

**Minutes of the Advisory Group on Quality of agricultural products  
Brussels, 6 July 2009**

President Dr. Nienhoff welcomed participants and noted that he will preside the meeting until election of the new President of the Advisory Group.

All socio-economic groups emphasised their appreciation for the work done by Dr. Nienhoff during his two terms of Presidency.

**1. Approval of the agenda and the minutes of the meeting held on 25 February 2009, drafted by the President.**

The minutes were adopted with the amendments made by ORIGIN and CELCAA.

**2. Election of the President and Vice-Presidents for the term 2009-2011.**

The candidates were the following:

- for the post of President: Dr. **J.W. RIEKE** (DE) from CELCAA
- for the 2 posts of Vice-President: (in alphabetical order)
  - Mr **G. BENVENUTI** (IT) from COPA-COGECA
  - Mr **J.L. BRETON** (ES) from CIAA

Ms **A. SLABE** (DK) from IFOAM EU GROUP withdrew her candidature before the start of the meeting.

Each candidate presented himself shortly, the election took place. All candidates were elected with one abstention by ECVC (European Coordination Via Campesina) for all candidates.

Dr. Rieke took over the chair of the meeting and thanked the members of the Advisory Group for their confidence. He looks forward to a constructive cooperation with all participants of the Group and highlights the advisory function of the Group. Concerning the strategic agenda 2009-2011 of the Advisory Group he noted that the elements of the Communication of the Agricultural Product Quality Policy would provide a good frame for the work of the Advisory Group.

**3. Communication on agricultural product quality policy of 28 May 2009 (COM/2009/234).**

COM introduced the subject by a power point presentation noting the amount of work done in a very short lap of time: Green Paper in October 2008, the Conclusions of the consultation and the High Level Conference in March 2009, Communication in May 2009. The consultation on further work can be done in a more relaxed way. Not everything needs to be legislated according to suggestions made in the communication. For those areas where legislation is needed the work will begin next year. Legal proposals might be forwarded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 2010. Possible impact assessments will take ± 1 year. More precise information on timing might be available at the next meeting.

COPA/COGECA noted that coherence with the legal proposal on food information to consumers should be observed.

The President referred to the Council Conclusions taken on 22/23 June and structured the further exchange of views under three categories:

- Farming requirements and marketing standards
- Quality schemes
- Certification systems

➤ **Farming requirements and marketing standards**

Several representatives of COPA/COGECA noted their reservations concerning the proposal to establish **marketing standards by CEN**. Standard writing procedures at CEN are cumbersome, long lasting and are not considered to be efficient. Further considerations related to the appropriateness of CEN standards for agricultural production should be made. Such standards would result in additional certification requirements for farmers and result in higher production costs.

ECVC shared these observations noting that CEN has no experience in the area of agricultural production.

EUROMONTANA welcomed the Commission intention to consider the establishment of an optional reserved term “product of mountain farming”, but expressed its reservations on using CEN for marketing standards on reserved terms.

CELCAA noted that preference should be given to existing **international marketing standards** like those established by the CODEX ALIMENTARIUS, which have also been adopted by the Commission and Member States. CELCAA also referred in this context to Art. 5 Paragraph 3 of Regulation 178/2002.

COM observed that the Communication contains no definitive commitment to use CEN for the setting of marketing standards for agricultural production. Possibilities are still investigated. The issues of costs and the procedural aspects remain to be studied in-depth. Concerning the use of international standards COM will continue to refer to them and will continue to contribute actively to their elaboration.

A long and controversial exchange of views on the **mandatory indication of the place of farming** took place.

Some delegates of COPA/COGECA emphasised the importance of national place of farming labelling for agricultural and food products. The main competitive argument in favour of European agriculture would be to produce quality. As all European agricultural products are quality products in view of EU regulations and Good Agricultural Practice, the only way to differentiate them would be the place of farming. Consumers should have the right to know where the agricultural products have been produced. This would also constitute a guarantee for higher quality. They pointed to additional market opportunities linked to place of farming labelling. Reference was made to marketing success of olive oil produced 100% from olives grown in Italy.

Other delegates of COPA/COGECA noted that diversity of agriculture production should be given a chance but it should simultaneously be looked at practicability and costs of place of farming labelling. For a set of products it would be easy to apply, would address the lack of clarity for certain products and would satisfy requests from consumers to have this information.

A pragmatic approach should be followed case-by-case. It might be considered for unprocessed products and food of animal origin. It was noted that no mandatory place of farming labelling exists for pig meat. It was highlighted that a European approach is favoured as member states are in the process of establishing national legislation on place of farming labelling.

