

Seminar 12- 13 February 2004 in Turin:

# Mountain food products in Europe: What assets and what strategies

## Project: Mountain Quality Products in Europe

### Workshops A1 / A2 : How can quality mountain food products be characterised ?

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### PREPARATORY DOCUMENT

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**DOCUMENT OF REFERENCE :** Main results of questionnaire 1

The information collected by the Q1 on mountain quality products are divided into 3 axis :

Axis 1: deals with intrinsic characteristics of the quality products in mountain areas i.e. methods for production and/or processing the raw materials, geographical situation, climate, and their links with the products. The connections agricultural products with local tradition and culture are also taken into account.

Axis 2: refers to strategies for the development of the existing quality initiatives and marketing approaches for the various mountain products. The collection of the information will ensure the analysis and the comparison between successful and failed initiatives.

Axis 3: concerns policies and regulations which control the initiatives of quality designation on the European, national and regional scales (type of label available, systems of control,... ). This part of the study analyses the impact of regional, national and European policies on the attribution of quality marks and on the setting up of initiatives.

**The questionnaire 1 had the 2 following main functions :**

- 1 - to draw up an overview of representative mountain quality products and their regulations in the study areas;
- 2 - to collect the necessary information for the selection of quality products, and for the definition of the criteria for their analysis.

The quality under review in the study is the “trade quality of the product” i.e. the quality offered by the product that has to meet consumers’ demand (explicit expectations).

On this basis we can distinguish an **intrinsic quality**, measurable and controllable of the product, as organoleptic quality, visual quality, price, accessibility, and an **“ethical” quality** which is based on various values:

- environmental values: related with the sustainability of the production systems (organic, integrated crop production, biodynamy production etc.), able to maintain the natural diversity and the landscapes.
- social–economical values: related with solidarity, wealth of human resources, employment conditions, maintaining of the social fabric, appropriate incomes to producers, public health.
- social-cultural values: liberty, respect of identity, respect of tradition and history, cultural heritage.
- animal welfare: respect of farm animals (short and local transport of living animals),

The quality has to be guaranteed to consumers through :

- traceability, or particularly short supply chain ;
- an independent system of control or supply chains have to be short and transparent (or open).

Moreover quality consists in all the matter upon which the consumer wishes to be reassured mainly referred to its health (“civic” quality ).

The main questions concerning quality mountain products are:

1- What are the **strong and weak points** that distinguish mountain production from standard production? (in terms of image, accessibility of the products, volumes of production, costs of production ...)

2 - For consumers, what are the **added values** of the mountain products ?

3 - How this **added value could be promoted** and enhanced to the consumer in order to get **better incomes in the upstream of the supply chain** ? (This question will have to be treated through the aspect of communication, distribution types, packaging, and marketing.)

**DESCRIPTION OF THE WORKSHOP :** The study results of questionnaire 1 shows the wide diversity of the products, their characteristics, their context and environment (in particular of the type of territories with very various realities and stakes according to the study areas). Nevertheless, some wide trends can be pointed out and in particular some criteria appear to be discussed (see the list bellow).

#### **LIST OF THE FACTORS ANALYSED BY THE Q1 :**

- Size of the enterprises
- Size of the market
- Mountain specificity / traditional aspects: raw materials, how-know, climate
- Origin/location of the raw material (mountain ?)
- Location of the process (mountain ?)
- Reputation and perception of the product
- Link with the territory (as a mountain area) : characteristics (product or systems of production) or reputation
- Labelling procedure: logo, denomination characteristics of the graphs, general information (dir. 13/2000/CE)
- Use of the idea of the mountain : word “mountain” and/or pictures of mountain
- Controls by a third part / official certification or identification

Some others could be added :

- level of quality (standard quality, middle or high quality),
- respect of the environment (organic products, integrated production),
- collective or individual initiatives or projects,
- etc.

**THEN** : a first level of discussion and of exchange about these criteria should allow us to outline the main guidelines that would constitute the basis document for the future European Charter for mountain quality products – maybe according to an approach by type of products or by type of territorial issues...

