



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

Policy brief

Beyond wood

Improving policies to promote
sustainable use of **non-wood**
forest products in Europe



Non-wood forest products (NWFPs) are an essential natural resource in Europe. The StarTree project (Box 1) estimates that some 140 million people in the region collect these products (Box 2). In some areas, especially in the Mediterranean region, they may have greater importance than wood. Some European countries are world leaders as top exporters or importers of products such as chestnuts, cork, wild mushrooms and vegetable tannins. NWFPs contribute to nearly all the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; they contribute to rural economies and provide an incentive for conserving forest ecosystems.

With forest cover increasing in Europe, the demand for NWFPs is growing in the region. NWFPs are traded at several scales, supplying raw materials in the food, medicinal and personal care sectors. Gathered traditionally for personal consumption, today they are valued as environmentally friendly products, and their collection also has a notable role in tourism and recreation.

A governance framework – including property rights over the resources, policies and policy instruments – is vital for NWFP sector development. Policies must encourage the livelihood contributions of NWFPs while ensuring that harvesting is sustainable and does not negatively affect other forest ecosystem services. They should take into account important factors influencing NWFP potential such as forest types and structures, forest management practices, socioeconomic and demographic aspects, cultural norms and traditions, market structure and commercialization patterns.

Policies addressing NWFPs require a comprehensive and coordinated vision. The NWFP value chain involves multiple domains (forestry, agriculture, rural development, nature conservation, food and product safety, trade) and many stakeholders (landowners, harvesters, processors, traders, entrepreneurs, policymakers, certification agencies, civil society, etc.) at different spatial scales (local, national and international). Therefore policies must be cross-sectoral and coordinated at multiple levels.

2.27 billion euros **(about 2,58 billion US dollars)**

The estimated total value of NWFPs in Europe – of which 83 percent comes from plant products

Box 1 **The StarTree project**

The four-year project “StarTree – Multipurpose Trees and Non-Wood Forest Products: A Challenge and Opportunity”, funded by the European Union’s Seventh Programme for Research and Technological Development, was developed to support the sustainable management, use and commercialization of non-wood forest products (NWFPs) for a more competitive rural economy. StarTree involved a consortium of institutions, universities, small and medium-sized enterprises and other stakeholders in 14 regions across Europe. The project investigated different aspects of the harvesting, management, trade, use and promotion of NWFPs. FAO focused on analysis of the policies and legal frameworks.

Box 2 **European household survey on harvesting and consumption of NWFPs**

The StarTree European household survey gathered information on harvesting and consumption of NWFPs in the EU28 (except for Malta, Luxembourg and Cyprus), Serbia, Turkey and the European part of the Russian Federation. More than 17 000 respondents were interviewed. The study revealed that:

