

**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT – COMMISSION FOR AGRICULTURE AND RURAL
DEVELOPMENT – 25 APRIL 2006**

**PRESENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR MOUNTAIN QUALITY FOOD
PRODUCTS**

SPEECH FROM FRANK GASKELL, PRESIDENT OF EUROMONTANA

Dear Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Members of the European Parliament,

I thank you Mr President on behalf of Euromontana for the privilege of speaking to you and your colleagues at this, perhaps the most important Committee of the European Parliament from Euromontana's perspective. Thank you also personally Mr President for presiding at the formal launch of the European Charter for Mountain Quality food products here at the European Parliament in December last year.

There are several parts to the message I have to deliver which go a little beyond a simple description of our European Quality Food Product Charter. Of course I must start by giving a brief explanation of what the Euromontana network is and an account of our general activities but more importantly I must say something about the European policy climate that makes our initiative vital for the welfare of mountain communities throughout Europe. After presenting the Charter itself, I will finish by looking at the rather daunting next steps we must contemplate. Finally I would like to explore with you the possibility that your Committee might consider helping to navigate this initiative to achieve the most practical conclusion, not only for mountain economies but for the European Union economy and society generally.

What is Euromontana?

It is a European network of 58 members many themselves networks from 18 countries - covering the mountain areas of greater Europe from Norway and Sweden in the north to Italy and Greece in the south, from Scotland in the west to Georgia in the east. Perhaps its most unique and powerful feature is the number of sectors it involves. Members comprise development and environmental agencies, research institutes, farmers and foresters' organisations, and regional authorities. Its mission is to promote sustainable development and quality of life in mountain areas and to strengthen the exchange of information and experience.

But what does Euromontana do?

We act as a monitor of technical information and European policy development for our members, and undertake exchanges and other external activities with other networks, bodies and institutions. Euromontana also initiates and manages European studies and other projects of a more operational nature, frequently with the support of European funds.

Our *exchanges and external activities* include consultation with the European Commission's Directorates-General for Regional Policy and Agriculture – we are members of the DG Agri Rural Development Advisory Committee. From time to time we have given evidence to the European Economic & Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and the Council of Europe. Euromontana has observer status in the Alpine Convention. We are the European

focal point for the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organisation's SARD-M Programme, (Sustainable Agriculture and Rural Development in the Mountains), an international initiative generated by the World Mountain Convention in Johannesburg.

Euromontana recognises the priority currently being placed on the delivery of the Lisbon Agenda which permeates all discussions on future European policy. We worry, however, that the inevitable tendency towards growth pole and centripetal development – the concentration of development within Member States and within the European Union itself – can only be detrimental to the survival of viable mountain communities. In response we know that we must promote the opportunities mountain areas can grasp - and the contribution they can make to growth – by the appropriate use of ICT and access to a universal level of services of general interest.

However, the foundation of any European mountain policy must be the retention of active land management. Certainly to be successful the foundation of any European Mountain policy must be the retention of *productive* agriculture and forestry.

Just reward for multifunctionality must be the second element so that the wider European society can pay our farmers and foresters for all they produce including environmental diversity, tourist attraction, security from natural disasters and preservation of abundant sources of pure water.

In November last year we convened a symposium of the leading international agricultural and rural development experts involved in this field, The findings of that exercise clearly confirmed the central role of mountains and remoter rural areas in the production of public goods of critical value to the economic, social and environmental welfare of Europe. The findings have been positively received by the European Commission. Perhaps Euromontana might have an opportunity to present these important conclusions at some future meeting of your committee.

Quality must be the next component of any practical mountain policy where we can earn more prosperity through producing higher value goods sold on our mountain image of purity and authenticity.

It is difficult to identify any comparative advantage that mountains have enjoyed over the centuries besides the security offered by their harsh inhospitable conditions. With the advent of the global economy, however, there is the prospect of a real substantive exploitable comparative advantage emerging.

Mountain areas represent perhaps the primary of Europe's last reservoirs of diversity. Diversity of nature, landscape, cultures, crafts and local distinctive produce.

Globalisation means that world production is increasingly homogenised. Distinctive products, therefore, command premium prices, if only they can be delivered to the market. . Europe as an entity has to address this threat and seize the opportunities it generates. .At last there is a chance for mountain regions to make a real contribution to the competitiveness of Europe itself. This is not the time to let the most distinctive and varied elements of European vitality wither and vanish.

It is to address this opportunity that we have worked since 1999, initially with DG Agriculture funding and latterly with DG Research and Development funding firstly to confirm the reality of that opportunity and then to devise a framework within which it can be delivered.

