



## EuroMARC – Mountain Agrofood products in Europe, their consumers, retailers and local initiatives



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Newsletter  
dedicated to the  
research project  
EuroMARC

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General information on  
the project, a  
presentation document  
and the first newsletter  
(published in  
September) are  
available on  
[www.mountainproducts-  
europe.org](http://www.mountainproducts-europe.org)



FOOD QUALITY AND SAFETY



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## Results of the EuroMARC seminar, 6 November 2008, Brussels

On 6 November, the EuroMARC seminar, organised within the offices of the Languedoc-Roussillon region in Brussels, brought together around fifty participants to exchange reflections on the first results of the research project on mountain quality food products. In addition to the 6 European experts invited by the consortium, the audience also participated and reacted to the presentations.

For the members of the consortium, the event had several positive aspects:

- It was an occasion to conduct a “check-up” of the work’s progress: after nearly two years spent working on the project, the seminar gave us the opportunity to realise what work had been accomplished and what work remains to be done!
- It was also an opportunity to put the pieces of the puzzle together:

the EuroMARC project includes five study fields (consumption, distribution, supply chains, local initiatives, and policies). Since these aspects are treated separately in everyday research activities, the common presentations were an opportunity to link up all these aspects into a coherent whole.

- Finally, the seminar provided us with a chance to gather external opinions: the partners greatly appreciated these contributions that will enrich their future analyses.

In this newsletter you will find a summary of the presentations and discussions that took place during the seminar.

Hope you find it interesting!

## The image of mountain quality food products

The presentations of Virginie Amilien, SIFO, and Markus Schermer, UIBK, are available on [www.mountainproducts-europe.org](http://www.mountainproducts-europe.org).

Guest experts: Noëlle Paolo, CNIEL; Richard Balling, Ministry of Agriculture of the Province of Bavaria

The first session was the occasion to present the results of the consumer and supply chain research. The presentations focused on the analysis of the image of quality products according to consumers and the different actors of the supply chains. It is interesting to notice the similarities between the points of view of such different actors. Thus, the positive connotation of mountain, which

evokes quality and a clean and preserved environment, is very frequent, and at the same time the hygienic quality of products appears crucial.

We can nevertheless observe differences in the perceptions of products according to the type of consumers interviewed. For instance, consumers in mountain regions consider mountain products as local products,

**"Mountain" evokes quality and a clean and preserved environment; at the same time the hygienic quality of products is crucial.**

whereas people in other areas tend to value more the mountain origin, thanks to the positive image of mountains. The research on supply chains confirmed these results and allowed us to identify limits to the marketing of quality mountain products. It appears, in particular, that better communication on mountain quality products, in order to give them recognition as a specific category, would be appropriate. But first, better co-ordination between producers and supply chains actors is necessary.

**Noëlle Paolo** from the CNIEL confirmed the interest of consumers in mountain quality products: a study undertaken by the CNIEL on mountain milk produced similar results. She stressed the necessity to use carefully the expression "mountain quality product", as the term "quality" suggests that inferior mountain products exist, and therefore undermines the mountain image. **Richard Balling**, from the ministry of Agriculture of the

province of Bavaria, concurred with that idea and proposed instead to talk about products "originating from mountain areas". The subsequent discussions raised several issues:

- The difficulty of defining what a mountain area is, a definition that would be necessary for the potential implementation of a logo or quality label
- The need to use appropriate terms, illustrated by the fact that in Scotland, "hills" is often used to refer to mountains.
- The need to define the potential criteria to be respected in the use of a logo or label.



Virginie Amilien, Markus Schermer.  
Picture: Vanessa Klepandy

In conclusion, two development models emerged from the discussion: for local marketing, the "local product" aspect should be valorised; whilst the "mountain" aspect of the products seems to have a stronger potential among lowland consumers.

## Adding value to mountain quality food products

The presentations of Philip Leat, SAC, and Bernd Schuh, ÖIR, are available on [www.mountainproducts-europe.org](http://www.mountainproducts-europe.org).

Guest experts: Frédéric Morand, Eco-Innovation; Livia Dömölki, Hungarian National Association for the Protection of Consumers

**Mountain quality food products are seldom sold at a higher price than products from lowland areas.**

During the second session, the consortium members working on the distribution and LEADER-like local initiative aspects tried to answer the question of how to generate added value for food products. **Philip Leat** first presented the initial results of the analysis of supply shelves of mountain products and similar products from other areas (see newsletter n° 1). These results show the price differences between the products identified by the researchers as mountain quality products and other products. The results show considerable differences according to the types of products and countries. Thus, for fruits, cooked meats, and water, the price difference was either not significant or negative for mountain products, i.e. sold at lower prices than products not originating from mountain areas. Mountain cheeses, on the contrary, are sold at a higher price, except in France, maybe because of the power of the distribution sector

in that country and the high quality image of many French cheeses from non-mountain areas.

**Bernd Schuh** then presented the analysis framework of the local food initiatives. Although this aspect of the project is only sufficiently advanced to present preliminary results, data from earlier ÖIR projects show the role that LEADER programmes can play compared to other development programmes: LEADER programmes can be the main element in rural development policies, or be a vector for new ideas, a niche programme, or a programme combining different initiatives at the local level.