	<b>Factors issued of results of Q1</b>	<b>Cluster 1</b>	<b>Cluster 2</b>	<b>Cluster n...</b>
<b>Economic size</b>	Size of the enterprise			
	Size of the market			
<b>Location and link with the territory</b>	Origin / location of the raw material			
	Location of the process			
	Mountain specificity / traditional aspects (about raw material, know-how, climate...)			
	Link with the territory (as a mountain area): characteristics (product or systems of production) or reputation			
<b>and/or Identification guarantees</b>	Labelling procedure : logo, denomination characteristics of the graphs, general information			
	Use of the idea of the mountain : word “mountain” and/or pictures of mountain			
	Controls by a third part / official certification or identification			

## REPORT OF THE WORKSHOP

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### **I – DISCUSSION ON THE MERITS OF CHARACTERISING MOUNTAIN QUALITY PRODUCTS**

The aim of today's workshop was to assess the merits of characterising mountain quality products (i.e. to describe their distinctive features) and to determine whether it can realistically be undertaken.

There are two principal stakes to mountain quality product characterisation:

1/ Characterisation precedes identification. Therefore, if characterisation is completed, there will be an ensuing need to assess the merits of product identification.

2/ Characterisation as a tool available to Euromontana in identifying priorities to feed its discourse for the purpose of discussions with its official partners, i.e. national, regional and European authorities.

### **II – WHAT IS MOUNTAIN PRODUCT QUALITY?**

During the workshop, many contributions addressed the notion of quality, the perception of which differs according to individual contexts (in terms of regional/local stakes) and sensitivity (perceptions differ in Northern compared to Southern Europe).

Different answers emerge, depending on whether examination is based on scientific, consumption or political grounds.

**1/ Example of an approach: spatial planning.** In the mountain environment, there are constraints on production, which must be turned into assets and leveraged as such. Hence the need to advocate those features which convey an ethical image—or possibly something even deeper (though this is not the point of the present discussion). This corresponds to a policy choice based on objectives identified in and for mountain areas.

If spatial planning is to be the guiding principle in developing action to preserve or expand economic activities and operators in areas defined as sensitive or disadvantaged, then there is a need to promote the link(s) between mountain products and their area of origin. In this case, criteria including local rooting, provenance or even origin should definitely be taken very specifically into account in any discussion of mountain product characterisation.

**2/ Mountain products and tradition.** Care should be given to avoid associating mountain products restrictively to the notion of tradition, as this would stifle access to new technologies and modern production techniques.

Observation derived from the project: it emerged from the survey that while many mountain products have some traditional dimension, this is not systematically the case. Quality observed in the products does not come down to tradition; other dimensions have been identified.

### **3/ Product uniqueness.**

a/ Some participants indicated that in order to define mountain product quality, there is a need to identify the unique features of individual products. Indeed, in the absence of uniqueness, there is can be no added value: mountain products cannot be considered quality products merely because they come from the mountains.

Observation derived from the project: here again, survey results indicate that while some products are unique (for a variety of product-specific reasons), other are not at all: certain products are entirely standard and production methods include requirements in terms of respect for the environment and use of space. These products do exist and play a role in mountain areas in terms of regional stakes.

b/ On the other hand, opposing views were expressed about the uniqueness of mountain products. Certain mountain products or towns enjoy wide recognition and have already managed to create a highly positive image resting on unique regional or product quality. These products are or could be certified under existing European identification and protection schemes (PDOs and PGIs). But what then, of other operators manufacturing products in mountain areas? Some are facing difficulties in asserting their identity and selling their products and have access to no identification tools whatsoever. What is under discussion here is quality not characterised by uniqueness, but rather by concerns including fair trade and a desire to maintain economic activities in mountain areas. Therefore, communication to consumers and tourists about quality is different and more geared toward support for economic activity in the mountains (fair trade).

However, products identified by the name of the production region in addition to the use of the term “mountain” or the depiction of the mountain environment must convey this link to a specific locus (and hence its “uniqueness”), while products identified only through the use of the term “mountain” do not necessarily have this unique character but do not systematically invoke arguments of fairness or ethics either. The notion of intrinsic product quality resulting from the general mountain environment (regardless of actual mountain area identity) needs to be conveyed unequivocally.

