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Natural and cultural resources , qualities of the products and local development in rangeland and grassland areas in France : animal products in the PDO system"

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The development of livestock farming in mountain , rangeland or less-favoured grassland areas of France is often related to acknowledged signs of quality , especially "Origin Labelled Products" (OLP) that have proved to be powerful vehicles for the creation of local added value for livestock products . The best known of these signs is the *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée* (AOC) , a French creation from the early 20th century which was subsequently extended Europe-wide in 1992 (EC Regulation 2081/92) under the name "Protected Designation of Origin" (PDO) . PDOs guarantee the typicality of products the specific qualities of which is due to the *terroir* . According to INRA-INAO , "Terroirs et Cultures" and UNESCO (2005) , a *terroir* is a delimited geographic area defined by a human community which develops all along its history a set of distinctive traits , know-how and practices based on a system of interactions between the natural environment and human factors . The skills and knowledges express originality , confer typicality and allow the recognition of the products or services originating from this particular area and therefore of the people who inhabit it . *Terroirs* are living and innovative spaces that cannot be associated solely with tradition" . At present , nearly 40 French PDO dairy products (mainly cheeses) involve 40 000 cattle , ewe and goat dairy farms representing 15% of the national dairy production of which 80% comes from mountain areas . There are only 3 PDO beef meats , 1 PDO lamb meat and 2 PDO poultry types in France (Casabianca et al .) . Several other PDO projects are in progress . There is a second type of OLP in the context of EC Regulation 2081/92 : the "Protected Geographical Indication" (PGI) , that means less specification constraints than with PDO ; about 70 PGI products are registered in France .

Since 1994 , in partnership with INAO (National Institute for PDOs) , interdisciplinary research actions have been engaged on the technological and cultural foundations of elaboration of these origin labelled products , and to highlight the links between food products and territories in order to better differentiate and qualify them (Montel et al . , 2005) . The aim is to promote and consolidate agro-food systems that are based on quality products linked to a locality and which can therefore not be delocalized since they are tied to the valorisation of bio-ecological resources (local breeds , grasslands) and immaterial resources (history , skills and know-how , cultural aspects) localized into a given environment on the basis of a quality recognizable by its ties to a geographic origin . Raw matter can be imported ; a cattle breed can be imported ; a technique can be reproduced ; but a *terroir* cannot be copied ! The objective is to promote activity locally , added value and diversification of products which will maintain the economic and cultural development of the identified areas . This added value and benefit is shared among the stakeholders that participate in the elaboration of this product . Public acknowledgement , protection of the name and characteristics of these products are ensured by the State through INAO in order to avoid imitations and misuse of the notoriety of the name of origin of the product .

These studies have shown the real influence of physical environments and production systems combined with processing technologies embedded in local culture on a range of specificities of the animal products (sensorial and nutritional qualities , image . . .) (Montel et al , 2005 ; Béranger et al . , 2005) . Thus cheese and meat qualities have been linked to grassland flora , to animal breed , its age and its growth curve , to feeding and herd management , to processes , to the diversity of microbial ecosystems of environment , . . . New links were found between some components of grass , or milk , or microbial ecosystems and the sensorial characteristics of the finished cheese or meat product . Analyses of skills and knowledges thus contribute to the tracing of original characteristics all along the production-processing chain . In 2007 , UNESCO has acknowledged this *terroir* approach and plans to set up an international action-research network for the compared analysis of different "development itineraries" of *terroirs* , in order to better promote this approach that is able to make , in a sense , livestock breeders become artists like merchants selling dreams .

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