



GIS SMART

REPORT

Geographical Indications Conference

A Producers' Vision for the EU Action Plan on
Geographical Indications &
Launch of the GI SMART Community Platform

25-26 June 2025, Brussels



European Federation
of Origin Wines

EFOW



Organization for an european
Geographical Indications Network



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Summary

In the framework of the GI SMART project, AREPO, EFOW, and oriGIn EU organised a conference in Brussels on 25-26 June 2025 to officially launch the **GI SMART Community Platform**, a Europe-wide initiative connecting stakeholders committed to the sustainability of Geographical Indications (GIs).

The event provided GI producers with a platform to share experiences, challenges, and opportunities, ensuring their voices shape future research and policies. A key aim of the conference was to contribute to shaping the **EU Action Plan for GIs** by bringing forward the practical challenges and expectations of GI producers.

The conference also explored the role of GIs as a successful tool for sustainable rural development and as an attractive, competitive model for farmers and producers.

By showcasing the economic, cultural, and societal value of GIs, it emphasised why producers decide to embark on the GI path and the added value they bring to local communities and beyond.

GI SMART is a 4-year research project that will provide evidence-based recommendations to strengthen the contribution of geographical indications (GIs) to sustainable territorial development and the objectives of the EU Farm to Fork strategy.

To achieve this, GI SMART will develop tools and methodologies to foster the implementation of sustainability strategies by GIs producers, ensure their recognition by consumers, and formulate policy recommendations for a better design of GI policies.



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About the organisers



AREPO, the Association of European Regions for Products of Origin (www.arepoquality.eu), is a network of regions and producer associations that deals with products of origin and EU quality schemes.

It represents 35 European regions and over 800 associations of producers for over 60% of European GIs.



EFOW, the European Federation of Origin Wines (www.efow.eu), is the Brussels-based organisation representing PDO and PGI wines towards European institutions.

As the voice of origin wines, our mission is to protect and promote the GI concept in all policy areas.



oriGIn EU is the European branch of the global alliance of GIs (https://www.origin-gi.com/web_articles/origin-eu/). Its mission is to ensure better protection and promotion of GIs.

oriGIn EU represents individual European GIs groups as well as national GIs organisations.

Opening session

Christophe Hansen - Commissioner for Agriculture and Food



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Commissioner Christophe Hansen opened the conference by highlighting the central role of Geographical Indications (GIs) in the EU's agri-food policy. With over 3,660 registered names generating €75 billion annually, GIs are key economic and cultural assets that offer producers a significant market advantage.

He stressed the need to boost GI uptake, especially in Member States with untapped potential, and noted that consumer recognition remains low. Rather than amending the recently adopted GI Regulation, Hansen advocated for fully implementing it within a strategic framework aimed at increasing visibility,

supporting producers, and raising consumer awareness. He proposed initiatives such as targeted promotion campaigns, an annual EU GI Award, and stronger cooperation with supermarkets.

He also encouraged exploring GI use in public procurement policies, inspired by similar practices in the organic sector. On the global front, Commissioner Hansen emphasised the importance of strong GI protection through trade agreements and development through platforms like the GI SMART Community for sharing best practices.

He pointed to EU-funded innovation projects as essential tools for strengthening the credibility and sustainability of the GI system. He concluded by reaffirming his personal and the Commission's commitment to working with stakeholders to ensure GIs continue to grow as a success story for Europe's agriculture and rural development.



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[Click here to read the full speech](#)

Opening session

Adam Nowak – Undersecretary of State in the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development, Poland



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Mr Adam Nowak emphasized Poland's strong commitment to GIs, presenting them as a key pillar of the Polish Presidency of the EU Council.

He highlighted Poland's considerable potential in GI production and noted the symbolic use of the **Jabłko łuckie IGP** (apple) as the emblem of the presidency, underlining GIs' value in showcasing national identity and quality.

The Presidency was prioritizing the

resilience and competitiveness of the agricultural sector, focusing on developing robust and lasting solutions for farmers. In this context, GIs are seen as an essential tool to support sustainable agricultural development, protect cultural heritage, and foster regional diversity.

He noted the sector's growth, with over 3,000 registered products and more than half of EU agri-food exports to non-EU countries being GIs, underscoring their economic and market importance. To secure these benefits for the future, Mr Nowak called for a strong and ambitious EU GI Action Plan, urging policymakers to view GIs as a long-term strategy to strengthen resilience, competitiveness, and integration in Europe's agricultural sector.



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Opening session

Alessio Mammi – Minister for Agriculture, Agri-food, Hunting and Fishing, Relations with the EU of Emilia Romagna Region



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Minister Alessio Mammi stressed GIs role in promoting a “democracy of food”, since they ensure **fairer distribution of value** and revenues across networks of farmers, producers, and territories.