CELCAA emphasised its strong reservations on mandatory place of farming labelling for bulk products and all dairy products. Agricultural traders highlight the costs involved in the separation of the product flows by origin as dedicated transport and storage facilities would be needed. The proportion of raw cereals, oilseeds and pulses directly consumed by humans is negligible and small for raw milk. Furthermore, agricultural traders question the interest for consumers of having the information on the place of farming of cereals used in bread or beer, or of the milk used in butter, cheese and yoghurt. Cases, where such information might be of interest for consumers, could be included into the PDO/PGI scheme. Mandatory place of origin labelling would increase costs for all raw products and, consequently, increase consumer prices for all food products. CELCAA referred to the discussions on high prices for food and competitiveness of the European agro-food sector. Furthermore, agricultural and agri-food traders expressed their concerns that mandatory indication of the place of production of primary products would endanger the concept of the single market and free circulation of goods as it would lead to increased protectionism within Member States of the EU. Consequently, CELCAA prefers voluntary place of farming labelling in order to use possible market opportunities resulting from such product differentiation.

The International Butchers' Confederation noted that the practicability of place of origin labelling should be taken into account and questioned whether place of farming is a quality trait per se. The transposition of mandatory place of farming labelling for all products and resulting costs should be taken into account.

The retailers' representative (EuroCommerce) noted that an approach by product category should be followed. It should be limited to agricultural raw products of animal origin.

CIAA highlighted the difficulties of mandatory place of origin farming labelling for processed products like sugar and composite food products. A rational approach needs to be followed before adding new rules and new costs for the highly regulated food sector.

COM noted on mandatory place of farming labelling that the option envisaged may be "EU – non EU" labelling. Such labelling would be considered only for Annex I products. Furthermore, it will be looked at on a case-by-case basis whether the place of farming labelling has an added value for consumers and does not lead to compartmentalisation of the Single Market. In each case the feasibility of such labelling will be evaluated. Before any proposal is finalised, interested parties will be consulted. Answering to a question whether COM changed its view on place of farming labelling in the context of the proposal on food information to consumers, COM noted that the rules are still discussed at the European Parliament and that COM awaits their opinion.

Concerning additional **information on the general basic standard** COM noted that it would be important to simplify and harmonise a set of definitions. This would help the consumer in understanding. Such general rules would not necessarily cover all products.

### ➤ **Quality schemes**

#### **a) Geographical indications:**

The President gave an overview of the measures that will be further taken into consideration by the Commission: Simplification by bringing together the systems for wines, spirits and agricultural products in one regulation or by merging the two instruments PDO & PGI. Furthermore, clarification of generic terms and the scope of protection, development of guidelines, better recognition of the EU-geographical indications system at international level as well as reduction of administrative burdens.

The following aspects have been raised by the stakeholders:

- The issue of production management is considered as strategic for the future of GIs by the producers of PDO and PGI. The Commission should make concrete proposals on this point. (ORIGIN)
- Merging the three systems was considered as positive under the condition that the specificities of each system can be preserved.
- Given the high number of PDOs/PGIs in the EU, a simplification of these instruments requires an impact assessment. (COPA/COGECA)
- The use of different colours for the two Community symbols was introduced in 2008. Therefore, a simplification of the PDO/PGI system does not seem appropriate because another change could be confusing for producers and consumers. The Commission's proposal to develop guidelines on the use of GIs as ingredients in processed products is considered as positive. (ORIGIN)
- It should be further explained how the merging of the systems can be implemented in practice and reasons should be given for a simplification; furthermore, COM should clarify what is meant by the two levels of protection (nat./local level and int. level).(COPA/COGECA)
- The PDO/PGI schemes should be self-explanatory. That is the most important criterion that should be taken into consideration. Consumers must understand what is behind the scheme(s). (COPA/COGECA)
- Regarding the international aspect of the geographical indications, the cooperation between COM and the producers should be improved. The Commission should function as a tie between Member States and producers. (ORIGIN)

On impact assessment, COM reminded that an impact assessment in the field of PGOs/PGIs had already been done in preparation of the Communication and that was also available on the website of the Commission. Regarding the necessity of merging the existing PDO/PGI schemes, COM replied that one single scheme could facilitate the communication to the consumers but the advantages and disadvantages of such an option would be carefully considered in another impact assessment. COM explained the origin of the two schemes, reminding that the concept of geographical indications was a concept used and understood by third countries. Impact assessments will be carried out before any legislative proposal.

On the international aspect of the geographical indications scheme, COM referred to the fact that orientations are outlined in the Commission Communication.

### **b) Traditional specialties guaranteed (TSG)**

The President gave a short introduction of the scheme: traditional specialties are defined in reg. 509/2006; since 1992, 20 products have been registered. Given the low take-up, the Commission proposed to abolish reg. 509/2006 and to include the term “traditional” as a reserved term to be defined within marketing standards. During the quality conference in Prague, stakeholders have nevertheless expressed their support for the scheme. In the Council conclusions on the Commission communication of June 2009, the “important role” of the TSG scheme has also been noted.

Stakeholders mentioned the following aspects:

- The costs of the current system were already high. The introduction of specific optional reserved terms for “traditional products” would also be accompanied by high costs.
- The proposition to define “products of mountain farming” was considered as positive.

COM explained that the actual number of registered names amounts to 22. Given the low take up of the scheme, there should be better ways to recognize them.