The new CAP orientation is clearly focussing on market driven strategies. We welcome this. Although mountain professionals could be apprehensive because of their less competitive

farming and food processing activities due to pedoclimatic conditions and isolation from market place, we are confident that they can also benefit from this orientation. They can promote and add value to their authentic products using the real advantage that their mountain 'cachet' provides. But for the moment this market opportunity cannot be addressed, no definition or, when existing, no coherent definition, of mountain products exists despite evidence of a strong interest from the consumers provoked by the special promise they recognise each time the word 'mountain' is used on food products.

At last, farming and food processing activities in mountain areas can play a crucial role in those fragile areas in providing economic and social development and in the preservation of mountain heritage whether it be environment, landscape, culture, built heritage, or languages.

The Charter has two Objectives:

an Economic development objective – to better identify the products on the market in order to avoid counterfeits that would be detrimental to producers and consumers in the use of the term

and a Policy objective: to secure recognition and promotion, on an objective basis, of the role of farmers and enterprises that produce (benefits for society) in the mountain areas in Europe and thus to defend their interests – which are vital to the interests of the broader mountain communities.

To deliver these two objectives the Charter proposes five principles with which a mountain quality product must comply. These five principles comprise the core of the charter and indeed the core of this presentation.

Firstly a Mountain product must be manufactured using primary materials produced exclusively in a mountain area defined by the Member States and validated where necessary by the European Commission (e.g. mountain areas identified by Member States within the framework of the regulation CE 1257/99 or mountain areas to be identified by Member States for regional European policy post-2006). Of course an exception must be made in respect of primary materials which, for natural reasons, cannot technically be produced in mountain areas. Animal production in mountain areas must always demonstrate a link with the mountain territory.

Secondly all stages in the processing of a mountain product must take place in a mountain area. This is because it is clear that, to have the intended optimal impact, value added must be retained in the mountain area.

Thirdly enterprises and farms which process primary agricultural resources in order to manufacture mountain products must be adapted to their geographical environment.. The production methods used must respect the environment and in particular the water quality present in the territory in question and integrate erosion risks.

Fourthly, the production and processing structures for mountain food products must encourage in their activity the maintenance of biological, genetic and cultural heritage of mountain areas, the development of the local knowledge-base of mountain areas and the management of rural areas and landscapes.

Fifthly and finally enterprises and farms which produce and/or process primary agricultural materials for mountain products must be able to ensure tracability,

Although the Charter is promoted predominantly in the context of the opportunities that globalisation is increasingly presenting, the emphatic intention is that the Charter should enable the mountain product to be commercialised at local, regional, national levels and as well as on a European-wide scale

And what after the signing of the Charter?

Although Euromontana is clear about the aims of this exercise, we are very conscious that we have yet to refine the details of how the principles of the Charter can be implemented practically at the European scale. This question is crucial and Euromontana wishes to take the time and resources needed to design this tool and to adapt it to the needs and reality of mountain actors in the field. We are also aware that we cannot afford to fail and tarnish the precious cachet of the word 'mountain' by any mismanagement of this important initiative.

Therefore, our mission must be to set-up an initiative that ensures the development of mountain food products by providing them with a better identification on the European market.

This tool implies:

- the delivery by mountain products of the 5 principles of the Charter, - in a cost effective way
- that producers should be able to promote the products across Europe by developing their own marketing strategies based on a common, clear and coherent message to consumers including territorial development
- the achievement of a common identification symbol that we want to be the protection of the word 'mountain' to avoid consumers being misled..

The basis for our tool would be to secure a European 'mountain' designation including the protection of the word. It would be owned the EU and national implementation could be incorporated, at least for the identification of mountain areas.

What is missing at present?

Two things:

First, a consumer/ retailers study. There is a lack of intelligence at European level on consumer expectations and on what is their perception of the promise made each time the word 'mountain' is used on a product. We have been working with DG Agriculture services to support a specific line in the last Framework 6 call in respect of Scientific Support to Policy and we have submitted a proposal.

The Charter has now to be translated into practical terms including specifications with a cost effective concept of the controlled supply chain. A proposal has also been submitted recently on this issue.

The second missing item is support at European and national levels to implement this 'mountain' designation approach and to ensure that it is taken into account at the highest appropriate political level.

Therefore, we would like to discuss this initiative with you and to explore the opportunity there might be to develop an 'avis d'initiative' at the European Parliament.

Thank you for your attention Mr President. I hope that this presentation has been sufficient for your Committee's purposes and, of course, I and my colleague are available to answer any questions.