

# Organic Farming and Food Quality Chains in Europe

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**Abstract** - Out from the evolutions of the European agro food systems since the 80' and besides Organic Farming, several other modes of production developed in parallel to the main stream system. This gave rise, during the last decades, to different research agendas and networks, which in general – and unfortunately - ignore each others. This paper intends to give some outlines to account for the diversity of those approaches and give some path of convergence for the future. In the frame of the new European agricultural policy, those research networks could gain credibility and power through improving connections with each others and make their relations more intense.<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

During the last decades, apart from Organic Farming, several alternative modes of production has been developed in Europe : let us mention, as examples, the Protected Designation of Origin, the Protected Geographical Indications, the on-farm processed products, local food, mountain food products, typical products (in Italy), etc.

If compared with organic farming, their regulations, modes and structures of productions, certification schemes, etc. are certainly different, sometimes on crucial points, but they have many points in common. In effect, they are concerned by small scale production, existence of short supply chain and box schemes, connexion with community supported agricultures, agro-tourism, participatory certification, handicraft processing, etc.

While organic food seems to be more advanced on the production systems at the primary production issues, other modes of production, as Protected Designations of Origin (PDO) or Protected Geographical Indications (PGI) have developed interesting schemes on small scale and handicraft processing, regional marketing, vertical and interprofessional partnerships (formalized in consortia, which manage part of the activities collectively). Slow Food, on it's side, developed an interesting participatory approach of consumers' expectations, based on culinary culture and gastronomic food quality. Mountain products, sharing a common European definition of what *mountain* is, are produced in many European regions from North to South.

Different public policy measures deal with those alternative and quality chains, which have to face often *very similar challenges*: how to combine eco-

nomie efficiency and strictness of principles? How to manage the strategic turns needed at certain development phases? How to comply with sanitary standards, worked out in the frame of the industrial development? How to cope with "conventionnalization trends" (do these quality chains converge towards concentrated modes of production and long supply chains)? How to design specific consumer information on the generic market, which is characterized by standard mass production and consumption? How to manage collective action in the framework of antitrust regulations? And finally how to design a consistent research agenda, when the whole research system is marked by the main stream?

Most of public policies touching the quality chains are not consistent with each others: i.e. CAP, regulations touching the competition rules, sanitary standards, products normalisation, etc.. Those regulations are difficult to assess altogether, because, according to the Tinbergen principle, it would not be possible to assess more than "one goal – one measure". However, in the frame of the new CAP (Luxembourg agreement, 2003), organic farming and other quality chains, could be specifically supported on the basis of their externalities and their contribution to social goals and expectations. In effect, most of those models are questioned on a similar way by such stakes as sustainability, rural development, multifunctionality, endogenous development, network analysis, less favoured areas, etc..

Those questions are presently addressed by different research networks, enlightening the strength and weaknesses of some of the concerned quality chains. Until now, those networks have not identified the common points, where a synergetic approach could be developed.

## RESEARCH NETWORKS

For the last decades, the *research network on OF&F* has been very active, addressing a various set of themes<sup>2</sup> (as an example : the OF in the frame of the CAP, regulation, consumer attitudes and purchase behaviour, market studies, statistical data system, crop and animal production, and more recently : technical factors influencing quality, impact on rural development (see the CORE Organics project).

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<sup>2</sup> It seems impossible, in the frame of this paper, to mention the wealth of literature produced on all the alternative modes of production. We mention in the references some of the website where this literature can be found.

During the last decade, another network has developed on products bearing *Geographical Indications*. The research agenda concerned the technical factors influencing the sensory and nutritive aspects of the quality, traceability of the origin and delineation questions, legal aspects of the growing political recognition (Intellectual Property Rights), consumers' attitudes and behaviour, and impacts on rural development.

The network committed on *on-farm processed products* has mainly analysed the market, the structure of production and the sensory aspects of the quality, while the *Euromontana network* was devoted to the legal aspects of the political recognition.

#### SOME INSIGHTS

It seems impossible, in the frame of this paper, to account for all the results achieved in many years of research. However, we can report here the main findings, showing up the strengths and weaknesses of each mode of production, and try to identify the convergences and the research areas which could be promoted.

