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LABELS FOR UNDERUTILIZED CROP SPECIES

Introduction

Today we see that consumers and food producers as well as food services are interested in local, traditional or sustainably produced fruits, vegetables or arable crops. This provides an excellent premise to label such products in order to make consumers aware of special product qualities, taste, shape and colour. Food labels are a tool to communicate the special quality of the produce to the consumer, especially if consumer and producer are not in direct contact. They are in front of a pack, use text or/and visual claims, logos, some are certified (organic, fairtrade) while others are not. The communication works:

- if there is awareness among consumers
- if there is sympathy for the topic and trust in the actors
- if there are products available to act.

DIVERSIFOOD first results

Labels for **underutilized crops**¹ are scarce on the European food market. The food quality labels promoted by the EU, e.g. PDO -*Protected Designation of Origin*, or PGI -*Protected Geographical Indication*, do not cover aspects of crop diversity, breeding process and seed origin. For organic production, the diversity of crops and varieties bred for organic farming is limited.

In the course of the DIVERSIFOOD project, different label concepts have been analysed and compared. Labels for „old underutilized crops” and labels for „newly bred varieties of underutilized crops” were included. Some good examples are given in Table 1.

Critical points for label development

Consumer Awareness – tell a story about seed quality

There is a trend of consumer interest in seeds of rare varieties. Not all labels and claims promoting rare/traditional/regional varieties include seed origin and seed quality, respectively, especially the EU wide PDO labels. Actions need to be put into place, to ensure that consumers understand the added values attached to labelled products. Possible measures to sensitise consumers towards these values include the use of social media (i.e. Facebook), field days, and information available at the point of sale. Participation in national and international events enables successful promotion of the products and the label to a large audience. If possible such events are even organised by the label organisation itself, letting the label be the event's headline.

Collaboration – invest in good product quality

The labels described below are a result of cooperation within the associations' and foundations' partner networks. We assume, that the different partners have had different skills but a similar motivation to develop a label or a special produce.

AT FIRST GLANCE

Information about regional or organic food is often given by the use of a label. In most cases, the origin of seeds is not addressed. Here are a few examples of labels for underutilized crops species.

Embedding crop diversity and networking for local high quality food systems

¹ See DIVERSIFOOD Innovation Factsheet #4 for a definition



Product availability – choose the point of sale carefully

In the cases of the Schoderleer Zwiebel and of PSR, the collaboration with the retailers SPAR, and Coop, respectively, further developed the labels, and products became more available for consumers. For other labels, the relations to hotels, restaurants, specialised stores and the catering sector could be more relevant.

Trust and credibility

Labels like «organic» or «fair trade» invested a lot in standard development and third partner certification to maintain trust. In the cases described above, third party certification is not established yet (PSR is working on it). For the consumer, trust in the product could be established based on personal contacts, farm visits and investment in relations along the supply chain.

Enabling environment

In the case of PSR, the Swiss implementation of the Convention on Biological Diversity was relevant to develop a professional approach to the conservation of genetic resources. However, the willingness of the retailer Coop to promote the label of PSR had the biggest impact. In the case of “Grani Antichi di Montespertoli”, the Italian framework for collective trademarks was relevant. For the Schoderleer Zwiebel and for the Champagner Bratbirne, the support and commitment of civil society organisations as Arche Noah and Slow Food is being relevant.

Other concepts

No label is directly associated to the so called Champagner Bratbirne – Champaign Pear. It is an individual manufacture brand of pear sparkling wines and it is also a SlowFood presidio. The SlowFood presidio is explicitly not a label. Instead of a label, there are flyers and the German slow food homepage describes the product. The product is sold mostly to the German market (95%) via direct marketing (20%), an online shop (20%), resellers and catering (60%).

Table1: Good examples of labels for underutilized crops

Label / Initiative	Label / Initiative Description	Markets
Pro Specie Rara - PSR PSR foundation	All kind of rare seeds and plants of cereals, vegetables, fruits, berries. Crops and processed products of rare varieties. Also livestock and ornamental plants.	Labelled products are available on local markets, in catering and in the large Swiss retailer, Coop. Starting in organic retailers in Germany.
Schoderleer Zwiebel Arche Noah Arche Noah Association	The «Schoderleer Zwiebel» is promoted in a supermarket in association with the logo of Arche Noah, which aims at preserving and promoting varieties in Austria.	Products are promoted by one of the larger retailers of Austria, SPAR, in line with similar products of traditional varieties.
Grani Antichi di Montespertoli owned by the “Associazione dei Grani Antichi di Montespertoli”. The association includes farmers, processors and consumers.	Products made from ancient cereal grains from the region of Montespertoli. The label fits within the framework of the Marchio Collettivo (Collective Trademark).	Short supply chains: Farmers' markets, farm shops, box schemes at the regional, national, international scale. Catering; Mills (flour). Specialised shops, small-medium size retailers, small bakeries, a school canteen.

Suggested readings

Asioli, Daniele, et al. "Making sense of the “clean label” trends: A review of consumer food choice behavior and discussion of industry implications." Food Research International 99 (2017): 58-71; Schrot&Korn 2016: Marken3Klang; Grani Antrichi di Montespertoli; Pro Specie rara (<https://www.prospecierara.ch/de/home>); Slow food Presidi (https://www.slowfood.de/biokulturelle_vielfalt/presidi/); Schodlerleer Zwiebel (http://slk.ages.at/fileadmin/eventpages/slk2011/daten/Beschreibungen_PDF/Schoderleer_Steckzwiebel_2015.pdf)

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