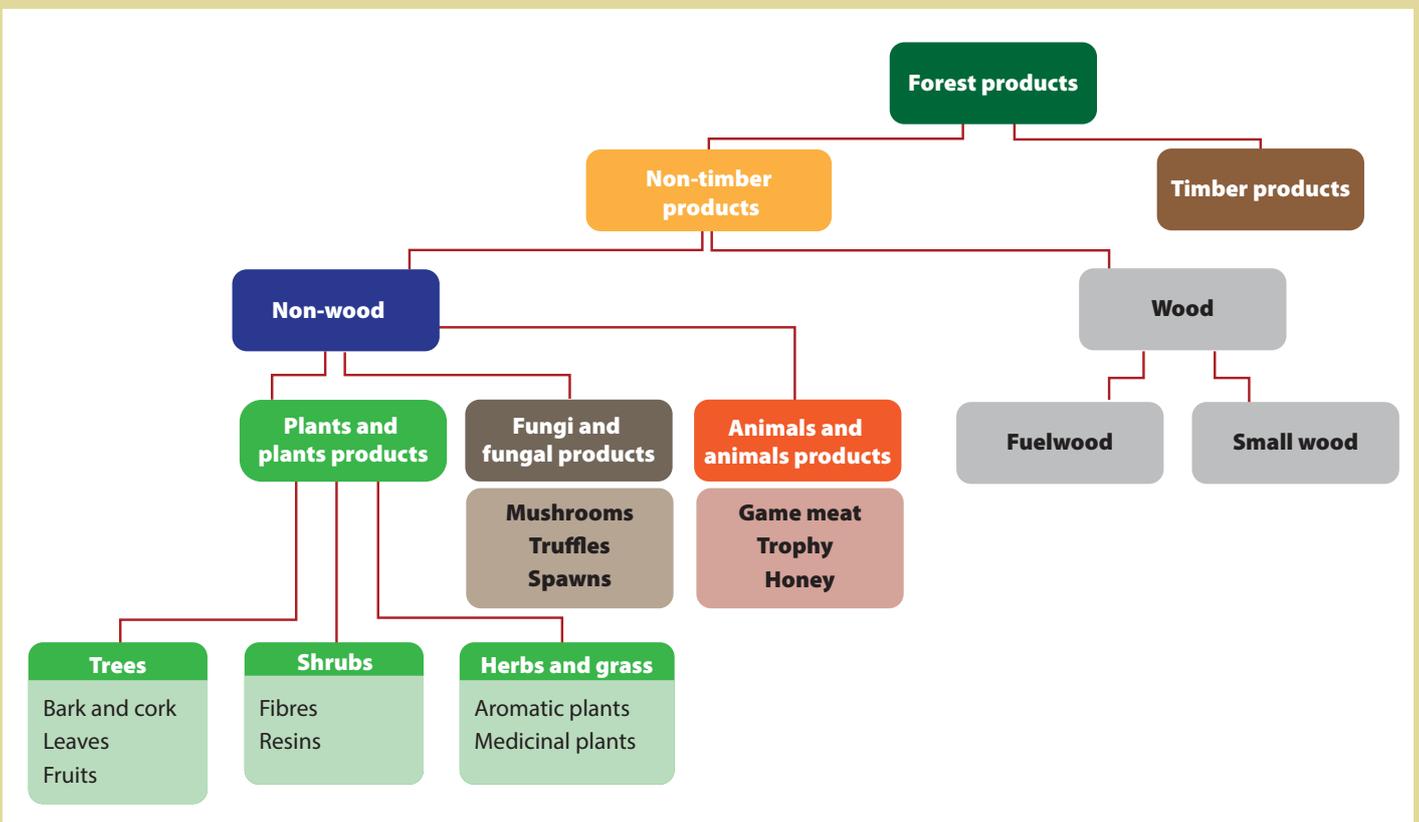
- in 2015, 90 percent of sampled households consumed NWFPs and almost 25 percent of households collected them;
- wild berries and wild mushrooms are the most picked groups of species;
- most households that pick NWFPs do so 3 to 12 times per year;
- rural households collect NWFPs more than twice as often as urban households;
- there is no relation between NWFP collection or consumption and the income of European households.

What do we mean by non-wood forest products?

FAO (1999) defines non-wood forest products (NWFPs) as “goods of biological origin other than wood, derived from forests, other wooded land and trees outside forest” (Figure 1). They include products of both plant and animal origin, including edible products (mushrooms, fruits, nuts, herbs, aromatic plants, game), fibres (used in construction, clothing or handicrafts), resins, gums, saps, and products used for medicinal, cosmetic or cultural scopes. NWFPs may be gathered from natural or semi-natural forests or partially or fully cultivated in forests, plantations, agroforestry schemes or trees outside forests. The same species may be obtained from different production systems, depending on the scale and type of intended use.

These products may be referred to by a variety of other names, including “wild forest products”, “non-timber forest products”, “secondary forest products”, “minor forest products”, “other forest products” “non-wood benefits of the forest”.

1 Some examples of non-wood forest products, categorized within the wider realm of forest products



Existing EU-level policies related to NWFPs

Local harvesting, trade and use of NWFPs are affected by policies and laws in the countries where they grow and are collected, but also by international and global policy frameworks and relevant EU regulations. There are no overarching harvesting regulations at the EU level, but once the NWFPs move from forests into a supply chain to consumers, they are subjected to a plethora of policies and laws related to the quality of the products. However, none of the EU policies or laws specifically and exclusively target NWFPs.

Forest policy. Although the EU has no common forest policy, the desire to promote NWFPs is highlighted in several EU agreements and international processes in which the EU participates, such as the European Forest Strategies, the EU Forest Action Plan and the resolutions of FOREST EUROPE – the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe. Albeit non-binding, European forest-related policies call for a commitment by Member States to address the multifunctionality of forests, including NWFPs, in their national forest programmes and framework legislation.

“Forest-based biomass, together with non-wood forest products, which are gaining market interest, provide opportunities to maintain or create jobs and diversify income in a low-carbon, green economy.”