**Table 1.** Comparison of some of the production modes

	Strenghts	Weaknesses
Organic Farming	Strict regulations, worldwide Strict certification scheme Positive Image (health / environment) Positive environmental impacts / ethical issues	Lack of subsidiarity in the implementation of the regulation Often too much focused on primary production steps Individualism Misleading health image Weak concern for rural development impact
Geographical Indications	Flexibility in the implementation of the regulation, according to the local conditions Verified links between modes of production and final quality (taste) Positive image (taste, handcraft, tradition) Handcraft's traditional know how	Heterogeneous regulations throughout the world Lack of legitimacy Heterogeneous certification schemes Lack of concern for environmental impacts, lack of environmental impact assessment
Mountain products	Very good image Strong impact on rural development	No regulation on production rules Great heterogeneity
Farmhouse products	Verified link between modes of production and final quality (taste)	No regulation on production rules

#### CONCLUSIONS

Although economic structures, markets, sometimes consumers are definitely not the same in the different quality chains, there are several areas where they could gain from a collaboration between the networks. For example, research on OF&F seems to

be more advanced regarding the *consumer's attitudes and behaviour*, the impacts of *public policies* and their potential improvements (especially the CAP), while research on GIs are more advanced regarding the *processing technologies*, their effects on the *final qualities* (sensory and nutritive aspects), on the *traceability tools* and on the impacts on *regional and rural development*.

#### REFERENCES OF SOME PROJECTS AND NETWORKS

- CORE Organic – Coordination of European Transnational Research in Organic Food and Farming, [www.coreorganic.org](http://www.coreorganic.org)
- Blight MOP - Development of a systems approach for the management of late blight in EU-organic potato production.
- CHANNEL - "Opening Channels of Communication between the Associated Candidate Countries and the EU in Ecological Farming",
- CONDOR – Consumer Decision Making on Organic Products, (<http://www.surrey.ac.uk/SHS/condor.html>).
- EISFOM - To build up a framework for reporting valid and reliable data for relevant production and market data about the European organic sector, (<http://www.eisfom.org>)
- Organic-revision - To provide recommendations for development of the EU regulation for organic agriculture.
- OMIARD - Organic Marketing Initiatives and Rural Development, ([www.irs.aber.ac.uk/omiard](http://www.irs.aber.ac.uk/omiard)).
- Organic Inputs Evaluation - European Concerted Action (CA), to harmonise and standardise procedures for evaluation of plant protection products, fertilizers and soil conditioners for use in organic agriculture. (<http://www.organicinputs.org/>).
- QLIF - Quality Low Input Food - To improve quality, food safety and reduce costs in organic and "low input" food production systems, (<http://www.qlif.org/about/about.html>).
- REPCO. Replacement of copper fungicides in organic agriculture.
- SAFO - Sustaining Animal Health and Food Safety in Organic Farming.
- SIMOCA Setting up and implementation of sustainable and multifunctional rural development model, based on organic production, ([www.simoca.org](http://www.simoca.org))
- WECOF - Strategies of Weed Control in Organic Farming Project, (<http://www.wecof.uni-bonn.de/>)
- Sus-Chain – To enhance sustainability, including consideration of the organizational structure of the food chain and interactions between different actors, ([www.rso.wur.nl/uk/Research/sus-chain](http://www.rso.wur.nl/uk/Research/sus-chain))
- PDO-PGI supply chains, markets and institutions – to assess the economic impacts of the implementation of the regulation 2081/92 on Protected Designations of Origin and Protected Geographical Indications, [www.orgin-food.org](http://www.orgin-food.org)
- DOLPHINS – Development of Origin Labelled Products, Humanity, Innovation and Sustainability, [www.orgin-food.org](http://www.orgin-food.org)
- SINER-GI – Strengthening International Research on Geographical Indications : from research foundation to consistent policy
- IPDEV - To assess the impact of IPR rules on economic growth, environmental protection and social goals through quantitative and qualitative analysis.
- Euromontana - the European multisectoral association for co-operation and development of mountain territories, [www.euromontana.org/](http://www.euromontana.org/)