
GI development experience in Georgia

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Résumé

Georgia is one of the richest countries in terms of traditional agri-food products with quality features and reputation that can be clearly linked to their geographical origin. The country is on the path of building and consolidating an effective guarantee and quality control system on Geographical Indications. Two GI awarded Georgian cheeses, Sulguni and Tushetian Guda, represent the first results of this development process. These two traditional origin-linked cheeses are in fact the first products being registered and recognized in 2019 respectively as PGI and PAO with upgraded product specifications according to the newly developed GI scheme. Since 2017, the Biological Farming Association Elkana, with the support of FAO and EBRD, and in collaboration with public and private stakeholders, has been working on the country's GI development process. During a two-year work, Sulguni and Tushetian Guda producers were helped to upgrade the product specifications, develop internal control and start building a marketing and promotion strategy. The work and discussions held with producers to understand and agree on a common GI production process lasted nearly 2 years. Yet this is rather a short time if compared with the time needed in most of the cases observed in EU countries (lasting on average from 5 to 6 years or sometimes over 10 years). The approach relied on meetings with producers who had to reach consensus among themselves on the different steps of production. Quite quickly leaders emerged and took part systematically to all meetings, ensuring continuity in the debates and progress towards the finalization of the specifications. This process ensured the full participation of the main players of the supply chain allowing in-depth discussions on the critical points of the specifications and to a certain extent the circulation of the information among the producers' community. Simulation exercises of the certification process were organized with producers, certifiers and public authorities, as well as study tours in other countries for producers and public authorities to better understand the role and function of producers' groups managing GIs, GI promotion and marketing, etc. During this two-year work Elkana has gained experience in supporting GI value chains, proving that the active involvement of grassroot organizations is able to ensure in-country expertise beyond donors' projects, accompanying producer groups in their efforts to protect new GIs. The two-year work helped on triggering policy dialogue between private and public sector stakeholders, allowing to discuss, negotiate, and find commonly agreed solutions to different issues. In particular, this allowed the revision of the country's GI legal framework, the introduction of specific flexible rules for GI products to ensure food safety of cheeses produced on-farm or by small-scale dairies, and defining a control and certification system combining public and private control bodies. This is encouraging small producers to engage in the GI process that implies

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moving progressively from grey economy to formal economy. Such development is giving local producers more incentive to protect the country's natural resources and biodiversity, as in the case of Tushetian Guda producers in the Tusheti mountains.

Mots-Clés: Georgian Cheese, Food safety, small, scale dairies.