

FINAL DOCUMENT APPROVED BY THE COMMITTEE

The Standing Committee on Agriculture of Italy’s Chamber of Deputies,

having examined, pursuant to Rule 127 of the Rules of Procedure of the Chamber of Deputies, the Proposal for a Council Regulation on the quality of agricultural products (COM (2010) 733) and the Proposal to amend Regulation (EC) no.1234/2007 on marketing standards (COM(2010)738), which together form part of the so called "Quality Package" for agriculture products and foodstuffs;

having regard to the European Commission's guidelines setting out best practices for systems of voluntary certification and for the use of the "Protected Designation of Origin" (PDO) and "Protected Geographical Indications" (PGI) labels for foods, which also form part of the "Quality Package";

having regard to: the Commission's Work Programme for 2011 (COM (2010) 623 final); the 18-month programme of the Polish, Danish and Cypriot Presidencies (11447/11); and the Government's Report on Italy's programme of participation in the European Union in 2011 (Document LXXXVII-bis, no. 1);

having regard to the reports relating to the draft resolutions for the framing of the aforementioned Proposals for a Regulation as approved by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament on 21 June 2011 (COM (2010) 733) and 4 July, 2011 (COM (2010) 738) respectively;

taking note of the European Parliament's approval on the second reading of the Proposal for a Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers (COM (2008) 40);
whereas:

- the foregoing proposals are aimed both at enhancing EU rules relating to the quality of agricultural products and foodstuffs by making farmers, producers and consumers aware of the characteristics that give these foods and products their special value, and at improving the functioning of national and private certification schemes so that they become more transparent and easier to understand and, at the same time, less burdensome for producers, administrators and, just as importantly, consumers. The foregoing objectives have our full support and backing, especially in view of the fact that any discussions concerning quality necessarily touch upon related issues to do with businesses, small producers and the provision of direct sales support to them, workers in the sector, skills, knowledge and consumer awareness;

- the existing quality schemes – Protected Designation of Origin (PDO), Protected Geographical Indication (PGI), Traditional Specialities Guaranteed (TSG), organic farming produce, produce from the outermost regions – have to be developed by maximising the intrinsic value of the best European products, a task that may require clearer definitions, greater legal certainty, greater consistency and more efficient international protection;

- the European Commission presented the "Quality Package" on 10 December, 2010, following extensive public consultation which was launched with the publication of the Green Paper on Quality (COM (2008) 641). The results of this consultation exercise were incorporated into the Communication on Agricultural Product Quality Policy published on 28 May 2009 (COM(2009)234), which set forth strategic guidelines. The proposals in the "Quality Package" also take account of the many suggestions contained in the report produced at the initiative of the European Parliament on 25 March 2010 "Agricultural product quality: what strategy to follow? " and refer to:

  a) the Commission’s Communication "The Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) towards 2020: Meeting the food, natural resources and territorial challenges of the future", which, among other things, stresses the important influence that a policy of agriculture product quality might have both on the guiding principles of CAP reform (i.e. the maintenance of the policy of diversifying agricultural activities in different rural areas and enhancing competitiveness), as well as the Resolution of the European Parliament on 23 June 2011 referring to the same Communication;

  b) the priorities given in the "Europe 2020" Communication, with particular regard to the objective of promoting a more competitive economy;

  c) the principles underpinning the policy of consumer information;

considering that Italy, the top European producer in the agri-food sectors of Protected Designations of Origin and Protected Geographical Indications,
sees the "Quality Package" as a key and strategic element with respect to the forthcoming decisions on European agricultural policy, and as therefore constituting a vital opportunity to be exploited; and also sees the Package as being, above all, a means of ensuring that at the heart of the strategies designed to protect the quality of agri-food products are the principles that production involves an entire supply chain, that connections with the local area need to be strengthened and the specific nature of local circumstances taken into consideration;

- taking note of the European Parliament's approval, on the second reading on 6 July 2011, of the Proposal for a Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers (COM (2008) 40), which unquestionably marks a first step towards guaranteeing transparency and traceability for consumers and safeguarding the distinctive values of quality production, as well as a step towards establishing fair competition among farmers and producers who generate value added thanks to their distinctive characteristics and qualities;

