

In the 19th and 20th centuries, the Czech lands were among the largest hop-growing regions in the world. Hop products became, in the interwar period, one of the crucial agricultural export goods of the Czechoslovak economy. This study aims to draw attention to the process of emergence of cartels in this particular branch of agricultural production. It traces the attempts to organize the industry by means of cartels from their very beginning in the late 19th century until the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1938. As a point of departure, it takes the assumption shared by many theoreticians of industrial organization who argue that the given structure of the industry to some extent pre-determines the ways how the cartels emerge and the particular forms they assume. These institutions, however, might in turn reshape the structure of the industry. The analysis indicates that the cartels in the hop industry were essentially 'children of opportunity' and their emergence was rarely correlated with an economic crisis. Even though the industry gave rise also to international collusive structures, the cartels in the hop industry were essentially unstable and weak and in most cases, the attempts to create them failed. Present study challenges the belief, widely held in the scholarship on cartels in the Czech lands, that the cartels were powerful and stable. Despite their instability, however, the cartels in the hop industry paved the way for a radical rationalization of the production, which, however, was not followed by a concentration in ownership.