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FOOD SAFETY AND QUALITY IN EUROPE: ASPECTS CONCERNING QUALITY, NUTRITIONAL BALANCE, IMPORTANCE OF AGRICULTURAL LAND AND CULTURAL HERITAGE ("TERROIRS")

I. INTRODUCTION – THE MULTIPLE DIMENSIONS OF FOOD

1. Among its many dimensions, the overriding criterion for food is that it be safe. Food safety is everybody's right, whatever the market. Related aspects have been widely addressed in previous conferences (Forum of Marrakech 2001, Pan-European Conference on Food Safety and Quality in Budapest 2002, Twenty-third FAO Regional Conference for Europe in Nicosia 2002). Their conclusions, which will be further discussed at the Second Global Forum of Food Safety Regulators, to be held in Bangkok 2004, have already been integrated into this document which seeks to explore the other dimensions of quality.

2. For, food quality is not limited to safety. Other dimensions need to be considered and particular attention could be usefully placed on the following two aspects:

- assurances of organoleptic and nutritional characteristics in relation to food processing; and
- enhancement of quality associated with production area and its cultural dimensions.

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II. FOOD QUALITY: DEFINITION AND APPROACHES

A. DEFINITION OF QUALITY: TWO MAJOR CONCEPTS

3. The concept of quality has been given many definitions according to different forms of interpretation, but there are two basic notions underlying usage of the term "quality".
4. The first refers to the identified characteristics that make a thing what it is in relation to its end purpose; these are the properties we expect to be present. Standard ISO 9000:2000 provides a fairly broad definition of quality: "*The totality of features and characteristics of a product, process or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs*". Emphasis is placed on the pre-eminence of needs and the nature of their satisfaction.
5. The second concept enshrines manifested excellence, and thus distinction from similar objects that justifies demand. However, there is no specification in either case as to who defines the content of quality, between the supplier or the demander. There is no indication how quality is formulated or ensured. Can we rely on the close interplay of the players directly concerned or must we resort to institutions, indeed the State, to determine the measure of the needs that are to be satisfied?
6. These two major concepts often overlap in a broad array of situations referring to, for example, supposed needs, expressed expectations, absence of quality (deficient properties) or the process of rejection (disenchantment from lack of excellence). All these interpretations give rise to frequent confusion, so it is important that we share clear definitions. Discussions could therefore centre on definitions of quality and how these compare in the countries of Europe, so that we no longer talk about quality itself, but rather specify its accepted meaning.

B. LEVELS OF APPROACH

7. The term "quality" logically gives rise to similar debate when applied to food products. The term has also been used in different ways in successive periods, which leads us to consider three levels of approach:
 - a) Historically, quality has been primarily understood as the absence of defect, fraud and adulteration. Public authorities intervened very early on by implementing specific regulations. Europe's countries seem to have established *de facto* harmonization and consensus seems to have emerged on the need for broad application of this approach.
 - b) More recently, quality has rested on expected properties such as organoleptic and nutritional characteristics or resulting benefits. This introduces the need to take the legitimate expectations of users into account and to require that operators do likewise. The role of the State in this case is to defend the interest of its citizens, acting if need be as their mouthpiece. In this way, consumer needs are largely subsumed in the notion of public interest. The same applies to regulations concerning food safety and other normative characteristics contributing, in particular, towards nutritional balance or related services.
 - c) Finally, quality designates desirable characteristics likely to justify added value; for example, forms of production (organic farming, environmental consideration, animal welfare), production areas (designation of origin, mountain area) and their associated traditions. Such characteristics need to be explicit in product supply to specify necessary interventions and responsibilities of each operator and to generate expected added value.
8. These three levels of approach are not interchangeable; they are superimposed and call for different levels of intervention from public authorities, operators and consumers.

