

Logos, labels, quality...

a guide to the finer points of the schemes

TOP-Value project

Added value of the mountain product

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European Regional Development Fund



TOPVALUE
Mezzanet von Bergbauerngruppen
I vobro oggintad el Produtto di Montagna

WHAT IS QUALITY?

In its broadest sense, quality expresses the level to which something satisfies the expectations of the buyer and, at the same time, the ability of a producer to meet said expectations. Put like this, it is a concept that takes on different meanings depending on the observer's standpoint and depending on the context in question.

It is not always easy to put a definition on "quality": the meaning of the term has been augmented over time with the addition of a stream of ever-new content.

While the term quality once came down to the subjective dichotomy of "good"/"not good", more recently the concept of quality has taken on an increasingly specific connotation. So what happened? Starting in the '90s, as the globalization phenomenon began to take hold, various factors came into play resulting in a flattened food consumption landscape shaped by just a few mass trends. It was in this context that certain producers began to set themselves apart from the masses by catering to the demands of an increasing number of consumers attuned to the nutritional meaning and healthiness of food and, at the same time, steered by a green conscious. Thus they gave their ranges a point of difference and began to focus on the product's hitherto overlooked aspects, such as: the connection with its place of origin and tradition, authenticity and respect for the environment in the production process, and the ability to generate ecosystem services.

With discerning consumers growing in number and producers and engineers channelling their efforts accordingly, the concept of quality is continually evolving, as are the standards intended to govern it.

Quality doesn't happen by accident, it needs to be guaranteed: product certification in the agri-food industry and EU labels

For product quality to be guaranteed, it must be measurable in terms of verifiable concrete requirements based on a set of rules - whether national or supranational (European) - ensuring its unilateral assessment. This, in a nutshell, is the meaning of product certification.

In the agri-food industry, product certification is voluntary: it is the actual producer who, by opting to become part of a certified supply chain, commits unconditionally to an ongoing programme of self-inspection of their business on top of the controls carried out by the relevant authorities.

Product certification provides a guarantee that an authorized control body - by definition impartial and independent - has determined that the producer is complying with specific rules and only on passing the body's inspection is the producer entitled to put the product on the market with that name.

The European quality labels and logos (PDO, PGI, TSG, Organic) are an important consumer-targeted communication tool as they are designed to provide them with a concise visual indication of the product's attributes, such as origin, distinctive characteristics, food safety, production methods, sourcing of suppliers and/or raw materials.

The quality labels placed on wrapping or packaging attest to the product's certification and should be taken to mean: "it delivers what it promises".

European indications of origin and quality terms: PDO, PGI, TSG labelling

With a view to protecting/supporting its top-quality foodstuffs and agricultural products in the global market, back in 1992 the European Union established three labels - PDO, PGI and TSG - to protect, above all, those traditional products with quality attributes closely linked to the areas they come from in terms of the origin of raw materials and historically established production practices.

Twenty years on and EU Regulation no. 1151/2012 - the standard currently in effect - replaced and improved on EC Regulation no. 2081/1992, highlighting the need for effective legislative instruments for the identification and origin traceability of fine foodstuffs and agricultural products.

Applications to have a product recognized as qualifying for one of the labels under the scheme are always submitted by a group of organized producers who - convinced that the value of their product transcends the commercial, and is instead representative of a defined area, of a local skill set or of a specific community - choose to go down the certification path to add legitimacy to it and, at the same time, protect it against imitations.

The document submitted with the application to the European Union for registration of the protected name is the product specification, which must contain a definition of the geographical area of origin, historical research substantiating the link between the product and defined area, a detailed description of the product and methods of obtaining the product that must be adhered to.

Once approved, the specification - a sort of product passport - becomes "law" for all intents and purposes. From that moment on, the product name and the label it has been awarded become a single entity and can be used only by those producers who agree to submit to inspection by the controlling authorities.



The acronym **PDO**

(Protected Designation of Origin) identifies a product as originating in a region or a town whose particular features and characteristics are essentially due to the geographical area or unique to it. All production, processing and preparation involved in making the product must take place in the area defined by the relevant specification.



