Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Recommendation 1575 (2002)[1]

Introduction of a quality label for food products derived from hill farming

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is aware of the need to promote the sustainable development of mountain regions on account of the diversity and the wealth of their resources.

2. The Assembly considers that hill farming has a crucial role, not only in the economic and social development of mountain regions, but also, because of its multifunctional nature, in the quality of life of the lowland population.

3. The Assembly points out that it actively concerns itself with food safety, security for consumers and food quality issues.

4. The Assembly believes that promotion of high quality food products derived from hill farming is of considerable importance to the future of mountain economies.

5. The Assembly is heedful of the issues relating to the development of mountain regions and has focused on the question of protection of mountain regions, recommending the introduction of a quality label for mountain resorts in Europe (Recommendation 1433 (1999)).

6. Setting up a quality label for food products derived from hill farming would be a means of enhancing the images of these products with consumers, controlling their quality and guaranteeing legal protection against misuse of geographical names by agrifood companies in the mass-production sector. Such a quality label would not necessarily supersede other labels indicating local or regional origin, but could be added to them.

7. The Assembly is convinced that the Council of Europe can aid the development of hill farming, given the activities it pursues, especially those undertaken by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, and, in particular, in view of the final declaration adopted at the Third European Conference of Mountain Regions in 1994.

8. It believes that establishing a legal mechanism for the promotion and protection of food products derived from hill farming is consistent with a joint European approach to the challenges facing mountain regions, whether in the Alps and the Pyrenees, in the Balkans, the Carpathians or the Caucasus, or in any other mountainous region in Europe.

9. The Assembly considers that the development of hill farming can also have a positive impact on the conservation of the natural and cultural environments, prevent natural disasters, protect water resources, guarantee a minimum population density in mountain areas and develop ecologically sustainable tourism.

10. Having regard to the above, the Parliamentary Assembly recommends that the Committee of Ministers:

introduce a quality label for products of hill farming by putting forward general criteria covering both geographical boundaries and production conditions, and by inviting the member states, in particular, to put forward the proposals of national, regional and local administrative authorities and of producers from mountain areas;

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1. Text adopted by the Standing Committee, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 3 September 2002 (see Doc. 9504, report of the Committee on the Environment and Agriculture, rapporteur: Mr Gubert).

invite the member states to harmonise their legislation on designations of origin and quality labels, making it possible for a label of origin to be introduced for hill farm products;

encourage the member states – possibly through awareness-raising exercises – to designate their mountain territories, define the criteria for the award of the quality label to a growing number of products and put the finishing touches to verification and monitoring machinery;

propose that the European Union add to existing methods of protecting designations of origin and the typical characteristics of agrifood products a geographical designation, which could even be used in combination with another designation, to identify mountain products;

consider preparing a possible agreement enabling this quality label system to be extended to the European countries which are not members of the European Union, and invite these countries, particularly those with common borders, to move towards this objective;

consider taking initiatives with a view to setting up a European body to guarantee, in co-operation with interested member states, co-ordinated management of the quality label for products of hill farming;

encourage member states to make use of existing European Union legal provisions in order to protect the designations of origin of their mountain regions' agricultural and food products, if appropriate by concluding agreements with the European Union;

invite the World Trade Organisation to promote the transparency of farm and food product markets through the protection of the designations and labels which indicate products' diversity and their specific characteristics derived from their places of origin (including mountain areas) and production processes;

invite Council of Europe member states and the European Union to increase the resources spent on research into the specific qualities of hill farming products, both at local level and in respect of particular mountain ranges or of mountains in general;

respond to the expectations of many Council of Europe member states and pay particular attention to the specific problems of mountain regions and hill farming.