



# Improving networking and cooperation among mountain supply chain actors

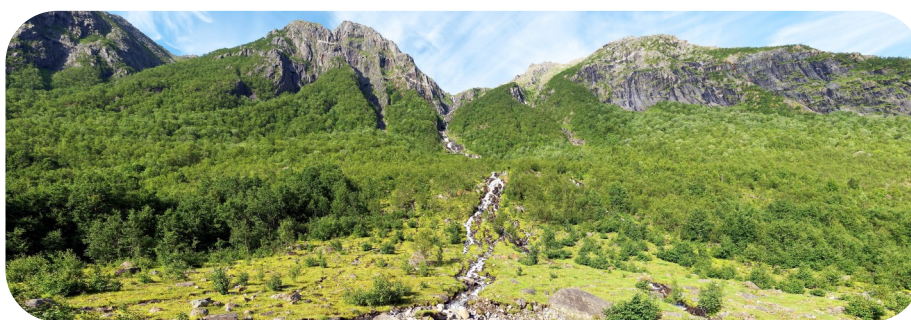
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The organization of the various actors around mountain supply chains at local and regional level is essential for their development. The networking of supply chains will allow not only the connection of different actors, but also will improve their competitiveness through the adoption of the optional quality term "mountain product".

The need for the establishment of a European network of mountain supply chains has been stressed by the different mountains stakeholders. This network should act as an instrument to connect mountain supply chain actors to strength their competitiveness, to explore the potential and spread the uptake of the optional quality term "mountain product". It should also be an instrument that permits the stakeholders to exchange views on common issues and find common solutions to strengthen and enhance the mountain supply chains.

Following the adoption of the new EU optional term "mountain product", Euromontana believes that the adoption of broader approach to the issue of mountains products should be:

- Inspired by the European Charter for mountain quality products - the new legislation provides the legal basis for implementation of two of the charter principles, it is time to go back to the full charter to embrace the issue of mountain product development more widely and resume greater political ambitions.
- Strongly connected to market reality – mountain supply chain development must be achieved in a way which provides increased income for producers and communities, avoiding the leaking of added value, especially where major industrial groups are involved.
- Anchored in territory – the ultimate goal of mountain supply chain development is territorial development, retention of economic activity in the territory, creation and retention of employment and the establishment of increased links between production and tourism activities.
- Holistic – looking at: all quality tools and their potential interest for promotion of mountain products (GIs, territorial brands, private brands, direct sales...) and not just the optional quality term which is only one option among others; all products and not only food products: water, spirits but also wood or even services including the full span of mountain value chains, also integrating tourism.



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# Assesment of the current situation

There is a wealth of traditions and know-how relating to food production and processing in mountain areas and the mountain image is associated in the eyes of consumers with goods of a certain added value. Mountain products combine different aspects for consumers; these products evoke the environment of the mountains, nature, authenticity, purity and quality. At EU level there exists a market potential for mountain food products, but the supply chains are not currently sufficiently organised to exploit it.

To develop mountain supply chains locally, farmers and other local actors encounter several difficulties. The following are the main barriers:

- **Higher prices, small production volume and seasonality of production** of mountain quality food products are considered by retailers as the most important factors inhibiting the distribution and the success of these products.
- **Low capacity to join existing certification schemes** mainly because they are accessible only through a procedure which is too lengthy and costly for small-medium scale supply chains (commonly located in mountain areas) or because their criteria are difficult to meet for production in mountain conditions.
- **Lack of training, infrastructure, know-how and skills.** A key constraint for the development of mountain supply chains is the lack of skills relating to marketing and business management. The key to successful farm processing and direct marketing is the development of a strong business, communication and marketing skills base among farmers.

A better exchange of good information on production issues, supply or marketing opportunities, consumer demand between the stakeholders of the mountain supply chain could avoid these problems and provide appropriate solutions.

Facing these difficulties, farmers may use alternative forms of supply chains: those addressing consumers more directly, by supplying consumers in a close area and selling locally with fewer intermediaries. By direct sales, products go straight from producers to consumers. The objective is to allow mountain producers to offer their products at a more competitive price to consumers, and increase profit. People become aware of the connection between farming and the food they eat. Short food supply chains furthermore contribute to increased access to fresh, seasonal food and clearer origin of the product.

Furthermore, the establishment of an European platform of mountain supply chains acting as an extension of the Euromontana network able to multiply and consolidate the information of the different mountain chains actors, is relevant in the context of the new regulation of the optional term "mountain product". Today, after the last 15 years spent by Euromontana in the achievement of a new mountain quality term, it is essential for the network to back into action to promote networking and encourage supply chain actors to use and implement the new legislation on the optional quality term or other quality and marketing tools.

In order to facilitate networking and cooperation between mountain supply chain actors and the setting-up a European platform for mountain supply chain, the following concrete actions should be encouraged:

- The **involvement in the platform of all actors of the mountain supply chain**: producers and producers' organizations, processors, retailers, consumers, restaurants and chefs, local authorities, schools and universities.
- The **clear definition of the platform strategy, objectives, actions** impacting on the economy, supporting the export of mountains products or structuring of cooperatives. The platform should also identify the leaders able to drive the process.
- The **mapping of existing initiatives** related to the mountain supply chains in order to define the state of the art, identify needs and constraints, avoid multiplication of initiatives and create synergies.

# Recommendations on policy and strategy



In order to facilitate networking and cooperation between mountain supply chain actors, we recommend:

- **Fostering collaboration inside mountain supply chains by encouraging the organization of farmers and processors within and between enterprises.** Provision of business training could be crucial in order to change the mindset of all actors towards a higher entrepreneurial mentality and so acquire specific skills to strengthen their business.
- **Improvement of processing capacities** by supporting the modernisation and creation of small-scale transformation units in mountains areas.
- **Improvement of the cooperation between the producers and support collective actions** (for example through cooperatives) to ensure both sufficient supply volumes and authentic products. Small scale producers and processors in mountain areas should be encouraged to produce quality products, working collectively in order to be able to reach larger markets at regional, national, European level and or new type of markets (on-line selling or products baskets at a larger scale). Furthermore, this collaboration, can provide benefit in a wide range of different contexts, as for example negotiations with retailers, suppliers, processors, or technological investments, etc.



# Action Plan



To facilitate networking and cooperation between mountain supply chain actors, Euromontana was asked to implement concrete actions:

**Action 1: Lobbying at EU level concerning mountains and in particular mountains products** through participation in the Civil dialogue groups in particular on Quality and Promotion, on Common Agricultural Policy and Rural development as well as through the EIP-AGRI platform and the ENRD network. Euromontana must continue to play this role of main interlocutor for the EU institutions and lobby them in order to obtain specific attention to mountains territories within the different European policies.

Timetable: ongoing activity

**Action 2: Establish a European mountains supply chains network through the creation of a platform** that will aim at exchanging experience, discussing common problems, disseminating information, developing projects in order to enhance the products' competitiveness, to explore the potential of mountain products, to monitor and extend the scope of the "mountain product" optional term. This platform should integrate also the other mountain supply chain actors such as universities, businesses, traders and consumers, and should act as virtual exchange forum within Euromontana by a "bottom-up" approach.

Timetable: from 2015 and on-going the following years by Euromontana secretariat.

**Action 3: - Revise the European Charter for Mountain Quality Food Products** by integrating the new legislative framework and by involving other stakeholders (such as industry, trade, consumer organizations).

Timetable: 2015



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