– *EU Forest Strategy: for forests and the forest-based sector*

Nature conservation and biodiversity policies. The EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2020 and specific EU directives and related instruments (Birds Directive, Habitats Directive, Natura 2000 network) aligned with the International Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) do not explicitly target NWFPs, but they specify in a binding way the level of protection of species of interest to the EU. In particular, annexes to the Habitats Directive list over 400 species that must be strictly protected, as well as more than 90 species whose collection in the wild must be ensured to be compatible with a favourable conservation status; these species include several NWFPs such as mosses and medicinal plants.

Agricultural policies and instruments. The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), and Rural Development Programme (RDP) and funds such as the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) strongly encourage the diversification of rural activities and have provided incentives for NWFPs, for example cork (e.g. in Portugal) and chestnuts (e.g. in Italy). The three objectives of CAP 2014–2020 – viable food production, sustainable management of natural resources, and climate action and balanced territorial development – all have implications for NWFPs. CAP finances support measures through direct payments, market measures and rural development programmes. Under RDP there could be new scope for including management regimes favourable to production of particular wild products (e.g. thinning) as fundable activities or wild product gatherers as eligible actors.

Regulations on trade and movement of products. Non-wood forest products traded at international scale may face international requirements such as import or export tariffs and customs duties established within the general framework of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Additionally, the EU Wildlife Trade Regulations define provisions for import, export and re-export as well as internal EU trade in specimens of listed species, in some aspects going beyond the requirements of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES). Among the listed species are some NWFPs of plant origin. Enforcement is under the sovereignty of each Member State.

Plant health and phytosanitary regulations. Movement and trade of several NWFPs may be affected by Council Directive 2000/29/EC, which aims to protect crops, fruit, vegetables, flowers and forests and regulates the introduction of plants and plant products into the EU and their movement within the EU to prevent the introduction or spread of harmful pests and diseases, based on provisions laid down in the International Plant Protection Convention.

Fiscal policies. In the EU, the application of value-added taxes (VAT) is decided by national tax authorities, so VAT levies applied to NWFPs can be markedly different from country to country. These differences may have strong effects on NWFP transaction costs, value chains and markets. In April 2016, the Commission adopted the Action Plan on VAT – Towards a Single EU VAT Area, which will start by

removing VAT obstacles to electronic commerce in the single market. In 2017, the Commission will present a legislative proposal for a VAT system for trade that crosses borders, based on the principle of taxation in the country of destination of the goods.

Food safety regulations. Food safety regulations such as EU directives defining maximum levels for specific contaminants in foodstuffs apply to NWFPs that are traded and consumed. While they protect consumers' health, in some cases they may act as barriers to trade. For example, the maximum level of aflatoxin in nuts set by the EU disrupted the trade of Brazil nuts from the Amazon region.

Product contents and labelling and packaging regulations. The European Union policies and regulations provide common rules for managing markets for edible products and standards for marketing them. An example is the "Fruit and vegetable regime" framework, which focuses on agricultural products but includes rules for certain NWFPs such as chestnuts, mushrooms, truffles and berries. Other policies and regulations govern the labelling and packaging of foodstuffs and non-foodstuff to ensure consumers' full awareness of product information such as ingredients, origin and production method. Edible NWFPs listed in the regulations should follow these rules.

Organic certification and other marketing mechanisms. A number of voluntary frameworks may increase marketing opportunities for NWFPs.

- Organic certification can have a strong positive role in promoting NWFPs. Under the framework of the common EU organic label, both wild collected and semi-domesticated non-wood forest plants can be considered organic, although hunting and fishing of wild animals are not considered organic production.
- The EU Ecolabel is a voluntary system of environmental labelling for products and services (excluding food and medicine) that have a lower environmental impact than other products in the same group. Cork, fibres and cosmetic compounds are examples of NWFPs that can receive the EU Ecolabel.
- Green public procurement (GPP) favours the use of products with a reduced environmental impact throughout their life cycle in ten priority sectors. It could be of interest, for example, for promoting cork in construction and edible NWFPs in food and catering services.
- EU labels defining the geographic origin of products – Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) and Traditional Specialty Guaranteed (TSG) – have been used to command higher prices in niche markets for several NWFPs, including products made from nuts, berries, mushrooms and honey. Such procedures can also help in protecting traditional NWFP management.

