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## **How geographic indications can represent sustainable landscape management: Insights from stakeholders of extensive animal systems**

The European Green Deal, including the 'Farm to Fork' strategy, has opened the possibility of integrating sustainability standards into product specifications of geographic indications (GI). Although, many producers claim an inherent sustainability of their production, until April 2024 there was no option to include mandatory sustainability standards into product specifications. To support the upcoming process of sustainability implementation, we carried out interviews in five case study areas in which 'protected designation of origin' (PDO) products stem from extensive animal husbandry systems. We investigated characteristics of sustainable landscape management practices in context of PDO production, and identified conditions under which stakeholders of PDO production can leverage sustainability potentials of their systems.

### **Sustainable landscape management through PDOs**

From the interviews it became clear that local stakeholders in general, and specifically producers, perceive themselves as guardians of cultural landscapes. They are entrusted with maintaining production systems which contribute to several objectives of sustainable landscape management at once, such as biodiversity conservation, upkeep of cultural values, and maintenance of aesthetically beautiful landscapes. Those benefits were clearly attributed to traditional and less-intensive management practices, which are supported through the GI labelling scheme. Management practices that come along with low-input grassland management or grazing lead to mosaic-like landscapes. Being rich in structure and aesthetically valuable, those multifunctional landscapes allow stakeholders to combine social-ecological conservation and economic diversification at the same time by simultaneously offering room for domesticated animals, wildlife, and tourism. Although extensive landscape management practices are the reason for the inherent sustainability, there is the looming risk of over-intensification for increased production.

### **Favourable conditions to transform PDO production into sustainable systems**

We found two important governance options that can support sustainability ambitions in GI producing landscape systems. Regarding actual landscape management, stakeholders called for a redistribution of GAP money towards landscape management practices which are less productivity-oriented but target at improving common goods instead. In regions where contractual nature conservation plays an important role for generating income, the stakeholders demanded stable contracts that allow for long-term planning of their landscape management strategies. While diversification through nature-oriented or culinary tourism is another strategy to ensure viability of productive landscapes, often the producers themselves have not enough resources to tap into those business options. In this regard, case study regions with integrated regional branding performed very well. Especially the combination of regional marketing and advertisement for emblematic regional food specialties appeared valuable for diversification purposes. Sustainability standards, as made possible by latest EU legislation, can help to producer groups to make sustainable management decision the new status quo and thereby preventing a race to the bottom regarding environmental issues. The sensible selection and design of those standards is part of current academic advances as they should meet the criteria of credibility, relevance, and legitimacy.

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Please choose the main keywords of your contribution (with an X, unlimited number)

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