9. As regards food products in Europe, we can consider that the first two levels now apply to all products. We will look at them jointly¹ under the term "generic quality", which we expect to be rigorous and unambiguous. In contrast, the third level presupposes the existence of strategies of product differentiation and market segmentation. It is this third level, identified under the term "specific quality", that implies the attribution of official seals of quality and calls for specific provisions.

C. GENERIC QUALITY: GUARANTEES OF THE MASS MARKET

10. Efforts to ensure generic quality have constituted the basis and justification of food legislation and its recent developments. Application was at first mainly in the form of regulations on food safety and the control of malpractices and consumer deception. It then extended to guarantees for the proper functioning of the food mass market.

11. The first stage of controlling fraud produced a regulatory framework for production, with prohibitions and obligations imposed on operators. The second stage was more directly associated with market regulations, focusing on the characteristics of foodstuffs, their rules of manufacture, their composition and their sensory properties. This stage helped determine the market presentation of foods, for example, the classification of wines or the shape and fat content of cheeses.

12. Guarantees of generic quality then extended on two fronts:

- links between food and public health. This related to food safety, first the organization of production processes, including rules of hygiene, then characteristics of products themselves, their fitness for consumption, microbiological criteria, maximum residue levels, etc. More recently, nutritional characteristics (food facts on labelling) have been added to provisions on food safety;
- guarantees of proper functioning supply channels and markets. Conventional means of ensuring generic quality are generally standardization and quality assurance, but they also include corporate certification (along the lines of ISO 9000) which opens the way for voluntary action to constantly improve the manufacture of products and customer-supplier relations on intermediary markets. Standardization in this perspective concerns both the products themselves and production methods, analysis techniques and associated services (as witnessed in changes in the catering trade).

13. In the last ten years, the nutritional quality of food sold on the mass market has received increasing attention from operators and a segment of consumers for whom this has become an important consideration of purchase. Ways of achieving nutritional balance and thus preventing cardiovascular disease, in particular, are increasingly understood – regular meals; varied diet and ample intake of fruit and vegetables; moderate use of fats; if a drinker, moderate consumption of alcohol; regular physical activity; and monthly weight check. These recommendations concern not only foods, but also how they are combined by consumers in their diet and in their preparation of meals.

14. For the purpose of achieving this nutritional balance, foods are divided into different categories: cereal products, fruit, vegetables, dairy products, meat/fish/eggs. Nutritional education encourages variety of diet to make sure that all micronutrients are covered, which means consuming different foods each day from within any given food category or group. In addition to proportions of carbohydrates, fats and proteins, increasingly food contents now also state levels of vital micronutrients, such as vitamins, minerals and fibres, as a proportion of calorie content. More foods are marketed with nutritional information specifying that they are "sources of" or

¹ In follow-up to Sylander (2001): Rapport sur la notion de qualité – Conseil National de l'Alimentation (National Food Council), Paris.

"rich in" some micronutrient. The use of "serving" rather than weight or volume is preferable as more immediately relevant to actual food intake.

15. However, consumer needs on the mass market tend to remain implicit. Raising the awareness of consumers and their representatives is important if the criteria of generic quality of foods are to be increasingly explicit and reliable:

- price, whose role remains unclear in the minds of consumers (is a more expensive product necessarily a "quality" product?);
- the trademark under which a company seeks to build its reputation, which requires coherence in the range of products bearing the mark, and
- informative labelling on the marketed product.

16. There would be good reason to engage in participatory actions, involving users, producers and public authorities, to better define expectations and formalize consensus on the requirements of the mass market. This could focus on all aspects of quality, including food safety. Formal discussions could be periodically arranged whereby designated spokespersons of respective stakeholders discuss major consumer issues to have emerged during intervening periods. Conclusions could then be drawn for the advancement of transparency and effectiveness of intervention of each party. Consensus discussions have already been held in various countries and are initiatives that could be usefully replicated in the future.

17. If it is to function properly, the mass market therefore requires "duly informed consumers" who are able to identify which declared attributes are relevant to their particular needs. Special efforts could be agreed in Europe to cultivate this modern form of consumerism, cognizant of the implications and attentive to the guarantees. Such an objective would also reduce the level of social discrimination that exists as a result of the absence of such understanding.