The acronym **PGI**

The acronym PGI (Protected Geographical Indication) identifies a product as originating in a region or a town whose qualities, reputation and features are attributable to that geographical area and at least one of whose production and/or processing and/or preparation steps must take place in the defined area.



The acronym **TSG**

The acronym TSG (Traditional Specialities Guaranteed) identifies a product made from traditionally used ingredients or to a traditional production method. This certification scheme can be applied to foodstuffs and agricultural products that have a "specific character" linked to the method of obtaining the product or to its composition or to the tradition of a geographical area, but that may not necessarily be produced in a defined area of origin.

For more information on PDO and PGI certified products from the Friuli-Venezia Giulia, Veneto and Carinthia regions, check out the web pages:

Friuli-Venezia Giulia

www.ersa.fvg.it/divulgativa/i-prodotti-dop-e-IGP-del-friuli-venezia-giulia



Veneto

<http://www.regione.veneto.it/web/agricoltura-e-foreste/disciplinari-dop-IGP-STG>



Carinthia

<http://www.svggh.at/geschuetzte-produkte-aus-oesterreich/>



Mountain product

A new term introduced by EU Regulation no. 1151/2012 is the optional term "Mountain product", which labels foodstuffs and agricultural products made in mountain areas to set them apart from other offerings and is a tool used to build up their visibility and reputation. The fact that they come from mountain areas represents both an added value for these products, in terms of authenticity and environmental sustainability, and a limitation due to the greater costs incurred by producers working in often penalized areas that can be a somewhat hostile place to live. The term "Mountain product", therefore, is aimed at individuals who are discerning in their purchases, taking into account the environment in which the product has been made and wanting their custom to also serve to support the forms of production they deem most deserving. The term "Mountain product" may be placed on the label of products of animal and/or plant origin where the whole production process meets the following conditions (EU Regulation no. 665/2014):

- products of plant origin are grown in the mountains;
- milk and eggs come from animals that are reared in the mountains;
- meat is obtained from animals that are reared for at least two thirds of their life in the mountains. Transhumant livestock are reared for at least one quarter of their life in the mountains, herded between mountain pastures;
- the animals' annual diet consists of feedstuffs produced in the mountains (ruminants: at least 60%; pigs: at least 25%; other animals: at least 50%);
- bees collect nectar and pollen only in the mountains;
- milk processing, animal slaughtering and pressing of olives, by way of derogation from the provisions, may take place in facilities outside the mountains provided that they are located within 30 km of the administrative boundary of the mountain areas. In Italy, milk processing may even take place in facilities located within 10 km of the administrative boundary of the mountain area (Italian decree D.M. 57167 dated 26/07/2017).



**Italian Mountain
product logo**
D.M. dated 02/08/2018

Organic product

Organic agricultural products are distinct from those produced by conventional farming as the farming methods involved refrain from using fertilizers, pesticides, antibiotics or any other substance obtained by chemical synthesis that does not respect the natural biological cycles of the plants and animals.

Organic farming espouses a production philosophy that revolves around environmental protection and supports a development model based on the ability of the natural resources employed during the course of the production cycle to self-regenerate, with a special focus on soil fertility.

When it comes to rearing animals, the organic method entails adhering to practices geared towards improving animal welfare, saying no to any kind of forced feeding or overcrowding in the facilities where the animals are reared, instead encouraging animals to roam freely in relevant open spaces.

Producers who choose to adopt organic farming principles and who want to use the EU logo submit to a voluntary assessment by the control authority who, once they have verified that the requirements of EC Regulation no. 834/07 have been met, approve their registration as organic producers.

As far as processed foodstuffs are concerned (e.g. preserves, baked goods, dairy produce), the regulations call for products to be made from organically grown and/or reared ingredients and made without using genetically modified organisms (GMOs).



European Organic logo

When featured on the label, the origin of the raw materials must also be stated.