He called for **stronger support to address market inequalities**, linking GIs to both environmental and digital transitions. Mr Mammi urged a global promotion strategy to raise awareness of GIs, especially among younger generations, and to expand their visibility beyond Europe.

He called for a Multiannual Financial Framework with dedicated agricultural funds, warning that a single nationally managed fund could undermine subsidiarity, and advocating for regionally inclusive approaches.

He insisted on **the need for a GI Action Plan that is ambitious, actionable, and timely.**

He also encouraged recognizing **GIs as key tools for tourism and food education**, proposing their **inclusion in public procurement and fostering alliances with restaurants.** He concluded by suggesting a preferential tax system for GIs to make quality, origin-linked food more accessible and visible.



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Launch of the GI SMART Community Platform

Armelle Mazé, Senior Researcher, INRAE and Coordinator of GI SMART Project

Dr. Armelle Mazé presented the [GI SMART project](#) and its [Community Platform](#), a milestone in the research journey of the project and an opportunity to collaboratively shape the future of GIs. In fact, this platform is not only about research results but also about working with producers and stakeholders in a [participatory process aimed at enhancing the sustainability of GIs](#).

GI SMART tackles key challenges such as consumer awareness, implementation of the new EU regulation, and the role of GIs in promoting public goods, cultural heritage, animal welfare, and rural development, especially in mountainous and marginal areas.

Dr Mazé delved into the four research focus areas of the project:

- RF1: Optimizing the use of existing data at national and EU levels
- RF2: Understanding and enhancing producer practices for sustainability
- RF3: Benchmarking GI-related policies across Europe
- RF4: Engaging with consumers and understanding perceptions



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She explained that the community platform is designed to complement existing initiatives, by including diverse stakeholder voices, building upon existing knowledge and fostering dialogue and collaboration.

The platform uses [Multi-Actor Platforms \(MAPs\)](#) at national level to encourage structured exchanges. These have already begun in several countries since May – June 2025.

The process will span three years, including workshops, online meetings, and surveys, with the next steps scheduled for autumn 2025, with a workshop on GI producer recognition systems and another one involving consumer organizations.

Dr Mazé concluded by underlining that the project's originality lies in [its co-creation approach and its ambition to produce concrete impacts, not just academic results](#). The collection of practices, case studies, and producer input are central to the initiative's success in shaping a more resilient, inclusive, and sustainable GI system for the future.





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Panel 1: Why choose the GI path?

This panel, moderated by Juliane Schäfer, Weingut Klosterhof (Rheinhessen Wine), broadened the usual narrative surrounding GIs, which often centers on well-known products from southern Europe, by bringing forward the voices of producers from less represented regions.

By showcasing experiences from countries like the Netherlands, Czech Republic, Romania, Belgium, and Finland, the discussion highlighted the diversity of motivations and impacts associated with GIs and the importance of reinforcing the GI system.

Martin Chlad from the Czech Winegrowers' Association (Svaz vinařů ČR) explained that before 1995, wine production in the Czech Republic lacked formal legislation and followed basic norms.

With the introduction of a viticulture law in 1995, the country adopted a system inspired by the German model, incorporating the European PDO and PGI classifications and dividing the country into two wine regions.

The move toward the GI system was motivated by the need to align with EU standards, ensure quality control, and protect the reputation of Czech wines through origin-based labelling. While the GI framework has brought structure and credibility to the sector, Mr Chlad noted that **the process for approving and updating specifications remains complex and not always transparent**. However, good cooperation with national authorities and recent steps toward digitalization have brought practical benefits, improving efficiency and helping the sector move forward.

Simone Crone from the Vereniging Nederlandse Wijn Producenten (VNWP) explained that the growth of viticulture in the Netherlands over the past 25 years has been driven by climate change – particularly increased sunlight and warmth – and the development of disease-resistant grape varieties, mainly from Switzerland and Germany.

Since around 2010, Dutch wine producers have increasingly turned to PDO/PGI schemes to add value to their wines. The GI path was chosen not only to enable quality wine labelling and establish clear product specifications, but also to **foster cooperation between producers, create a unified quality image, and support wine-related tourism.**

The PDO framework helps in marketing efforts, although challenges remain in making geographic names appealing to consumers. Events and public outreach around PDOs are essential to building awareness.



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The PGI Salam de Sibiu, a traditional Romanian cured meat and the country's first PGI for meat products were represented by **Andru Sandu Capra.**

He explained that the decision to pursue PGI status came from **the need to protect reputation, standardise the recipe, prevent abuse and counterfeiting, and access EU promotional funding.**

Despite major legal and structural hurdles, the process proved valuable. Key challenges were to unite competing producers in one association, navigating numerous legal oppositions, and handling intellectual property disputes. He emphasised that PGI status offers legal clarity, credibility, and financial opportunities.