D. SPECIFIC QUALITY: GUARANTEES ASSOCIATED WITH OFFICIAL SEALS OF QUALITY

18. Market developments have led some operators to seek recognition of a difference, of a level of excellence evidenced by signs of quality. Public policy has centred on these seals of quality and on the voluntary participation of many operators. Such seals designate specific characteristics that might be perceived as superior and that are guaranteed the user. These characteristics distinguish the product and generally serve to justify a price differential.

19. In many countries, the public authorities have placed such initiatives under their control to ensure that the differentiation is duly warranted. Related initiatives vary among countries according to intended purpose, but can perhaps be compared if described in greater detail.

20. The notion of "specifications" is important for determining rules of production and promised characteristics. It lists all aspects that operators undertake to provide, as well as the ways and means of doing so (evaluation, rectification, elimination of irregularities).

21. Of course, any organoleptic qualities included among the promised properties need to be periodically verified, using standardized methodologies of reference with the established sensory profile: the flavours and savours of the intended product.

22. Depending on the situation, the setting of rules can:

- be based on producer associations that internally negotiate agreement on the terms of their commitments;
- concern companies that establish their own framework for restructuring the market in which they want their quality difference to prevail.

23. Such a mechanism also permits the traceability of products by appending information flow to physical flow, and thus verification of rules of production. This information can trace production history and thus permit prompt intervention in the event of a problem and withdrawal

of the defective batches. Moreover, corrective action is taken on the basis of detection of cause and identification of solution. A traditional market brand does not always guarantee all these elements. A major attraction of seals of quality is that their associated guarantees are transparent.

24. The capacity of control is essential in this connection and should apply equally to:
- verification of production conditions, understood as all mandatory means to be adopted by operators. These must therefore be clearly spelt out and employ cast-iron criteria able to withstand all remonstrations;
 - the product itself, whose determined characteristics are in fact the necessary results. Here again, references need to be objective and measures need to be independent of operators.
25. This issue of control divides responsibility among the agents:
- own-account control by producers to ensure their production process functions properly. This usually requires them having to know how to document and report their interventions;
 - internal controls within associations of holders of the seal of quality. The use of this seal solely for worthy products requires frequent checks at distinct points of the production chain; and
 - external checks to see that the holders of the seal of quality actually observe the rules. If external checks are to be credible, inspectors need to demonstrate independence from producer associations, impartiality towards producers and objectivity in judgement.
26. It is up to States to decide which bodies are to undertake these external inspections; the choice is between public administrations and private sector services. The choice has a significant bearing on related costs, to which we need to add the cost of quality rejection, in other words efforts that have failed to gain specific quality recognition. Who should meet the expenses of all the controls? It is important to ensure that there is no distortion of competition between companies or discrimination based on capacity. Thus, the choice of external control bodies raises the issue of division of functions between the private and the public sector, with control by the private sector engendering a bona fide control market. But it also raises the question of State capacity and operating credibility. We could review the organization of these functions in the countries of Europe and, on the basis of findings, provide technical assistance to foster and help the construction of national capacities (structures, approaches) where necessary.

E. CONSUMER INFORMATION

27. However, quality can only become a determinant of consumer choice if information is giving on appropriate labelling. There are public controls of such labelling among operators and at points of sale. The indication of a promised quality attribute amounts to a commitment and as such presupposes assured recognition by the different players in the agrifood system. This is not always the case at end consumer level, which raises an interesting question: in the many existing situations, how does identification of proposed qualities occur? Are most quality indications explicit? This would appear to be an area for useful comparison of observable situations in Europe.

28. As regards products aiming at generic quality on the mass market, informative labelling continues to represent a significant challenge, as combining mandatory indications with voluntary information frequently leaves room for misleading claims, particularly as regards nutritional value. Thus, in addition to the nutritional education of consumers and informative labelling, might there not be scope for information centres by major food category (bread, milk, meat, etc.) that could provide detailed information on what their particular product contributes to a meal and in which form or combination it can be most effective?