Intellectual property rights. In compliance with international rules under the United Nations World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO) and the Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) agreements under WTO, the EU has set a uniform policy for protecting intellectual property rights, for example through the use of patents, trademarks and copyrights. NWFPs and biogenetic resources derived from NWFPs – especially medicinal and cosmetic compounds – are increasingly subject to such agreements.





How countries regulate NWFPs

Generally, in Europe the legal framework for NWFPs is found in national or subnational laws such as national forest acts, wildlife and national hunting laws, environmental protection laws, nature conservation laws and ad hoc laws for specific NWFPs. NWFP harvesting is governed both by regulating access to the forest and by regulating harvesting, although the right to harvest NWFPs is usually more restricted than the right of access to forests (yet countries vary greatly in the details). In addition, NWFPs traded at the local and national scales are subject to a range of regulations including fiscal policies, product safety regulations and trade regulations.

Access to forests. Public access to forest is a fundamental right in many of the studied countries, subject to specific conditions (e.g. daytime only, only on foot, only on paths, not during forestry operations, not with vehicles). Depending on the country, access rights may be regulated by the forest law or code or by other legislation (such as the civil code or criminal code) and may be addressed at the national or subnational level. A general rule is that people entering the forest must not cause damage to the forest owner, the property or the forest ecosystem. In some countries access may be more restricted, for example, permitted only with owner permission (Turkey) or when forests are registered as common lands, whether public or private (Wales, United Kingdom). In some countries owners are entitled to restrict access to the forest. The leasing of forest land for the purposes of exclusive access to forest resources is allowed in most European countries, but in practice is seldom invoked for NWFPs.

NWFP harvesting rights. Harvesting may be regulated by civil and penal codes at different levels – national regional, provincial or municipal. Across Europe, NWFP harvesting regulations differ in aspects such as the category targeted (NWFPs in general versus specific products); whether restrictions vary between private and public forests or between collection for household consumption and for commercial use; the specification of quantities, methods, means of harvesting, periods and times allowed for collection; and requirements for authorizations, licences or permits for collection (Figure 2).

Most countries restrict collection to some extent, at least for certain products and areas, frequently in response to concerns about actual, perceived or potential overharvesting or damage to species populations or habitats. Countries can be distinguished according to whether:

- harvesting is generally free, with the everyman's right granting the universal right to collect in all forests (e.g. Finland);

2 Aspects governed by NWFP harvesting regulations in European countries

WHAT? Regulated species	List of species allowed or prohibited for harvesting due to the ecologic, economic or social relevance of the specific WFP in the country/region
WHERE? Regulated areas	Areas where harvesting is allowed or prohibited Public versus private forests Special protected areas
WHY? Purpose of collection	Personal consumption versus commercial use
WHO? User groups	Residents versus non-residents Commercial versus non-commercial pickers Landowners versus others
HOW? WHEN? HOW MUCH? Harvesting practices and limits	List of allowed or prohibited harvesting practices Quantity limits, seasonal or time restrictions
UNDER WHICH REQUIREMENTS? Administrative requirements	Harvesting licences or permits (free or paid), quotas, concessions Everyman's rights Restrictions imposed by public administration versus by private landowners

- the public has the general right to collect NWFPs, but landowners or other right holders (e.g. public administrations) may restrict or prohibit the collection of certain NWFPs or may limit collection quantities or apply fees for collection (e.g. Italy, Latvia, Serbia, Spain) (Box 3);
- restrictions are imposed only for commercial purposes (e.g. Austria, United Kingdom), or collection can be forbidden only if the forest owner holds a permit for commercial harvesting of NWFPs (e.g. Slovenia).

The collection of protected species is governed by ad hoc regulations, and in protected areas and natural parks the collection of many NWFPs is generally restricted.

Box 3

Regulations for wild mushroom collection in Italy

In Italy, national legislation on the collection and marketing of fresh and preserved wild mushrooms gives regions and autonomous provinces the right to establish harvesting limits in accordance with traditions, customs and local needs, the areas of wild mushroom collection and collection periods. The sale of wild mushrooms requires municipal authorization. Other national laws define which species can be traded, regulate the trade of mushrooms, and establish quality standards for mushroom trade (e.g. mycological inspection).

Most Italian regions adopt the use of permits for mushroom collection, with specifications that differ from place to place. In the Autonomous Province of Trento, for example, a regular harvesting permit allows collection of 2 kg of mushrooms per day, but this limit can be waived for persons whose livelihood depends on selling collected mushrooms. The permit is free for residents of the province, while others must pay a fee to the competent authority (usually a municipality).