Mr Sandu Capra called for **stronger enforcement mechanisms** against infringers, more support for **helping competitors collaborate within producer associations, simplified registration procedures** to reduce legal uncertainty, and the continued availability of **EU funding for promotion efforts.**

Steve Podevyn, the President of the producers' association of PGI Miel Wallon, a traditional honey from Wallonia (Belgium) welcomed the recent PGI recognition (February 2025) which came after 30 years of effort.

He highlighted the long and sometimes discouraging journey that began decades ago with the aim of safeguarding quality and heritage in a sector threatened by globalised and less controlled honey imports.

He described the PGI as a powerful tool to highlight both the product and the beekeepers' skills, with a strict traceability system covering every stage. He welcomed the promotion policy, saying that strong promotion will help the public associate the PGI logo with true quality.

Mr Podevyn called for continued support for associations to help with administrative processes, better promotion to raise awareness among both producers and consumers, and long-term efforts to keep the PGI system active and meaningful beyond registration.



Pauliina Kovanen producers of PGI Suonenjoen Mansikka, strawberries from Suonenjoki, Finland's strawberry capital, with a PGI status since 2023 shared her views on the GI system.

She explained how unique climate conditions give the strawberries their special taste and justified the PGI recognition based on long-standing tradition and quality.

While local shops and restaurants have embraced the PGI, many producers and traders are still unfamiliar with the GI system, making its implementation difficult. Concerns include fear of added paperwork, possible sanctions, and uncertainty about the benefits.

To tackle these issues, a "strawberry team" was formed before the PGI registration to bring together farmers, communication experts, and local actors. An EU-funded project was also launched to build awareness and cooperation across the value chain.

Ms Kovanen called for better promotion of the GI concept, especially at wholesale and retail levels, more collaboration with restaurants, tourism, and local festivals, and support to make GI use simpler and more attractive for producers and traders.





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Panel 2: Challenges arising from the EU Regulations

This panel discussion, moderated by lawyer **Monica Minelli**, proved valuable in shedding light on the various **challenges** that **GI producer groups** face when implementing EU regulations, extending beyond the specific GI framework and rules. It explored how regulatory processes at the national and EU level could be made more practical and supportive for GI producers.



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Maximilian Hendgen, Director of PDO Mosel, highlighted the structural and financial challenges facing Germany's PDO system via the example of PDO Mosel.

Although the EU framework was introduced in 2009, Germany only established its Schutzgemeinschaften (producer groups) in 2018. These groups, run by traditional wine associations without additional resources, now also manage PDOs, even though not all producers are members, leading to issues of representation.

The legal and administrative demands have grown increasingly complex, placing a heavy burden on these wine associations, who also face court proceedings in some cases. The new EU GI Regulation 2024/1143 adds further uncertainty around legal structure, liability, and producer definitions.

The main challenge, however, is financing. While all producers benefit from PDO status, not all contribute financially. Unlike other EU countries, Germany lacks legal mechanisms to ensure mandatory funding.

Maximilian called for solutions inspired by some Member States practices to create a fair, sustainable, and inclusive model for PDO management in Germany



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Carolina Martínez Origone, Secretary General of PDO Jumilla, emphasised that recent EU policies have shifted attention toward sustainability, often at the expense of the core value of GIs as guarantees of origin and quality. She noted that GI wines face discrimination in funding and promotion compared to products with environmental labels, despite adhering to strict standards.

A major challenge is the EU's vineyard restructuring policy, which in Spain has sometimes led to the replacement of traditional, high-quality local grape

varieties with others that are not typical of the region and of lower quality. In Jumilla, a semi-arid area, this is especially problematic because the traditional cultivation relies on low-yield vines with minimal irrigation, essential both for the unique character of the wine and for sustainability.

The restructuring policies, however, have sometimes encouraged broader irrigation and changes that undermine these traditional, environmentally adapted practices. Ms Martínez Origone called for future EU policies to better support GIs by recognising their unique conditions and contributions, ensuring that their protection and promotion are prioritised.

Fulvio Blanchet, Director of the consortium for Fontina PDO, underlined that despite being a small-scale product, Fontina cheese is often counterfeited internationally, partly due to Italian diaspora producing it abroad, making GI protection vital.

His intervention focused on the legal and intellectual property challenges linked to protecting PDO names within and beyond the EU.



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He highlighted problems faced by producer groups in **registering collective trademarks**, especially under new EUIPO guidelines that may weaken GI protection.