29. As regards products aiming at specific quality, specific labelling naturally contains the seal of quality and official indications that guarantee them, as well as the quality controls. States can take steps to confirm the reputation of such seals and have them play an effective role in

product differentiation, indeed in market segmentation. With the prospect of integrated markets, the countries of Europe need to ensure that quality indications carry relative equivalence in terms of:

- types of associated restrictions, and
- assured market optimization.

III. QUALITY LINKED TO SPECIFIC PRODUCTION AREAS AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS

A. GEOGRAPHICAL INDICATIONS TO BE PROTECTED

30. Emphasizing a place of origin seems to generate market benefits for products that carry the name of a particular area. Studies have shown that consumers feel reassured by information on the place of production of a particular foodstuff, especially in a period of crisis. The name in question should therefore be protected when associated with specific properties: quality linked to production area is one of the forms of specific quality presented above.

31. A juridical framework already exists to give legal status to this association between name and characteristics: geographical indications understood as intellectual property. The TRIPS agreements concluded under the WTO as well as the Protected Designation of Origin (PDO) and the Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) in EU Regulation n° 2081 of 1992 provide for the protection of “geographical indications”: *the name of a region, a specific place or, in exceptional cases, a country, used to describe an agricultural product or a foodstuff originating in that region, specific place or country, and which possesses a specific quality, reputation or other characteristics attributable to that geographical origin and the production and/or processing and/or preparation of which take place in the defined geographical area.*

32. Origin is therefore not solely provenance that can be documented by effective traceability. The legitimacy to grant exclusivity to certain producers rests on qualities, characteristics and reputation attached to a defined geographical area. Origin can result from:

- the close link between product and land ("terroir"), expressed through specific characteristics intrinsic to the locality and shaped by human activity;
- deep-seated roots in the specified production area which makes it difficult to transpose production elsewhere. In this case, the local bonds ensure the reputation of a product and justify the restricted use of a geographical name, preventing it from becoming “generic”.

33. Identifying the natural and human determining factors serves to draw up a list of specifications or a “code of practices” that group the requisites linking product to area. These concern mainly:

- Natural resources mobilized in the production process. These become a local priority and very often change status with the protection of geographical name. Imposing the use of a particular animal breed or plant variety with geographical area calls for careful definition and collective management, giving resources greater importance than previously and devising ways of qualifying them. Similarly, the use of spontaneous vegetation, summer pastures, mountain ranges, wetlands, etc., represents a value investment whose low productivity is advanced as justification for protection.
- Local know-how constituting a technical culture in its own right, known to producers and connoisseurs of products of origin. This know-how has to be codified if it is to be included in the specifications, which ensures its continuity but at the same time carries the risk of impoverishment (only selecting certain practices and eliminating others). This know-how will therefore have to be shared and disseminated within associations of local players. Finally, know-how will have to be transferred, especially through intergenerational instruction, taking care to maintain standards and avoid its generalization outside the local area.

34. This linkage between resources and know-how is an inherent feature of the socio-technical complexes that need to be developed to consolidate initiatives to protect quality associated with geographical area.² The link to locality, defined by delimitation of production area, can be based:

- on the direct impacts of the soil, climate and resources on the intrinsic characteristics of production, impacts derived from the production practices of a human community: the land and culture combination ("terroir") that renders this link inimitable and non-transposable. In this case, the geographical area will be very carefully delimited, very often down to the nearest plot. Experts are called in to ensure maximum precision in tracing boundaries that are often subject to dispute and legal recourse;
- or on an accumulation of factors met by operators on a portion of defined area and solidly recognized by the market. The area is then determined on the basis of proven practices and their observable spatial extension. Administrative limits might be required where these are based on a tangible cultural reality.