**4/ The notion of quality must evolve.** Care should be taken to characterise quality from an evolutionary perspective—under pressure from consumers and the CAP reform—in order to mainstream into this notion the changing requirements of both consumers and the law.

**5/ The sanitary quality of mountain products.** A few participants established a link between tradition, operation size and mountain product sanitary quality.

Participants’ reactions: first, the hygiene dimension of quality is not an aim of our discussion, as is it a regulatory requirement for access to the market and a bare minimum (i.e. mandatory) standard. Secondly, major food crises in recent years never originated in small operations.

### III – A FEW ASPECTS OF QUALITY EXAMINED IN THE WORKSHOP:

**1/ Production unit location and connection with the mountain environment.** Several examples were mentioned of agricultural products manufactured in mountain areas but whose link with the mountain environment is limited, and sometimes even insignificant. There are quality (i.e. good, healthy, wholesome, etc.) products whose link with the mountain environment is all but absent (livestock feeding entirely on silage, i.e. grass not originating in mountain areas...). Can such products be considered mountain products?

It appears that there exist three different levels of product connection to the mountain environment:

- 1- Originates in the mountains (idea of source): this is a political choice;
- 2- Production methods and management are linked to the area;
- 3- Closer link with mountain areas (notions of tradition, culture, heritage, etc.).

It seems that many in the room were of the opinion that at least a minimum link between product/production and the mountain environment is required. But what should be the minimum requirement and how can compliance be measured?

**2/ Economic size of mountain area operations.** If Euromontana's objective is to preserve activity in mountain areas by retaining large numbers of operations in mountain areas, then there is a need to preserve operations of smaller average size compared to the lowlands.

If it is agreed that consumers can be interested in "mountains" as a notion, is it then acceptable to deny them access to mountain products at certain times of the year? If not, the economic and commercial sizes of operations are in need of redevelopment.

### IV – WORKSHOP SYNTHESIS USING THE WORKSHOP TABLE

	<b>Factors emerging from Q1</b>	<b>Argument</b>	<b>Conclusions</b>
<b>Economic size</b>	Operation size	There are businesses in mountain areas that contribute to the preservation of a large number of local jobs. These operations are generally smaller compared to similar organisations established in the lowlands and face specific problems ⇒ Euromontana could play a role at this level by identifying their needs and representing their interests	No ideal business or market size seems to have emerged from discussions. Small companies may be exposed to specific difficulties because of their size and location. It would be useful for Euromontana to be mindful of this.
	Market size	Market size should be adequate to reach tourists after they have gone home	If seems difficult to justify restricting access to “mountain” schemes to one market dimension to the exclusion of others, as this would place certain consumers at a disadvantage.
<b>Local rooting and link with mountain areas</b>	Origin/source of raw materials (in the mountains?)	Not directly discussed	While criteria were not discussed individually, it appears that the link between products and mountains should be explicit in some way (to avoid practices such as high-altitude hydroponics).
	Location of the different production process stages (in the mountains?)	Not directly discussed	
	Specific “mountain” features / traditional aspects: raw materials, know-how, climate	There is a need to avoid discussing only the traditional dimension of mountain products (as this restricts access to new technology)	There is also an apparent desire to link product identification to spatial planning stakes ⇒ there must be a relevant link with

<p><b>Local rooting and link with mountain areas</b></p>	<p>Link with regions (as individual mountain areas): distinctive features (of products or production systems) or reputation</p>		<p>regional development.</p> <p>One of the positions consisted in arguing that genuine mountain products are unique, and that identification should therefore denote product uniqueness.</p> <p>The exact opposite position establishes a link with fair trade (arguing that communication should focus on consumers' purchasing motives, i.e. preservation of / economic support for an activity)</p> <p>Is it possible—though this would definitely not be easy—to identify an intermediate level of quality?</p>
	<p><b>Identification and/or guarantees</b></p>	<p>Product reputation and perception</p>	<p>Not discussed</p>
<p>Certification procedures: logos, conditions applying to the registration of visual marks, general information</p>		<p>Not discussed</p>	
<p>Promotion of “mountains as a concept”: use of the term “mountain” and/or images of the mountain environment in communication about products</p>		<p>Not discussed</p>	
<p>Independent controls / certification or official denominations</p>		<p>Not discussed</p>	