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UNDERSTANDING THE MISSIONS OF THE EUROPEAN CHARTER OF MOUNTAIN QUALITY FOOD PRODUCTS

Answers to :

- Why a European Charter for Mountain Quality Food Products?
- What are the key new ideas of it?
- What is the purpose ?
- What are the principles of mountain quality products according to this Charter?
- Is there a favourable European context for its development?
- What are the benefits for the signatories of the Charter?
- Does Euromontana commitments to this initiative terminate with the publication of the Charter ?
- Will the identification of products in conformity with the Charter's specification be accomplished within the framework of a private European brand approach or by way of a community "label"?
- Who are the signatories ?

Euromontana has decided to take action without delay in favour of these products from mountain regions, before their authenticity and the human riches of mountain areas are lost.

This European policy charter translates the intention of its signatories to characterise, protect and promote mountain quality food products and thus to contribute to the sustainable development of the economies and territories of Europe's mountain regions.



This charter and its principles are binding only on its signatories.

Why a European Charter for Mountain Quality Food Products?

Four assessments can be drawn from the work carried out by Euromontana*, among others, on food supply-chains in mountain areas:

1/ **Farming and the food industry activities play a crucial role** not only in the economic and social development of mountain regions, but also in the "preservation and development of the mountain heritage". This is characterised by the wealth of its environment, the diversities of its tradition, culture and landscape and by the distinctiveness of its built heritage. The activity of the agricultural sector even contributes to the preservation of natural disasters and to the quality of life of the European population.

2/ **Mountain regions in Europe share difficulties** arising from their specific topographic and pedoclimatic conditions and their distance from business and urban centres, which influence directly the competitiveness of farming and food production of the regions. It is crucial therefore to develop added value products.

3/ **Food products**, including some which describe **themselves in a fraudulent way**, directly or indirectly, as "mountain products" circulate within and between member states. In addition, the lack of definition at national level and, when such definitions exist, the lack of consistency between member states, are to be deplored.

4/ Whenever the term "mountain" or any image relating to mountains is placed on a food product, this constitutes a **"promise" to consumers that must be delivered**. In fact, the mountainous identity represents very positive communication capital in the eyes of consumers; it is the duty of everyone to ensure that this image is not tarnished or abused.

* See the last page

What are the key new ideas of this Charter?



Several notions that are an integral part of the charter are either drawn from the wide reflection developed on this subject by Euromontana since 1999 or taken directly from the conclusions of the Euromontana study on mountain quality food products, carried out between 2002 and 2004, with 10 mountain areas in Europe.

⇒ **The quality of products cannot be disassociated from that of the territories** where they are produced. By characterising the conditions of production, the aim of the Charter is to influence not only the quality of products but also the harmonious integration and positive incidence of the economic activities carried out in fragile regions. Consequently, this Charter which specifically addresses products, targets greater satisfaction of the consumers of these products but also the local populations and tourists visiting these regions (territorial “consumers”).

⇒ **The quality of mountain products is also linked to the management of production and process** in harmony with local natural mountain conditions and resources. Very often, the quality of mountain products is principally associated with the tradition which makes a unique product of one area. This “traditional” quality clearly complies with the Charter but its identification and protection at the European Community level are already defined in the framework of the PDO* and PGI** regulations (CE 2081/92). Furthermore, these two tools are not always adapted to the various products and/or businesses in the mountains. In recognising also the quality linked to a specific mountain environment, the Charter seeks to promote innovative initiatives respecting sustainable development and activities within mountain areas and the product of which delivers satisfaction to the consumers. In this area, production need not necessarily be traditional.

⇒ **The production and all the process stages of products should be located in mountain regions and “linked” to the territory.** It is important to maintain and develop sustainable economic activity in mountain territories so that the economic and social spin-offs and benefits in terms of image are reintegrated. Mountain regions must also be able to benefit from the knock-on effects of any such food production activities and communication with consumers. The transfer of part of the activities to more profitable areas compromises efforts to maintain the added value in mountain regions. In addition, for reasons of consistency with regard to consumers, a product complying with the Charter, must be produced AND processed in the mountains.

⇒ **A mountain product can be commercialised at local, regional, national levels and on a European-wide scale.** The Charter does not specify any distribution circuit that should be given priority. It is recognised both that the size of the market must be in line with the specific strategy of each initiative and that it is desirable that all European consumers must potentially be able to buy a mountain product, irrespective of whether they live close to or a long distance from a mountain region.



“the Charter seeks to promote innovative initiatives respecting sustainable development and activities within mountain areas ”

What is the purpose of this Charter?

The present Charter, related to the sustainable development of mountain agricultural and food products, **is a tool that is aimed at:**

- encouraging the maintenance and development of traditions, culture, heritage, environmental quality and of the innovation capacity and the economic activities of mountain regions,
- contributing in a sustainable way to economic development and territorial management in those regions.

The signatories consider this Charter to be a Policy instrument providing a Reference Framework for mountain quality products defining the fundamental principles to be fostered, defended and promoted. Their endorsement of the Charter contributes to its recognition as a common reference for Europe on quality mountain food products and the value of such products for the producers, consumers and society.

This Charter addresses **economic development and policy objectives** which are:

- the better identification of these quality mountain products in the market in order to avoid counterfeits that would be detrimental to producers and consumers, especially in the commercial use of the term “mountain” and a contribution to the achievement of a fair price for all of the partners in the commodity chains concerned.
- the recognition and promotion, on an objective basis, of the role of farmers and enterprises that produce (benefits for society) in the mountain areas in Europe and thus the defence of their interests.