35. Control applies to the location of operators, their observance of required standards and the properties of resulting products. We need to emphasize that sensory criteria are largely based on local gastronomic culture, which means clearly explaining how products are appreciated locally. It is not in fact a question of trying to please everybody or of adapting to the ways and whims of the market. Products of designated geographical origin offer a range of savours and flavours to those who are able to appreciate them. Thus, instead of satisfying the *ad hoc* demand of consumers without prior expectations, sensory quality linked to geographical origin serves to confirm lasting product individuality among an informed and discriminating clientele.

36. Operators working within specific producer associations hold the right to a designation over which they have exclusivity. This gives them the right of use but also a responsibility for the economic future of the activity and for the optimization of their products. A coordinated approach to products of geographical origin in the different countries of Europe would give an international dimension to national studies and thus provide added input to the existence of qualities linked to specified production areas.

B. ORGANIZING OPERATORS

37. It is important to consider the internal diversity that exists among operators in an area that has a protected designation, not only in terms of volume and resources but also in terms of organization of production, as there is sometimes a co-existence of farmers, artisanal producers and industrial manufacturers. The role of distributors also needs to be carefully examined as quality linked to geographical area is strongly influenced by the behaviour of markets and their segmentation.

38. The right to exclusivity of name creates relations of both cooperation and competition. While operators compete directly over the same products and same markets, they nevertheless have to sit around the same table to talk and negotiate. Protecting quality linked to geographical origin calls for new local relationships for the good of the collective initiative. This initiative will also be conditioned by commanding social forces that can have varying impacts on the way activities are pursued, for example:

- the composition of the producer association or consortium that will first launch the initiative and then have to run it for the long-term;
- a channel captain whom nobody can ignore in the management of the initiative, even if this person does not form part of the group. Certain manufacturers or distributors play this role.

² As shown by Casabianca and Valceschini (1997): La qualité dans l'agro-alimentaire- Emergence d'un champ de recherches. Département Systèmes Agraires et Développement – INRA, 344 p.

39. Vertical alliances involve contracts that formalize supplier-client relations and influence the rules of distribution of benefits among operators. Quality linked to geographical origin can thus encourage demand for local raw materials, even though these might fetch a higher purchase price. Such requirements can serve to rebalance the upstream and downstream relations that are often dominated by food processors and distributors. They can also restore proximity linkages that have become distended by the globalization of the market for agricultural raw materials.

40. Market arrangements permit the strategic positioning of products of origin with specific marketing³. We need however to distinguish:

- messages that focus on notions of belonging, whether consumption be local or in dispersed communities keen to restore the connection through the vehicle of the product of origin; and
- the regional identity of a product that attracts a remote clientele by offering a new culinary experience. The emergence of "ethnic" cuisine in contemporary society is a case in point.

41. Important for such production are:

- direct sale between producer and consumer, in an effort to renew ties weakened by conventional distribution;
- e-commerce that restores such ties directly, using modern technology and freeing isolated operators of normal constraints.

42. Within producer associations, rules of production formalize the technical culture of local producers and impact on the recognition of expertise.

43. In the case of traditional production, for example cheese-making from raw milk, such expertise (controlling useful flora for preservation and development of product characteristics) also applies to precaution in technique and innovation. Any change in the production process needs to be analysed in terms of novel risks and how these can be monitored and corrected. Traditional techniques can even be revived where their impact on controlling microbial balance can be demonstrated. For example, the link between livestock breeding and inoculation of raw milk is beginning to be understood. Understanding how to gather useful flora and transfer them to milk can help control the development of products and improve microbial balances. Further understanding is required in this area to demonstrate that traditional methods of food preservation do not generally run counter to food safety requirements.

44. Development and technical support bodies also have a role to play, with farmers targeted by awareness raising and training policies aimed at increasing their ability to meet expectations. The boundary between control and advice becomes hazier and assistance aims to help them handle the technical constraints imposed by the protection initiative. Participating in a geographical origin initiative can create a new dynamic and thus an invaluable mechanism for change: for example, voluntary rules associated with designated production area can encourage operators to adhere to regulatory constraints that they initially had trouble accepting.