Personal consumption of most NWFPs is generally permitted in most European countries, although in some countries (e.g. Austria, Italy, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom) forest owners or holders of commercial harvesting rights have the right to forbid or restrict collection of species for which they hold a permit. The definition of personal use varies. In some countries, personal use is limited to “levels commensurate with household consumption” (e.g. Turkey), while in other countries these levels are clearly defined (e.g. in Austria and Slovenia personal consumption of mushrooms is limited to 2 kg per person per day).

Forest owners, in general, are entitled to use the NWFPs from their property for both personal and commercial use.

Commercial use is often subject to additional procedures, ranging from a general forest management plan even if it is timber oriented (e.g. in Slovenia), to a specific resource management or extraction plan for specific products such as cork, pine nuts and mushrooms in some countries, to authorizations for commercialization (e.g. in Italy), to scientific assessment of resource sustainability (in Romania).

The establishment and enforcement of contractual arrangements is somewhat easier for products that are attached to a tree (e.g. cork, birch sap, nuts, pine cones) than for products attached to the land (e.g. mushrooms, berries, herbs). The former can usually only be harvested with authorization from the forest owner, even under an everyman’s right regime.

High-value products aside, most of the NWFPs used for subsistence or traded locally are also regulated by customary law and informal rules, which sometimes prevail over formal regulations. For example, harvesting NWFPs without the permission of the landowner is theft under common law in Scotland, but because of a strong tradition of customary rights to NWFPs as public goods, landowners generally accept responsible harvesting for personal use.

NWFPs in national forest policies. National forest policies in European countries are clearly coordinated with those of the European Union. Since 1998, when the first European Forest Strategy was implemented, most of the national forest policies, strategies and programmes of the EU Member States have included mention of the promotion of NWFPs (although various terms are used). The level of detail varies, from a general mention (e.g. the statement that hunting serves the purposes of sustainable forestry in Germany) to detail on specific NWFPs as relevant to specific forest ecosystems (e.g. cork in Spain and Portugal), traditional uses and practices (e.g. mushrooms in Italy) or the value of NWFPs in national and international markets (e.g. truffles in Italy, Spain and Turkey). Most policies address specific products; only Scotland has a policy dedicated to NWFPs in general.

Policies also vary in their approaches. Some address mechanisms for improving the NWFP sector, e.g. by providing market access or favourable taxation. Spain’s Forest Strategy, for example, analyses a number of options for NWFPs with a view to encouraging the economic and social profitability of the forests (e.g. through the modernization of extraction and processing facilities for cork, and chemical research and producer association training to promote the aromatic and medicinal plants industry). The NWFP policies in Finland, well-known for its everyman’s right, are representative of a coherent approach: The government has long supported scientific studies on ecological productivity, collected statistics on NWFPs, fostered supply chains by financing production forecasting models, and provided economic incentives such as tax exemptions for harvesters and sellers.

Meeting policy challenges

Focus on people. Policies and regulations addressing harvesting of NWFPs are the cornerstone for successful enterprise development based on NWFP exploitation and are key for socioeconomic development in rural communities that use NWFPs for their livelihood. Policymakers seeking to encourage NWFPs in rural development may benefit by looking to other sectors such as food industry and tourism that have proved viable in fostering multiple benefits at a range of scales across Europe, including for small local producers. Ideally, policies should take into account different uses of NWFPs and should rely on a coherent approach to NWFP harvesting, management, trade and use.



Tailor the policy to the problem it is intended to address – whether to protect the resource from overharvesting, to limit the pressure on areas where massive harvesting takes place, to obtain income for the public administration or private forest owners, or to support sustainable natural resource use for rural development. While regulatory instruments are required to govern sustainable NWFP harvesting and use in a coordinated manner, incentive instruments such as unified trade tariffs are promising if they allow for innovative and value-generating activities in the NWFP sector. In each case, it is important to consider the implications of the regulation for household consumption as well as recreational and commercial activity.

Adopt a long-term vision. Policy should be developed with a strategic vision, rather than in a reactive or opportunistic way (as when a rapid increase in the marketability of a product triggers a shift towards privatization or domestication, or when government sets up harvesting limits as a reaction to a perceived change in the harvesting dynamic of a species).

Carefully evaluate the effects of harvesting regulations, and revise policies in this light.

