

EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR MOUNTAIN QUALITY FOOD PRODUCTS

Original version: French

Whereas:

the aims of the signatories are to make a contribution to the maintenance and the sustainable development of viable economic activities in mountainous regions in Europe,

these economic activities must be based in particular on a viable model of agriculture in mountain territories,

mountain agriculture on both small and medium-sized family farms is exposed to increasingly severe pressure from competition, especially with the 2003 reform of the CAP, the most fragile zones are threatened with the abandonment of agricultural activity, and mountain agriculture is consequently in need of positive discrimination in the various policy areas,

it is essential, above all in mountain areas, to preserve the biodiversity and to improve the quality of environment, and to maintain rural areas and landscapes, to maintain and develop local tradition, culture and collective heritage specific to each territory,

the micro-enterprises and Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) processing agricultural products take part in the sustainable development of these mountain areas,

the future development of mountain areas will also be achieved by the engagement of young generations with the land in activities that require creativity, innovation and dynamism,

on the occasion of the Brussels conference on Community Policies and Mountain, 2002, European commissioner, Franz Fischler, mentioned that "we must develop the concept of "quality products" in mountain areas, that will enable to increase the consumers trust and to support our primary sector",

Considering:

recommendation 1575 (2002) of the Council of Europe on the introduction of a quality label for food products derived from hill farming,

the final declaration of the second European Mountain Convention in Trento (2000),

the French and Italian initiatives with regard to the use of the term "mountain" for agricultural and food products,

the results of the 2002 – 2004 study on quality mountain food products conducted by Euromontana and 13 partners in 8 European countries within the framework of the 5th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development (RTD) of DG Research of the European Commission,

Whereas:

smallholdings in sparsely populated areas, far from market places and often with inefficient road infrastructures, have higher costs in the first marketing stages,¹

the integration of agricultural production into a local economy constitutes a success factor for its development,¹

there can be two different types of quality mountain products¹:

- either unique and non-reproducible products, due to specific breeds or varieties, and/ or traditional know-how exclusive to a defined production area,
- or products with special characteristics solely due to the fact that they come from a mountain environment,

the majority of the characteristics of mountain products are influenced by the conditions specific to mountain territories, which depend on the one hand on the physical characteristics of the mountain areas (relief,

¹ Result of the 2002 – 2004 project on quality mountain products, lead by Euromontana with 13 partners in Europe (5th Framework Programme for RTD – DG Research of the European Commission)

climate, etc.) and on the other on human factors, as the inhabitants of the mountain areas have developed knowledge peculiar to their area¹,

making reference to mountains on products, either explicitly (through the use of the word "mountain") or implicitly (geographical name) has an extremely positive effect on the purchasing behaviour of European consumers¹,

promotion strategies for mountain products have all the more chance of succeeding if they integrate or take account of¹:

- o the research and development programmes and quality control systems in the production area,
- o the cooperatives, organisations and collective and associative structures in the production area with shared responsibilities throughout the entire sector,
- o the special identification of the quality of the product with its own official certification and quality control structure of a Protected Designation of Origin (PDO)/ Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) with its certification system,
- o the most appropriate trading network.

the existing official systems for designation of quality and origin of food products at national and European level are not always appropriate to the specific issues of identification of mountain quality products¹, and that any future European scheme should, in any event, fulfil those existing systems,

the existence of the following has proved essential for measures to promote mountain products to have at their disposal¹:

- o economic support from the European Union, national and/or regional authorities for agriculture and primary production activities in the production area,
- o economic support from the regional authorities for cooperatives or collective and associative organisations and structures or even to small local enterprises,
- o support from the regional authorities or professional agricultural organisations for the emergence and creation of cooperatives and collective organisations or structures,
- o support from the authorities to facilitate access to know-how, and to research and technological development,
- o financial recognition of the benefits in terms of public goods

Considering the importance of access to information and exchanges of experience concerning food products, their production methods and sales and communication strategies between massif mountain areas and different countries for dynamism and innovation.

The signatories of the present charter undertake to respect, defend and promote the following five principles in their own actions:

1- Mountain products are manufactured using primary materials produced exclusively in a mountain area, as defined by the Member States and validated where necessary by the European Commission (e.g. mountain areas identified by the Member States within the framework of Regulation EC 1257/99 or mountain areas to be identified by the Member States for the post-2006 European regional policy), with the exception of primary materials which, for natural reasons, cannot technically be produced in mountain areas. Animal production in mountain areas must always demonstrate a link with the mountain territory.

2- All stages in the processing of products are to take place in a mountain area, as defined by the Member States and validated where necessary by the European Commission (e.g. mountain areas identified by Member States within the framework of the regulation CE 1257/99 or mountain areas to be identified by Member States for regional European policy post-2006).

3- Enterprises and farms which process primary agricultural resources in order to manufacture mountain products must be adapted to their geographical environment. They must take into account the concerns connected to sustainable development. The production methods used respect the environment and in particular the water quality present in the territory in question and integrate erosion risks.

4- The production and processing structures for mountain food products must encourage in their activity the maintenance of biological, genetic and cultural heritage of mountain areas, the development of the local knowledge-base of mountain areas and the management of rural areas and landscapes.

5- Enterprises and farms which produce and/or process primary agricultural materials for mountain products must be able to ensure traceability to provide transparent provision of all information relative to the product's manufacturing conditions (production/processing). In this way, they must satisfy the legitimate expectations of consumers to be given any information that will allow them to appreciate the mountain characteristics of the products and the values (transmitted in a positive way) of mountain farming.