45. The countries of Europe should discuss and share the experiences of their research and development agencies. The aim is to improve the approach to such initiatives in terms of understanding their inherent features and determining how best to support them.

C. ENERGIZING DESIGNATED PRODUCTION AREAS

46. Quality associated with geographical area guarantees not only the location but also a local structure of mutual relations driven by partnership and close and frequent interaction. Such initiatives are relevant to many regions, provinces or countries, whatever the level of economic

³ See the work of Giraud (1999) : Marketing sustainable farming food products in Europe. Journal of international food and agribusiness marketing 9, 3, 41-45

development: quality associated with geographical origin is not the preserve of the rich countries. Rural areas with low-income farmers can even employ such a policy as a means of achieving broader economic integration: strengthening of activities, accession to markets that function better with accompanying guarantees and possible economic gains. Geographical areas pursuing such initiatives probably exist in all European countries, as a rapid international inventory could confirm.

47. Any claim to uniqueness of product needs to be supported by:
- the sustainable use of the natural resources concerned and of the biodiversity these represent; and
 - the non-transposable nature of local specificities.

Visible effects are expected, such as landscape, land-use features and local species and breeds of animal; all this serving to identify quality associated with origin as a component of local tourism policy, with its eco-museums, "wine routes", festivals, trade fairs and so forth.

48. The benefit of association therefore extends beyond the producers as product identity spills over onto the whole of local society. Synergies can be built between product, area and society⁴. There is no method to accurately evaluate the impacts (wealth created, employment generated, operators concerned, viability and continuity of their enterprises, etc.). Regional supervisory bodies can be useful for monitoring initiatives, impacts and actions needed. Such experiences have been conducted in various regions: the Auvergne region in France has such a body; the canton of Valais in Switzerland is in the process of establishing one; and similar initiatives are under way in Italy.

49. A more systematic European study of the local impacts of products whose quality is linked to geographical origin would be immensely useful in enlightening States on the validity of such initiatives and justifying large-scale national structures for their implementation.

D. MOBILIZING CONSUMERS

50. Sensory aspects are of course crucial to consumers in contemporary society. However, target consumers need to have the wherewithal to recognize products, to appreciate them or to reject them if not up to standard. This requires education, promotion and training.

51. Providing consumers with information reassures them, especially on the questions of hygiene that often come to light. Fermented products and their intrinsic preservation guarantee far greater safety than sterilized products exposed to all manner of risk of contamination (problems of cold chain, cleanliness of household refrigerators, etc.). Studies on the beneficial impacts of fermented products (in terms of useful micro flora, but also essential micronutrients) should be supported in order to objectively determine associated risks and benefits. Such studies should ideally be international in scope, as the intention is not to adopt a defensive or partisan stance, but rather, to enhance consumer perception of these products.

52. Consumer requirements also need to include the perspective of pleasure and quality linked to geographical origin is mainly enhanced by culinary preparation specific to the local culture. The specialized press and media can inform consumers how best to use local produce. Broad action on this front would help revive local culinary traditions that are becoming neglected in everyday life. Formal recognition of this European heritage, of this often unknown cultural asset, would provide a clearer idea of the resources that need to be better exploited on food markets.

⁴ As was shown by Barjolle and Sylvander (2000) : Some factors of success for origin labelled products in agri-food supply chains in Europe : market, internal resources and institutions. Actes et Communications, INRA, 17 45-71

53. The nutritional dimension of products whose quality is associated with geographical origin also includes micronutrients. It ensures that meals are varied, which is crucial for preventing numerous public health problems such as obesity, which is becoming an increasing threat, not only in the United States of America ⁵, but also in Europe. It is now widely accepted that an overly monotonous diet, even if nutritionally balanced, is a factor of risk of obesity for these populations. However, we cannot assert that products whose quality is associated with geographical origin impact directly on nutritional diversity. What would appear to happen, however, is that customers more inclined towards such products are generally more curious to try products with strong individual character. Food consumption in such households is therefore more likely to provide a varied nutritional intake.

