International trade in medicinal and aromatic plants: actors, volumes and commodities

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Abstract

The international trade in medicinal and aromatic plants for the period 1991-2003 was investigated. For this purpose the foreign-trade statistics of 110 countries, compiled in the COMTRADE database of the UN Statistics Division and reporting an external trade of the commodity groups HS 1211 and SITC.3 292.4 pharmaceutical plants, respectively, have been evaluated. Based on this, the main features of the worldwide trade, the main trade streams, the main acting countries and striking trends are presented. In particular, the dominance of some countries and regions in this trade is pointed out. External trade figures are given for the three trade centres, the USA, Germany and Hong Kong, and their role is shortly discussed. An overview over the main consumer and supplying countries is presented. Further, export and import prices of selected countries are compared and their relevance for evaluating commodities in trade is discussed.
The estimated global trade in medicinal and aromatic plant materials was more than US$60 billion in 2000, and is expected to reach US$5 trillion by 2050 according to the World Bank report. China and India are the world’s leading exporters of medicinal and aromatic plant materials. Medicinal and aromatic plants constitute the basis of primary health care for the majority of the population in Asia and are a critical source of income for rural populations. They earn their living by selling wild or cultivated plant materials. It consists of three volumes giving information on habitat, distribution, collection, drug description, constituents, pharmacological actions, usage and dosages and pictures of the plants.