Policies that work for NWFPs are based on ensuring rational and sustainable harvesting. However, measures that restrict collection require careful consideration, as they can have a direct, strong effect on household consumption, recreational activities and commerce. Restrictions such as maximum harvestable limits should be based on solid ecological knowledge, where available. Where such knowledge is not available, governments should act based on the precautionary principle to avoid causing possible harm to the public or to the ecosystem. Assumptions may not apply to all species. For example, high rates of harvesting can be detrimental for medicinal and aromatic plants, but may not affect the reproducibility or yields of other species, such as mushrooms (Pilz *et al.*; 2003; Egli *et al.*, 2006). Before policy is established, it is necessary to ask: if collection is not known or suspected to be detrimental, do we really have to regulate it?

Policy instruments should be revised periodically in the light of recent scientific studies, always taking into account the history and tradition of the uses and commerce of the specific NWFP in a precise area.

Support policy implementation. Laws, regulations and economic/financial incentives are needed to make policy effective. They must be appropriate to the socioeconomic and cultural context in which harvesting occurs, otherwise they will not be followed. NWFP-related policies need to be coherent with

existing legislation. Overlapping laws and institutional mandates can sometimes result in confusion as to which procedures NWFP entrepreneurs should follow. Furthermore, the implementation of NWFP policies requires institutional support structures with adequate capacity and resources to address the different aspects of the multifaceted NWFP sector (e.g. inventory, land management, harvesting, transportation, processing, trade). In most European countries such institutional structures either do not exist or lack power, resources and capacity to deal adequately with the issues.

Support development all along NWFP value chains. Public policies should set incentives to foster regional horizontal and vertical cooperation and business opportunities along the NWFP production and processing chains, from low-value exports of unprocessed raw material to value-added products of distinct origin. NWFP opportunities can support rural development particularly effectively if the actors are well organized along the value chain. The introduction of standards and certification schemes can help overcome perceptions that NWFPs lack quality, supply stability and traceability of origin.

Transcend sectoral policies. Non-wood forest products are a cross-sectoral domain: They emerge from a variety of production and management systems, have many uses and contribute to different dimensions of local livelihoods. In the EU, policies and regulations in many areas govern the various stages of NWFP value chains – some with binding implications, others just providing orientation to guide decisions (Figure 3). The provisions and boundaries set by these policies and regulations should be considered in building an effective policy for NWFPs. The importance of NWFPs also needs to be recognized in other policy fields such as nature conservation, food, health, recreation, trade and industry. Special attention should be paid to support structures for better communication across these diverse sectors.

Facilitate coordination of policy at different levels (EU, national, subnational) and across borders. As seen in Figure 3, NWFP-related policies, laws and fiscal measures can be established at different levels, EU, national or subnational. Differences in regulations among countries may have considerable effects on NWFP markets. If collection of a certain NWFP is restricted in a country, economic actors will seek a supply from another country with laxer regulations, displacing the supply chain. Products that cross national borders may require common policies, especially for strategically important resources. The EU could have a role in streamlining policies at the national level, but so far has not done so owing to the complexity and diversity of legal and institutional mechanisms across countries, and the multiple jurisdictions and cross-cutting nature of conservation, trade, intellectual property and benefit sharing.

Include NWFPs in forest management plans. The ability of forest owners to determine management goals for forests on their property is crucial for encouraging production of NWFPs and promoting product domestication and innovation. In most (but not all) European countries, forest owners are legally allowed to transform a forest stand to favour NWFP production for commercial use, with the prior approval of the appropriate authorities, based on a management plan or felling licence, as long as the land is not deforested or the stand clear felled. In practice, however, in many countries NWFP production is not a specific goal of forest management plans. It is less common for owners to prioritize NWFPs over timber production (with a few exceptions such as cork and chestnut producers).

Develop financial instruments to support NWFP production. Existing financial instruments mainly support domestication and cultivation of NWFPs (e.g. grants for domestication and high quality production, subsidies for improvement of stand productivity). Some support is also available through broader subsidies for multifunctional management, although these measures affect NWFP production only indirectly.

Harvesting regulations that include provision for harvesting licenses, permits or concessions can generate considerable income for forest owners/managers or the public administration. Reinvesting these revenues in improvement of forest management could make a positive contribution to rural development and promote sustainable use of NWFPs. Potential areas of investment include specific silvicultural measures, forest paths for improved access, maintenance and restoration of sites under pressure from NWFP collection, forest patrolling and promotional events for marketing NWFPs.