54. The success of these products of course requires that target consumers be prepared to pay for them. The prices that regional specialities fetch reflect consumer recognition of the qualities they seek. These knowledgeable, demanding consumers, who are willing to remunerate the efforts of professional operators, thus become full-fledged players in the local economy through their acts of purchase. Their behaviour is a mechanism for orienting markets by demand.

E. CONVERGENCE OF PUBLIC INTERVENTIONS

55. Quality linked to geographical origin renews the combination of food safety and quality. The product ensuring this link is a sound candidate for public intervention as:

- it ensures that culture, in all its forms, projects into the economy;
- it stimulates the multifarious role of agricultural activity; and
- it curbs the risk of rural desertification and steers resource management towards sustainable development.

56. These are all good reasons to advance in the promotion and understanding of the quality of such food. The countries of Europe might wish to recognize the legitimacy of this objective and report on their respective national instruments to this end.

57. Finally, far from constituting new non-tariff barriers, public policy interventions stimulating such initiatives aim to enhance the well-being of populations as a whole and to consolidate a rural fabric of farmers that are firmly anchored in their regional economy. Without requiring a surfeit of rules and regulations, straightforward respect of the environment and of the ethical values associated with these geographical production areas and their traditions will also direct production and trade (on national and international markets) towards new contracts between the societies of European countries and their respective agricultural sectors.

IV. CONCLUSION

A. QUALITY: DEFINITION AND APPROACHES

58. Two concepts underpin usage of the term "quality": (i) a declaration of the characteristics that make an object what it is in relation to the purpose of its use; (ii) a level of excellence, a form of distinction from similar objects. As regards food, quality is first the absence of defects and adulteration. It then rests on anticipated properties such as organoleptic or nutritional characteristics, in the case of "generic" quality on the mass market. Finally, quality designates prized characteristics that justify added value, for example methods of production or geographical origin, in the case of "specific" quality.

59. The guarantee of generic quality is the basis of food legislation. Guarantees of generic quality then extended to links between food and public health, and to the proper functioning of

⁵ See McCrory MA, Fuss PJ, McCallum JE *et al.* (1999) : Dietary variety within food group : association with energy intake and body fatness in adult men and women. *Am. J Clin Nutr* **69** 440-447

supply channels and markets. The nutritional quality of foodstuffs available on the mass market is receiving increasing attention. Nutritional balance needs to be studied in terms of dietary properties of meals and how these reflect the differing needs of consumers as determined by their activities. Nutritional education is vital to encourage diversity of diet and enhance intake of all micronutrient requirements. To function properly, a mass market requires "properly informed consumers" who are able to identify the food indications that correspond to their actual needs.

60. Market developments have led some operators to seek specific quality, recognition of excellence expressed in the form of seals of quality. The notion of "specifications" is important for determining production rules and promised characteristics. This instrument makes it possible to trace products by attaching information flow to physical flow and thus allowing verification of production rules. The question of control is vital and responsibilities are divided between own-account producer control, internal producer association control and external control. To be reliable and rigorous, external control has to be entrusted to a public service or private body, which entails costs.

61. However, quality only intervenes in consumer choice if information is provided by appropriate labelling. In the case of products seeking generic quality on the mass market, informative labelling is a major challenge as the combination of obligatory indications and voluntary information leaves room for misleading claims. For products seeking specific quality, the specific labelling contains the seal of quality and its guaranteed official indications, together with related controls.

