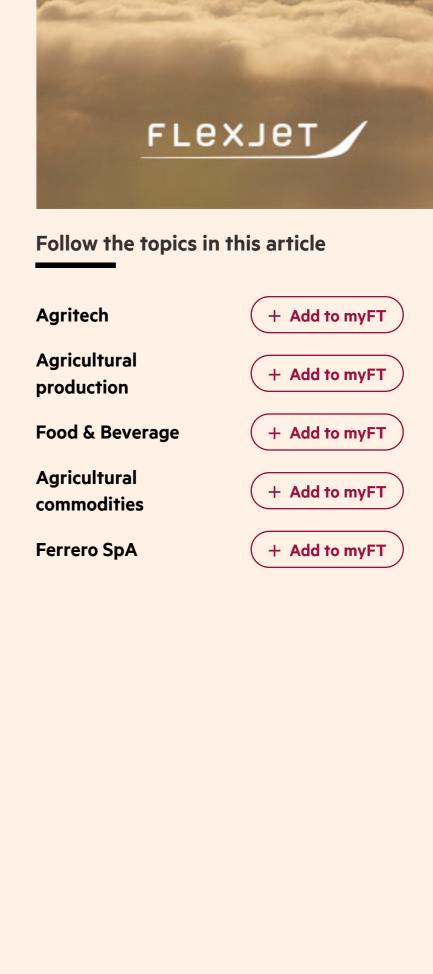
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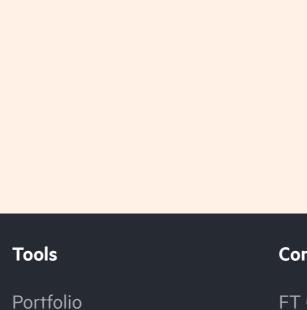
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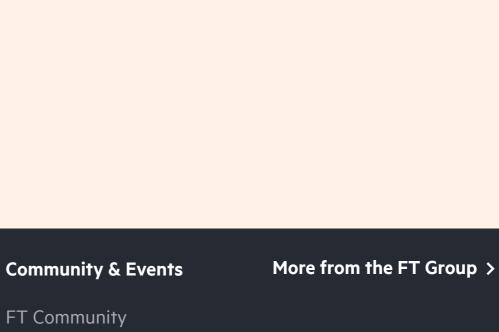
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