As results for this part of the study are not yet sufficiently well developed, it is not possible to establish at the moment the extent to which LEADER programmes can support the creation or development of mountain quality food product supply chains.



**Livia Dömölki**, from the Hungarian National Association for the Protection of Consumers, underlined the benefit for consumers of being able to choose between a wide variety of products, rather than having to face a uniform market. **Frédéric Morand**, from Eco-Innovation, raised the issue of the margin that producers can benefit from. Indeed, a positive price difference between mountain products and other products does not automatically mean that producers benefit from higher revenues.

The ensuing debate focused on the reasons why mountain products are not all sold at higher prices than the products originating from other areas. One reason put forward is

that quality mountain products are sold locally and therefore bought by a rural population with lower incomes than the urban population. These products need therefore to be sold at attractive prices for local people. Moreover, participants remarked that since mountain products, up to now, have an unclear image, consumers are not ready to pay higher prices for them. A stronger quality image and related promotion will first be necessary. Finally, the link between the products and their region of origin must not be undermined: a better mountain, territorial strategy, could bring added value to products.

## What policies would favour the development of mountain quality food products?

The presentations of Rob McMorran, Perth College, and Francis Fay, Deputy Head of Unit, Agricultural Product Quality Policy, DG Agriculture and Rural Development, are available on [www.mountainproducts-europe.org](http://www.mountainproducts-europe.org).

Green paper on quality food products: product standards, farming requirements and quality schemes, available on [http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/policy/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/quality/policy/index_en.htm)

Guest experts: Vesna Caminades, Brussels representation of the Province of Bolzano-Sud-Tyrol, Italie ; Christine Mueller, Federal Office for Agriculture (OFAG), Switzerland.



Virginie Amilien, Francis Fay  
Picture: Vanessa Klepandy

**Rob McMorran** presented the results of a survey conducted among persons involved in the preparation or implementation of rural development policies or in the labelling of products. The persons contacted worked at the local, regional, national or European levels (in the 6 countries). The results first showed that the understanding and legal definition of the terms “mountain” and “mountain product” greatly vary from one country to another. For instance, France has precise legal definitions for these terms, Romania only has a definition for the term “mountain”, and the other countries have no definition. The term “mountain product” is relatively well known and understood by the population in France and Austria, but not in Scotland. Moreover, the interviews conducted showed support at many levels in favour of a legal protection of mountain quality products. Even though the general tendency emerging seems to favour (by a narrow majority) such an initiative, some issues nevertheless need to be raised: the problem of the definition of mountain areas. Furthermore, some participants raised the issue of the relevance of a European label, since priority should rather be given to regional development support, and therefore proposed alternatives.

To further the discussion, **Francis Fay**, Deputy Head of the Products Quality Unit at DG

Agri, presented the Green Paper on quality food products. The launch of the document on 15 October opened a period of general consultation on European policy towards quality products, which is the first phase of reflection and debates which should lead to a reform of that policy in 2010. In the Green Paper, the European Commission in particular addresses the issue of the potential need for new protection systems for some product categories.

**Vesna Caminades**, from the Brussels office of the South-Tyrol Italian region, shed light on an example of local policy towards products. In this province, emphasis is placed on the local aspect of products, which includes the idea of mountain since the province is very mountainous. She concluded by stressing the difficulties of the implementation of a label, difficulties that were further underlined by **Christine Mueller**, from OFAG. Indeed, since 2006, Switzerland has promulgated a law to distinguish and protect mountain products. The implementation of the law is still the subject of debate.

The subsequent discussions addressed the issue of a mountain label: is it the best tool for regional development, or should another kind of protection for the term mountain be favoured?

Although the term « mountain product » is not understood in the same way in the different countries, there is an interest in developing a protection for it.



The issue of communication with consumers and significance of such an appellation was also addressed during the debate: the implementation of a quality sign or logo should go hand in hand with the promotion

## What recommendations for a better protection of mountain products?

Because of current European policies, the debates of the seminar largely evolved around the issue of how to protect mountain products. Two possible strategies emerged from the debate:

- The local strategy, based on the acquaintance of the buyers with the territory. In this case, buyers know the origin of a product, and therefore know *de facto* that it originates from a mountain area.
- The long distance strategy, which requires an appeal to the imagination of the consumers and their perceptions of mountains. Because of distance, consumers need to be

reassured about the origin of the products. It seems that a label or official sign certifying the mountain origin of products could generate added value in this case.

These first tendencies will need to be confirmed by the analysis of the results before being included in practice guides and recommendations which will be prepared in 2009.

The final presentation of the results obtained will take place in early December 2009 in Maribor, Slovenia.

## Thanks to our sponsors:

At lunch time, the seminar participants had the chance to taste some examples of mountain quality food products offered by several producers. We would therefore like to thank:

- Zillertaler (Austria) for the Bergkäse and Almkäse cheeses;
- The apples and pears producers from Savoy (France);
- Mountain pork producers from France for the *saucisson* and dried sausages.



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