Ensure clear definition of rights, and harmonize policy with customary rights and informal traditions. Sustainable use of NWFP resources is strongly linked to a clear definition of ownership, access and NWFP use rights. Informal institutions and unwritten traditions shape people's collection practices, places, times and species and frequently have a stronger impact on the value chain than formal rules. Formal and informal norms may complement or contradict each other; discrepancies between them may lead to clashes and illegal harvesting activities, especially in areas where pressure on the resource is high. To avoid disengagement of the local community, formal regulations should take into account the local needs expressed in traditional practices or even be based on pre-existing informal norms, always in the light of ecological studies on sustainable collection.

Involve stakeholders in policymaking processes. Involving a wide range of affected stakeholders in policymaking processes is key for developing more effective and widely accepted policies that reflect real needs and priorities and are tailored to local circumstances. This is particularly important for products with significant market value and importance for local livelihoods, as well as to safeguard personal use rights. For

3 Major European Union and national policies and regulations affecting different segments of NWFP value chains, and the extent to which they are binding

Policy area	Value chain segment	Forest tenure	Forest management		Harvesting ^a		Production ^a		Processing		Trade		Sale		Use and consumption	
Land tenure		N	N		N		N									
Forest			EU	N	EU	N	EU	N								
Biodiversity and nature conservation			EU*	N*	EU*	N*	EU*	N*								
Agriculture and rural development ^b			EU	N	EU	N	EU	N								
Harvesting rights			N		N		N								N	
Fiscal					N		N				EU	N	N			
Food safety							EU	N	EU	N					EU	N
Product labelling and packaging							EU	N	EU	N			EU	N	EU	N
Trade and movement of products											EU	EU				
Plant health							EU				EU					
EU certification schemes (e.g. organic production)							EU		EU				EU	EU		
Green public procurement							EU						EU	EU		

Notes: EU = set at EU level; N = set at national level; * = in some lands and for some species.

 Binding

 Not binding, voluntary instrument/economic incentive

 Not binding, but influencing national policies and laws which are binding

^a Harvesting refers to collection for purposes different from sale. Production refers to harvesting for sale.

^b Agriculture and rural development policies can be set both at EU level (CAP and RDP) and at national or subnational level, and are then implemented at national and subnational levels. They can provide both binding rules and a non-binding framework in which economic incentives are provided, such as direct payments for producers that comply with defined rules on a voluntary basis.

example, in the development of mushroom picking regulations in Catalonia, Spain, the agreement of diverse stakeholders was sought through surveys and interviews with landowners and others, as well as the pilot introduction of harvesting permits to test their economic and social acceptability.

Encourage innovation, and link NWFPs to the bio-based economy. NWFPs carry strong traditional connotations. While this is an asset, innovative production and marketing concepts must be explored to render these products a vital component of modern society. NWFPs have increasing potential, for example, in green infrastructure and green health, in light of current trends favouring organic products and nature-based solutions for basic materials. Care needs to be taken that steps towards a bioeconomy support the multipurpose use of forests rather than a single use, and sustainability must be assessed to avoid overexploitation of the resource.



Improve definitions to optimize the economic, ecological and social valorization of NWFPs. Policy and legal documents use inconsistent terminology for NWFPs, which allows for many interpretations of the range of products in question. Defining these products as “secondary”, “minor” or “other” undermines their importance and stands in the way of a truly strategic approach to their management and use.

Collect better information on NWFPs. The significance of NWFPs in Europe is underrated because monitoring of their production, consumption and trade is inadequate and statistics are lacking or incomplete as a result of fragmented value chains, complex trade patterns and use outside the formal sector. Similarly, their importance in maintaining local and regional identities is insufficiently documented. A new product classification scheme for NWFP product groups (raw and processed) is needed that can represent the diversity of products and help to rectify the sectoral fragmentation which has kept NWFPs invisible in the bioeconomy.

Create an enabling environment for advocacy groups in the NWFP sector. NWFP harvesters and producers frequently lack the organizational capacity or institutional vehicles to ensure their voice is heard. Advocacy organizations for some NWFPs, such as cork, at both national and European levels represent the interests of producers and processors in policymaking and bring visibility to these products. Advocacy groups are only beginning to emerge for most other products, examples being Arctic Flavours in Finland and the Association of Foragers and the Scottish Wild Harvests Association in the United Kingdom.

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