Other national quality systems

ITALY

National quality integrated production system: SQNPI

The Italian label SQNPI (National quality integrated production system) is applied to identify foodstuffs and agricultural products made according to the principles of integrated production. According to the relevant regulations, the term “integrated production” is defined as an agri-food production system that uses all production and crop protection measures aimed at minimizing the use of synthetic chemicals and rationalizing the use of fertilizers, in compliance with ecological, economic and toxicological principles. This is a nationally applied certification established with Italian Law no. 4 dated 3 February 2011. In health and hygiene and environmental sustainability terms, it guarantees a higher level of quality than current commercial standards with reference to both the production process and end product. National guidelines dictate the general rules for low environmental impact farming at every agronomic stage of the production cycle, from preparing the ground for sowing right through to harvesting the crops. The guidelines are adopted at a regional level in the respective integrated production regulations. Certification (which is voluntary) can be granted to any farm or processing or distribution business officially adhering to the scheme.



SQNPI

(National quality integrated production system). Label identifying foodstuffs and agricultural products obtained using agronomic practices and methods with a low environmental impact.

AUSTRIA

AMA Gütesiegel

AMA Gütesiegel is a quality seal recognized by the authorities that is assigned by AMA-Marketing to identify products intended for human consumption only. It serves to allow consumers to make an informed choice when purchasing foodstuffs and attests to their high quality, proof of origin and independent monitoring.

The label can be applied to any foodstuff where specific guidelines are in place, and provided the products comply with the provisions and meet the quality requirements set out in the guidelines approved by the Bundesministerium für Nachhaltigkeit und Tourismus (Austrian federal ministry for sustainability and tourism).

In the guidelines regarding the quality seal, AMA-Marketing sets out the standards to be met for the product to qualify for use of the protected name AMA Gütesiegel, which must include giving information regarding its origin. To be entitled to use the label, the producer must comply with the quality seal's specific guidelines and enter into a licence agreement with AMA-Marketing.

The country's national colours (e.g. red-white-red for Austria, blue for the EU) and the wording inside the label's inner circle - e.g. "Austria" - indicate the area of origin of the raw materials.

AMA Gütesiegel is the distinctive symbol showing that the producer adheres to this voluntary quality scheme that, based on the product's sector and risk, determines and systematically monitors criteria across various levels through specific quality seal guidelines for each stage of production and marketing.

The strategy behind the AMA Gütesiegel seal and its guidelines is based on the following three cornerstones: high quality, proof of origin and independent monitoring.



AMA Biosiegel

As of 1 July 2010, pre-packaged foodstuffs produced in the EU according to the relevant versions of (EC) regulations no. 834/2007 and no. 889/2008, must bear the EU organic logo on their packaging. In addition, organic foodstuffs that meet the requirements of the Österreichisches Lebensmittelbuch (Austrian food standard) and AMA Biosiegel labelling guidelines approved by the Bundesministerium für Nachhaltigkeit und Tourismus can carry the AMA Biosiegel seal.

AMA Biosiegel is a quality seal recognized by the authorities that is assigned by AMA-Marketing to identify organic products intended for human consumption only. It serves to allow consumers to make an informed choice when purchasing organic foodstuffs and attests to their high organic quality, proof of origin and independent monitoring. The colours red and white are used to symbolize the Austrian origin of the organically farmed raw materials. If the seal is black, the origin of the organic raw materials is not limited to one specific region.

In the guidelines regarding the AMA Biosiegel seal, AMA-Marketing sets out the standards to be met for the product to qualify for use of the protected seal AMA Biosiegel, with or without the origin being stated. To be entitled to use the organic product seal, the producer must enter into a licence agreement with AMA-Marketing and comply with the AMA Biosiegel seal's guidelines.

The strategy behind the AMA Biosiegel seal and its guidelines is based on the following four cornerstones: 100% organically farmed raw materials, high quality, proof of origin and independent monitoring.



Gutes vom Bauernhof

“Gutes vom Bauernhof” is a quality label established by the Landwirtschaftskammer Österreich (Austrian Chamber of Agriculture) awarded only to farms. The individual farms are assessed to see whether they qualify for the “Gutes vom Bauernhof” label. The assessment criteria are stricter than the legal requirements. The farm is assessed with a points system based on six criteria and must achieve a minimum score both in total and for each individual criterion.

Farm assessment:

- own raw materials
- qualification and training
- marketing and sales
- production quality



Processing assessment:

- in-house processing
- product quality

The farm is always assessed against general requirements. The processing assessment is carried out only where the farm produces processed products.