- noting also that both the internal and the external markets must recognise the quality of European products and the model of production for the same;

- drawing attention to the fact that the Italian Parliament has approved a law on labelling and traceability (Law no. 4 of 3 February 2011) that sets out regulations, whose most advanced aspects, particularly those relating to the revitalisation of competitiveness and the protection of health, might be suitable for adoption by European institutions;

- taking account of the evolution of the debate currently taking place in the European institutions;

- taking account also of the assessments made and the findings reported during a series of hearings held by the Committee during which it was able to obtain useful data and hear the arguments of delegates from many organisations representing agricultural businesses;

- drawing particular attention to the fact that the present final document shall be transmitted to the European Parliament, the Council and the European Commission as part of the Political Dialogue, along with the Opinion approved on June 15, 2011 by the European Union Policies Committee, which is attached hereto;

commits the Government to continuing to pursue negotiations in the European Union and underscores the importance of the Government's abiding by the following guidelines:
a) as regards the Proposal for a Council Regulation on the quality of agricultural products (COM (2010) 733):

1) the Committee is amenable to the objective of reaching a single legislative framework for quality systems, mainly by simplifying procedures and approximating different systems, but believes this objective must in no way jeopardize the survival of those elements that not only make it possible to recognise and give visibility to the defining characteristics of various individual categories of products, but also contribute to the underlying solidity of the entire system. In any case, our recommendation is to continue to pursue the objective of simplifying procedures and reducing the encumbrances of bureaucratic protocols;

2) by means of measures to strengthen institutional communication at a European level, the information available to consumers about European quality systems referring to modes of production should be enhanced, to which end adequate financial resources have to be allocated, also with a view to promoting and incentivising the informed buying of quality products;

3) in conjunction with measures seeking to give recognition to the role of associations of producers in managing PDO and PGI products - with particular regard to activities aimed at improving the functioning of the system - concrete action is required for the planning and management of production, also with a view to securing the stability of the markets.

In furtherance of this objective, producer groups should be allowed to plan and match supply to demand in order to avoid market disruptions, provided they have sought prior authorisation from their Member State, and to prescribe rules for the protection and use of the PDO and PGI labels on prepared products destined for sale;

4) for the sake of greater clarity, it would also be desirable better to specify what is meant by "groups" in this context, i.e. whether they consist of participants that produce, process or do both; similarly, better definition is needed of "phases of production", which include the transformation and/or processing of foods.

5) it would appear to be necessary also to include "product of mountain farming" as one of the optional quality terms envisaged in Title IV of the Proposal, which, indeed, would be in line with the announcement to this effect made by the Commission in the months prior to the approval of the "Quality Package", and is an idea that recently received the support of the Committee for Agriculture and Rural Development of the European Parliament;

6) again in respect of optional quality terms, the Commission's power to introduce delegated acts to reserve the use of terms and lay down the conditions of their use (Articles 28 and 29 of the Proposal) must take
account of existing quality terms for products whose specific characteristics

distinguish them from other similar products. This would enable a solution
to be found to certain problems relating to the recognition, including at
European level, of a number of typical Italian products or modes of
production; for example: "passata" (smooth sieved tomatoes) and "long" (or
"plum") peeled tomatoes;

7) further considering that in accordance with Regulation (EC) no.
509/2006, the Traditional Specialties Guaranteed (TSG) Register also
includes products whose name is not reserved, it would be appropriate to
put in place a procedure for changing the labelling of such products where
the producers of such products indicate their willingness to conform to the
new rules and opt for a name that can be registered and thus automatically
listed as a reserved name in the Register;

8) with regard to the indication of the origin of a product, we reiterate the
advisability of the mandatory inclusion on the label of the place of origin of
the raw agricultural materials used, at least in situations in which the origin
does not correspond to that displayed on the label of geographical
indication.