### **c) Organic farming**

The President explained that the organic legislation was revised in 2007. The creation of a new organic logo is now underway that will be introduced in July 2010. The EU also makes efforts to reach recognition of mutual standards with third countries.

The most important aspects mentioned were the following:

- The main problem is that consumers want to know the origin of the products and prefer therefore regional or local products. This problem cannot be solved by an EU/non-EU organic logo. (IFOAM EU REGIONAL GROUP)
- It is important to harmonise the enforcement of the organic regulations. In some MS (like France), it is obligatory to certify the distribution activity of organic products. This creates an obstacle when it comes to the trade in organic products between the Member States; the creation of an EU organic logo contributes to further harmonisation but only if the logo is easily identifiable by consumers. (EUROCOMMERCE)

COM referred to the lack of mutual acceptance between private and regional labelling schemes and organic logos. This problem needs to be addressed. According to the Commission, the aspect of reasonable communication to the consumers should be taken into consideration in all the work on quality.

➤ **Certification systems**

The President explained that the Commission intends to develop guidelines and not a regulation on food certification schemes. The aim of these guidelines is to prevent the misleading of consumers and to reduce administrative burdens for farmers.

Stakeholders made the following remarks:

- Regarding the extension of the Ecolabel to food and feed, a common EU-wide scientifically reliable methodology should be developed to assess environmental performance. Furthermore, the communication of environmental performance to consumers should be developed in an appropriate way. CELCAA referred in this context to the Food Sustainable Consumption and Production Round Table co-chaired by the Commission and by the associations representing the different constituencies in the food chain. The next meeting of the Round Table will take place on 7 July 2009. It is important to take into consideration international aspects. The Commission should exploit all communication possibilities in the agricultural sector and invest more to inform about the EU agricultural policy within the Community and to third countries.
- The Commission's intention to develop a framework for animal welfare labelling should be clarified given that the existing regulations already cover the aspects of production, transport and slaughter.
- The development of further EU schemes could confuse the consumer who is not even well informed about organic products. Labelling options in the field of environment are only beneficial if they are precise and are not based on approximate figures that can mislead the consumer. (IFOAM EU REGIONAL GROUP)
- In the Commission Communication, the reasons for developing these guidelines are not precise. Aspects like readability and credibility should be taken into account while drafting the guidelines. (COPA)
- The term "certification system" has not yet been defined.

On coherence, COM stated that the Ecolabel was not the best example in the context of coherence. On the question of animal welfare labelling, COM replied that the development of the framework is still underway and will be finished by the end of 2009. Concerning the purpose of private certification schemes, COM indicated that good practices should be highlighted in those schemes. An inventory of good practices will probably be available mid-October 2010. The Communication will include a differentiation between certification schemes and logos.

#### **4. Agreement EU/CH on Geographical Indications.**

The Commission reported about the current state of play concerning the bilateral negotiations with Switzerland. In this context COM also referred to negotiations with other countries including geographical indications, namely South Korea, Georgia and Ukraine. Negotiations with further countries (Central America, India, etc) are also foreseen in the near future. Concerning Switzerland the text resulting from these negotiations includes the following elements: a level of protection according to reg. 510/2006, the list of denominations to be protected and a clarification of the relation between trade marks and geographical indications.

The draft text has already been circulated to the Member States. It is expected that all respective GIs should be protected, after examination and an objection procedure, except for emmental. Switzerland is therefore not ready to include in the list of protected designations the EC emmental GIs: "Allgäuer Emmentaler", "Emmental de Savoie" and "Emmental français est-central".

The President asked if an agreement could be reached on "Feta" and "Gruyère". COM replied that "Gruyère" is a particular case given that both France and Switzerland demand individually to register "Gruyère" as a PDO under Regulation 510/2006. Given that procedures are underway, COM could not deliver further information. In parallel, negotiations on the designation "Gruyère" take place in the context of the bilateral agreement with Switzerland. "Feta" should be part of the Agreement like other EU GIs.

#### **5. Application of France and Switzerland to register "Gruyère" as protected denomination.**

The Commission said that, due to ongoing procedures, no further comments can be made at this stage (see above).

#### **6. A.O.B.**

The Commission informed participants that they plan to convene an Enlarged Advisory Group under the heading of Common Agricultural Policy on the subject of agricultural product quality policy on 9 October 2009. Commissioner Fischer Boel is invited to attend the meeting and the Commission services are still waiting for the confirmation.

ORIGIN reported about its fourth General Assembly that took place in June 2009 gathering GI producers and experts from 40 countries.

At the end of the meeting the Commission distributed a Working Document for discussion on different aspects of the agricultural product quality policy and noted that they would welcome written comments by the stakeholders.

Dr. Rieke closed the meeting.

**Documents distributed:**

- Commission Communication on the Agricultural Product Quality Policy
- Presentation on the Communication made by the Commission
- Working document on different aspects of agricultural product quality policy for discussion
- Press Release from ORIGIN paper
- Comments on the Communication on Agricultural Product Quality Policy from CELCAA

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