For each Austrian state, there is a body, nominated by the Landwirtschaftskammer Österreich (Austrian Chamber of Agriculture), handling registration and the initial assessment/consultation, organizing the initial control and spot checks by an independent inspection firm, handling contracts, issuing the statement of guarantee, awarding the label, entering data, and providing “Gutes vom Bauernhof” farms with ongoing training and assistance.

Regional collective labels

Regional quality systems and collective labels have been established with a view to supporting and providing greater visibility for local produce (such as milk, meat, fish, fruit and vegetables) that, by their nature, do not qualify as characteristic local foodstuffs and agricultural products unique to one specific defined area. The classes of produce in question are coming under greater scrutiny from a market that is increasingly discerning when it comes to quality and seeking reassurances on the health and hygiene front. Regional collective labels, therefore, identify a diversified range of products that meet the quality standards defined by their respective regional regulations. They generally identify products within a short-range supply chain that can support easily recognizable local economies and social communities that are all within easy reach inside the relevant area.



The QV Label

(Verified quality) was set up by the **Veneto regional government (IT)** for fresh vegetables, ready-to-eat pre-packaged fruit and vegetables, fresh fruit, cultivated mushrooms, ornamental flowers and animal feedstuffs.



The AQUA Label

(Agriculture, quality, environment) was set up by the **Friuli-Venezia Giulia regional government (IT)** for the following supply chains: pork, unpasteurized cow's milk and derivatives, rainbow trout and char, Manila clams and mussels, white asparagus, potatoes, apples, honey, and processed foodstuffs.



GENUSSLAND KÄRNTEN

was set up by the regional government of Carinthia (**Kärnten - AT**) for producers who have a recognized quality assurance system (EU origin labels, Bio Austria, AMA Gütesiegel, Gutes vom Bauernhof, IFS) and who meet the Genussland Kärnten origin criteria.

Traditional Italian foodstuffs and agricultural products - PAT

In 1548, years ahead of his time and our modern food tourism, the Milanese humanist Ortensio Lando in his catalogue of the good, the bad and the ugly of food and wine "Commentario delle più notabili e mostruose cose d'Italia e d'altri luoghi" told the story of a traveller who sets out to learn about various parts of Italy (long before its Unification) following a map that would take him on a journey of discovery through the country's major cities and, more specifically, their food specialities.

While a parody of a certain genre of literature of the time, Ortensio's work is to be commended for highlighting how cuisine and local food specialities are an essential ingredient of the culture of any region and of the process of getting to know that region.

Based on this premise, the list of PATs was compiled to acknowledge those products that are an expression of the traditions and culture of the Italian regions but do not enjoy the protection afforded by the PDO, PGI and TSG labels.

The essential requirement to quality for inclusion on the PAT list is proof that the associated recipes, traditions and food memories have been handed down over at least 25 years. In addition, it must be shown that the processing, aging and storage methods are well established and uniform across the whole area identified as the production area. PATs are governed by Italian decree (D.M. no. 350/99), which also calls for the list to be updated at regular intervals.



In the popular imagination, the mountains, with their scenery and customs, evoke values linked to tradition and to a healthy way of life. Products made here are the words through which these lands tell their story.

The TOP-Value project was initiated with a view to encouraging producers in mountain areas to embrace the optional quality term “Mountain product” and thus make the most of the opportunity to create a point of difference based on the setting in which they operate. On the one hand, TOP-Value aims to highlight the value of the optional quality term “Mountain product” and, on the other, allow the term to reclaim its rightful reputation in the marketplace. To achieve this aim, a series of research and dissemination actions have been designed to determine and share data and information regarding the so-called “ecosystem services” provided by the mountain farms the product comes from. They include protecting biodiversity, promoting the scenery’s attributes, focusing on animal welfare, and helping production processes retain their environmental sustainability balance. Identifying and measuring said services is a way not just of adding value to mountain products but, by acknowledging their environmental and social worth, of meeting consumer expectations, too. Product communication that is enhanced with more in-depth technical and scientific information helps make the product a key factor in keeping the traditions and appeal of mountain areas alive.

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