It is in any case essential to ensure that regulations that refer to this aspect
and are present in the various legislative proposals but not under
examination by European institutions are consistent with, in particular, the
provisions set forth in the aforementioned Regulation on the provision of
food information to consumers (COM (2008) 40), soon to be published in
the Official Journal of the European Union;

9) as regards the issue of controls on protected designations of origin,
protected geographical indications and traditional specialties guaranteed,
Member States, acting in accord with a standard frame of reference, need
to set up authorities that will be in charge of the preparation of the relevant
administrative and judicial measures. For the purpose of the foregoing, it
seems advisable to ensure the uniformity of the controls by, for example,
drawing up a set of protocols based on precise indications defined at
European level. In this connection, it should be noted that the Italian model
is one of the most advanced and effective, and offers a ready-made case
study on which to build up a body of shared best practices;

10) registered names also need to be protected against any direct or
indirect commercial exploitation by products that are not registered in cases
where the latter are comparable to the registered products, or where the
use of the name enables the unregistered product to exploit the reputation
attached to the name, even in cases in which a name is simply included in
a list of ingredients;
11) the various concerns expressed by the regions seem to point to the need for a scrupulous evaluation to be made of the possible consequences of a having different international systems of protection for wines and spirits and for food products, a sector that in terms of turnover is of significant importance for the preservation of European food culture and for the maintenance of lands used in production;

b) as far as the Proposal to amend Regulation (EC) n.1234/2007 on marketing standards (COM (2010) 738) is concerned:

1) regarding the need to make sure that the establishment of marketing standards takes account of the consumer's interest in receiving adequate and transparent information about the product, it is to be observed that the mandatory reference on the label to the "place of production" (article 112-e) needs to be made less generic, given that neither the definition of an "appropriate geographical level" nor the "case-by-case" approach appear to be sufficiently in line with the most recent recommendations as sanctioned in April 2011 in the legislative report by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety of the European Parliament that was prepared in response to the aforementioned Proposal for a Regulation on the provision of food information to consumers COM(2008)40, nor with the provision for the mandatory indication of origin for all agri-food products that was recently introduced to the Italian statute books through Law no. 4 of 3 February 2011. It would therefore be expedient to specify that the "place of production" signifies the place of crop cultivation or livestock breeding, i.e. the country of provenance of the agricultural product whether in its raw state or used as an ingredient in the preparation of a food;

2) it is essential that the European Union guarantees an adequate level of international protection of the PDO and PGI labels in bilateral agreements and in negotiations with the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and takes adequate measures to combat counterfeiting and piracy, which may also entail creating a register of protected products;

3) the Commission's power to adopt delegated acts to determine the content of marketing standards by sectors or products, a power granted by Article 112-e of the Proposal should be time-limited and applied in exceptional cases only to specific sectors or by way of a direct response to a market crisis. In no event should the power be extended to encompass essential parts of current legislation such as the definition, designation and/or sale description contained in Annex XII-a, for which ordinary legislative procedures are envisaged (as per article 290 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union). It is particularly important that during
the preparatory phase of the acts, the Commission always enters into appropriate consultation with representatives of the production chain;

4) the normal legislative procedure should also be followed when determining the conditions in which imported products are considered as providing an equivalent level of compliance with the Union requirements concerning marketing standards, and any derogations thereto;

c) finally, as regards the guidelines on best practices for voluntary certification systems and guidelines on the labelling of PDO and PGI products:

1) being thoroughly in agreement with the objective of protecting the reputation of quality products and without prejudice to the non-binding nature of the provisions for operators in the agri-food sector, we feel it is highly advisable to ensure the recommendations regarding the use of the registered names include a precise indicator of what quantity of PDO and PGI ingredients should be considered "sufficient" to have a bearing on the characteristics of the foodstuff, so that the image of PDO and PGI might not be compromised by a lack of clarity. It also seems expedient to get the producers themselves involved in determining the conditions of use of the said ingredients;

2) We find it necessary to re-propose the introduction of a definition pertaining to "traditional regional products" or to larger homogeneous areas. For the time being, this proposal has not been accepted, but as the Association of European Regions of Geographical Indications (AREPO) and others have pointed out, a voluntary-based scheme might offer the best opportunity for some small quality producers that are unable to undertake to more complex procedural steps towards recognition.