



Report from workshop "Labeling Products of Island Farming"

European Commission, Joint Research Centre

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In March, ESIN was invited by the European Commission to participate in a workshop on the subject "Labelling Products of Island Farming". The European Parliament has given the Commission a task to investigate good and maybe less good things about a new kind of labeling, a new concept "Products of island farming". Another study has already been made for "Products of mountain farming".

No later than 4 January, the Commission shall present a report to the European Parliament and to the Council on the case for a new term, "Product of island farming".

The Commission want to know:

- * If labeling would help the farmers and producers on islands.
- * If a new kind of labeling could add an extra value to the island products to similar products from mainland.

The purpose would be to facilitate the communication for producers to consumers about the extra value.

The Commission doesn't have the legal power to make a logo, a symbol, but can take a regulated term, for example "Product of Island Farming".

The term may only be used to describe the products intended for human consumption that are listed in Annex 1 to the Treaty, the raw materials which come from islands. In addition, for the term to be applied to processed products, processing must also take place on the island in cases where this substantially affects the particular characteristics of the final product.

A new labeling "Products from island farming" would probably be used in combination with quality certifications like PDO (Protected Designation of Origin) and PGI (Protected Geographical Indication).

Workshop

The workshop was organized by the Institute for Prospective Technological Studies, IPTS, in cooperation with DG Agri, Brussels. IPTS is a research centre of the European Commission, based in Seville. At the workshop, DG Agri was represented by three persons and IPTS by four persons. Other participants were representing universities who had done case studies for special islands or covering bigger parts of the EU, Copa-Cogega which is an association for farmers on EU level, the CPMR Islands Commission, AREPO - Association des Régions Européennes des Produits d'Origine, Gobierno de Canarias - the ministry for education, university and sustainability. There were persons representing offices for development from islands like Corse and Azores and also from Casa de la Miel who is marketing Tenerife honey.

Presentations

The workshop was a number of presentations of case studies. The presentations were made in different ways, depending on who gave the information. It was both a lot of facts and figures and also examples of products that are special for islands around Europe. After the workshop, the IPTS will collect written case studies from all presentations, which will then be put together for DG Agri in Brussels.

ESIN was invited to give three presentations - one from Denmark about a network of food producers on small islands, one presentation from Ireland about encouraging local, high quality food from small islands and one from Sweden, describing farmer's cooperation and adaption of EU regulations on small islands. We also got the opportunity to give a presentation of the ESIN.

Unfortunately the Danish participant, Laurids Siig Christensen, couldn't come as he had to be at another gathering, but his presentation was made by Anna-Karin. John Walsh from Ireland had a cancelled flight so he couldn't come either. Anna-Karin Utbult Almkvist gave the Swedish presentation and also the ESIN presentation.

What is an island?

There are several ways of defining what an island is. This was a question that came up in several presentations, as you need to know what areas this possible new labeling would concern. But also to describe why island farmers have difficulties compared to mainland farmers such as higher costs, distance, solutions for transportations etc. To clarify why an added value could be a help for farming on islands.

*In common sense - "An island is a piece of land surrounded by water".

* A geographers' concern - "An island offers an intermediate size, between an islet and a continent".

* A Scottish definition (?) - "A piece of land where you can keep at least one sheep". (But sheep don't like to be alone, so there must be room for at least two sheep!)

But, more worrying, is the Eurostat definition for EU statistical purpose, which excludes many of the small islands of the EU. Eurostat lists only islands with:

1. Minimum surface of 1 km².
2. Minimum distance between island and mainland of 1 km.
3. Resident population over 50 persons.
4. No fixed link to mainland.
5. No member state capital on the island.

At the same time, the European Commission sees some critical approach of the Eurostat criteria

- Coastal islands can face the same problems as others
- Fixed links are not always sufficient
- Very small islands in archipelagos have problems of "double insularity"
- Double / triple handicap: island + mountain + archipelago

Jean Didier Hache, representing CPMR, describe islands situation like this:

Each island has its own combination of isolation and limitations.

Island difference = isolation x physical and human limitations.

Isolation - to be measured in terms of remoteness from effective trading centers, as well as in quality, frequency and cost of connections.

Physical and human limitations - available space and natural resources, population size and market size.

What are the products?

The first block of presentations were a bit more technical and gave general economic aspects of farming on islands. To give a view of what is actually produced on islands and how other type of labeling are already used, there were a number of presentations from mainly big islands, such as Tenerife honey, key products from Sardinia island, Canary islands marks, labeling of Azores products, challenges for the agriculture of Balears etc.

Labeling today

Many producers already use the name of their island in their labeling as they see that consumers more and more want to know what they eat and where it comes from. A product from an island can be connected with good memories from a visit. But more than that, products can also have a special taste just because of where it has been growing. Islands can have a different kind of flora and soil than mainland, another climate as well as micro climate, a special way of preparing the products, long traditions that give a history to the product etc. If the consumer at the same time is aware of the extra costs that come together with producing on an island, hopefully they can be willing to accept a higher price on these products.

What is produced on the small islands?

There is a lack of data about what is produced on small islands and if special labeling or quality criteria are used. The big islands may have food industries, more money for marketing and possibility to provide authorities and media with information about their products. We, who live on the small islands, know that farming can be very important on these islands. This fact can easily be forgotten by authorities, especially if we are lost in the statistics by Eurostat island definitions. We know that there are many, many islands in Europe with few inhabitants. We need to speak more about the importance of added value from farming products from small islands.

ESIN is welcome to contribute more to the IPTS report, showing what is produced on the small islands and what the added value could be if there was a labeling of products from island farming. What has been done so far and what could be better.

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Anna-Karin Utbult Almkvist