Consequently, **the purpose of this Charter is:**

to promote:

- the recognition of, and the importance to mountain regions and to the whole European population of the development of, mountain food products,

and to specify:

- the essential principles which characterise mountain food products,
- the type of quality products whose development must be supported,
- the type of projects or initiatives that must be supported.



“a common reference for Europe on quality mountain food products and their value for the producers, consumers and society”

What are the principles of mountain quality products according to this Charter?

The Charter is based on 5 principles, which can be summarised as follows:

- 1/ The raw materials must be derived from a mountain region;
- 2/ The processing must be carried in a mountain region;
- 3/ Production must take into account local concerns relating to sustainable development;
- 4/ Production must attempt to maintain the biodiversity and heritage of mountain regions;
- 5/ Producers must be able to guarantee at all times the transparency of information to consumers.





Is there a favourable European context for the development of this Charter?

Yes,

In 2000, at the European Mountain Convention in Trento, one of the points of the final declaration of Euromontana was “Quality is the key to development for European mountain regions”.

In 2002, the Council of Europe issued its recommendation 1575 (2002) proposing the introduction of a quality label for food products derived from hill farming.

In 2002 also, at the Brussels conference on Community Policies and Mountains, the European Commissioner for Agriculture, Franz Fischler stressed that “we must develop the concept of ‘quality products’ in mountain areas that will enable us to increase consumer trust and support our primary sector”.

From 2002 to 2004, Euromontana, with 13 partners from 8 European countries, conducted a research project on the quality of mountain food products that identified the potential benefit of a Charter approach.

Finally, France, Italy and Switzerland have decided to enact legislation regarding the use of the term “mountain” for agricultural and food products. Other member states are expected to follow their lead.

Upon signing this Charter you will be kept informed of its political, technical and practical progress

What are the benefits for the signatories of the Charter?



Do you defend, promote or earn your livelihood from sustainable farming and food activities in mountain areas? Then, the signing of this charter has a meaning to you, whether or not you come from a country that has already adopted legislation on mountain food products.

Taking into account the free movement of goods within the common market and the agreements with the non-member European countries, it is definitely at the European scale that this action is legitimate. Both the gap in the law and the lack of harmonized legislations between states do a disservice to these products within their own national markets or in respect of export opportunities and do not favour the coherent development of mountain territories which are often located between several countries.

When signing this Charter, you will be invited to participate in the events organised in promotion of the Charter and be kept informed on its political, technical and practical progress.

Does Euromontana commitments to this initiative terminate with the publication of the Charter ?

No, it is just the first step. For the time being, it is only a policy Charter. It will not at this stage, be used directly as a base for promotion of products.

Mountains must offer an area of diversity and dynamism for the men and women who live and work there and for tourists and citizens who visit them. Mountain food products must reflect the image of this area, that is to say they must convey its values and aspirations,

This policy Charter on mountain quality food products is meant to be the first concrete step towards achieving that goal, by securing the adhesion of governmental and non-governmental institutions at European, even international level.

In both the short and middle terms, such a Charter would provide a tool to bring national and local situations in Europe closer together and create synergies between them, and should serve the development of mountain products according to the principles it specifies. It aims to become a reference system in Europe for mountain products.

Following this policy Charter, a “product” version that could approximate to “specifications” will have to be drawn up in close collaboration with the actors involved and consumers in Europe. This future document will specify the exact technical conditions for the application and for the follow-up of the conditions to comply with the values of the Charter.



“Mountain food products must reflect the image of this area, that is to say they must convey its values and aspirations”

Will the identification of products in conformity with the Charter’s specification be accomplished within the framework of a private European brand or by way of a European community “label”?

The two possibilities must be examined in greater depth and developed with all the beneficiaries of the initiative, from producers to consumers, in order to select the most efficient method. In the two cases, the main objective will be to find which process is more credible for consumers and the more adapted to needs and realities of business that intend to use it for their products, whatever is the size and legal status of these enterprises (it comprises the farming and craft businesses).

Who are the signatories?

Any legal persons incorporated under public or private law, working or involved in the area of agricultural production, food processing, distribution, commercialisation or consumption and defending the interests, as described in the charter, of mountain regions, their products and their entrepreneurs, as well as those representing consumers of these products, are invited to sign this Charter.

On the other hand, all natural persons wishing to support this Charter are invited to contact and encourage their organisation, union or any other structure, to adhere collectively to this Charter.



How to contact us?

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CONNECTING MOUNTAINS

This charter is the responsibility of Euromontana, the European association for development and cooperation in mountain regions. To obtain more information on the Charter, in particular its complete version, please contact the Association.

**Come and meet us on
our Website:**

www.mountainproducts-europe.org

Euromontana

EUROMONTANA is the European multisectoral association for co-operation and development of mountain territories. It embraces regional and national mountain organisations throughout greater Europe, including regional development agencies, local authorities, agriculture organisations, environmental agencies, forestry organisations and research institutes.

Euromontana's mission is to promote living mountains, integrated and sustainable development and quality of life in mountain areas.

In order to achieve this, Euromontana facilitates the exchange of information and experience among these areas by organising seminars and major conferences, by conducting and collaborating in studies, by developing, managing and participating in European projects and by working with the European institutions on mountain issues.

Come and meet Euromontana on: www.euromontana.org;