V. QUALITY LINKED TO GEOGRAPHICAL PRODUCTION AREA AND CULTURAL TRADITIONS

62. Emphasizing geographical origin helps product marketing. A legal framework formally recognizes this association of designation of origin and characteristics: geographical indications as intellectual property. Origin is therefore more than provenance documented by effective traceability. Legitimacy for granting protection is based on the qualities, characteristics and reputation that are associated with a specified area. Identifying the natural and human determining factors helps put together a list of specifications based on natural resources used in the production process and the know-how that constitutes the local technical culture. The association with geographical origin is the basis for demarcation of area. Controls centre on operator location, compliance with standards and properties of resulting product. Operators acting within producer associations hold the rights to a designation over which they have exclusivity.

63. Internal diversity within producer associations needs to be taken into account, in terms not only of volume and resources, but also of organization of production. Exclusive right to a designation forges bonds through close interaction that exists as both cooperation and competition and that is also influenced by commanding social forces. Vertical alliances require contracts that formalize supplier-client relations and impact on the rules of distribution of benefits among operators. Market arrangements place products of origin in a strategic position with special marketing. Within producer associations, rules of production give formal recognition of the local technical culture and determine the recognition of expertise. Traditional techniques can be revived if their effects, particularly on microbial balance, can be demonstrated. Farmers should be targeted by policies aimed at increasing their ability to meet expectations.

64. Quality associated with geographical origin is a guarantee of location but also represents a local structure built upon extended mutual solidarity. Rural areas with low-income farmers can use this as a vehicle for broader economic integration. All this converges to identify quality linked to geographical origin as a component of local tourism policy. Synergies need to be built between product, area and society. There is no method to accurately assess their impacts on the economy of designated production areas.

65. The sensory dimension is essential to consumers in contemporary society. However, target consumers need to be taught to recognize, appreciate or reject products. The nutritional dimension of such products includes specific micronutrients. These products provide variety of diet, an essential factor in preventing many public health problems, especially obesity which is becoming an increasing threat in Europe. The high prices that these regional specialities fetch reflect consumer recognition of the qualities that they seek. These knowledgeable, demanding consumers, who are willing to recompense the efforts of professional operators, thus become fully-fledged players in the food economy.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POSSIBLE ATTENTION OF THE TWENTY-FOURTH FAO REGIONAL CONFERENCE FOR EUROPE

66. The Commission could use the foregoing conclusions to orient its discussions in one or several directions and might wish to consider these recommendations for submission to the Twenty-fourth FAO Regional Conference for Europe.

- a) Determine the relationship between elements of quality (in particular food safety, nutritional balance, aspects linked to geographical origin) on the basis of their specific features but also their complementarity.
- b) Note that, if they are to function, systems covering the different approaches to quality need to be integrated into public policy, which requires reflection on the definitions of quality, including discussions on the different paths that countries have taken to identify different qualities available on markets and to supervise initiatives for the control and surveillance of quality.
- c) Consider the universal nature of stated notions regarding specific quality and aspects linked to geographical origin and identify ways of putting these to best advantage to farmers and small producers. Such ways include an inventory of products meeting these definitions and their areas of origin, as well as corresponding resources and local know-how. Evaluation of the technical, social and economic impacts of products whose quality is associated with geographical origin would help determine a coordinated approach towards products of origin in Europe and put appropriate national structures in place.
- d) Emphasize the importance of consumer education, training and mobilization and identify required actions. These could include:
 - the organization of participatory events where producers, users, consumers and public authorities would clarify expectations relating to the requisites of generic quality;
 - the development of informative labelling;
 - the development of nutritional education, including dietary intake from generic products in terms of nutritional balance and quality of meal;
 - the establishment of information centres per food category and an appropriate programme of communication with the professional categories concerned and the public that also promotes aspects relating to food safety, nutritional balance and quality of product.
- e) Confirm the role of research and of scientific and technical cooperation to better understand and implement the components of an integrated approach to quality as applied to foodstuffs and their processing. Such research should preferably be coordinated at European level and be included under integrated programmes of scientific cooperation. Technical cooperation actions could help to build national capacities (structures and approaches) in related areas and be given priority status by international organizations, notably FAO.