Mr Blanchet called for **better coordination across EU institutions and WIPO on GI protection**, mandatory use of the PDO logo, stronger rules to prevent misuse of GI names in trademarks, and action to ensure that GIs cannot be privately trademarked and transferred if producers leave the GI control system.



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Philippe Vincensini, President of Salameria Corsa representing the PDO Charcuteries de Corse, established to protect Corsican cured meat products explained that three PDOs have been protected since 2014: Coppa de Corse, Jambon Sec de Corse, and Lonzo de Corse.

They are all made from the local Porc Nustrale breed raised in Corsican mountains. He highlighted ongoing legal challenges posed by the registration of seven PGIs under the “Île de Beauté” name – which is a synonym of Corsica in French,

including three overlapping with the existing PDOs.

He lamented France’s approval of these PGIs, which undermines the strong geographical indication protection that PDOs require.

He also underlined that Salameria Corsa has initiated legal proceedings before the European Court to annul the Commission’s decision to register the other four PGIs, with the case currently pending. **Mr Vincensini called for robust enforcement of GI laws to safeguard the integrity and reputation of Corsican charcuterie.**



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Intervention by the Chair and Co-Chairs of the EP Intergroup on Wine, Quality Food and Spirits

The conference was followed by a cocktail with a tasting of GI products.

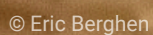
The cocktail was inaugurated by **MEP Eric Sargiacomo**, co-chair of the European Parliament Intergroup on Wine, Quality Food and Spirits, and **MEPs Enikő Győri** and **Carlo Fidanza**, Vice-Chairs.

They emphasized their strong commitment to supporting quality products and GIs, particularly in the context of the ongoing reform of the wine package and the upcoming CAP and MFF negotiations. They stressed the need for **quick and concrete action, greater simplification and flexibility for Member States, and a regulatory approach that informs rather than penalizes.**

MEPs Fidanza and Győri emphasized that

GIs must be preserved and celebrated by future generations. In light of geopolitical instability and how it affects the global market, **they called for better communication on GIs, moderate alcohol messaging when it comes to wine GIs, and stronger support for rural economies.**

Co-chair Eric Sargiacomo underlined the collective and territorial development model behind GIs, rooted in ambitious specifications and local know-how. He stressed the **importance of research and methodological support**, particularly to help newer or Eastern EU countries develop their GI systems. He concluded stressing that **GIs are strategic tools for rural development that must evolve without undermining fair prices and farmer remuneration.**





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Panel 3: Economic challenges – building a competitive environment for GIs

The second day of the conference was opened by **César Saldaña**, Vice President of AREPO, who summarized the key takeaways from the first day of the conference, posing a series of questions to spark the debates of the second day.

Panel 3 opened the discussions. This panel, moderated by Céline Keidel, Deputy Head of Unit, European Commission, DG

AGRI, provided an opportunity to discuss the economic challenges faced by GI producers and the strategies they use to remain competitive in evolving markets.

Discussions covered key issues such as market tools, the constraints of EU competition law, the role of promotion, and the rising costs of protecting GIs in the digital age.



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Damien Gilles, President of the Syndicat Général des Côtes du Rhône, highlighted the economic crisis affecting the wine sector and his PDO, where production costs far exceed market prices, as over 60% of Côtes du Rhône vineyards are engaged in sustainable practices (organic & Haute Valeur Environnementale).

To address this, the syndicate **introduced indicative price guidelines** from 2010 to 2017 to bring market transparency. Although **voluntary and non-binding**, the initiative was sanctioned by the French Competition Authority, exposing a disconnect between EU law, which allows some coordination in GI sectors, and its strict national enforcement.

To foster a more competitive economic environment for GIs, Mr Gilles **called for legal recognition of GI producers' right to economic coordination, clearer European regulations, and better alignment between GI policy and competition law**. This would help balance sustainability, economic viability, and the territorial values at the heart of GIs.



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Giacomo Savorini, Director of the Consorzio Tutela Lambrusco, presented **Lambrusco as a case study of how GIs can restore value and recognition to a product through collective action**. Once reduced to the stereotype of a sweet, fizzy red wine, Lambrusco is reclaiming its authenticity and market position thanks to strategic efforts led by the Consorzio.

He emphasised that Lambrusco's strength lies in its dual identity: as a family of native grape varieties and as a system of PDOs spanning Modena, Reggio Emilia, Parma, and Mantova. While this complexity brings challenges in recognition and legal protection abroad, it also reflects a deep connection to the land and cultural heritage.

To counter outdated perceptions Lambrusco has adopted a bold marketing approach, promoting the wine in iconic global locations such as Paris, Matera, and Monte Bianco, with New York planned for 2026.

These campaigns highlight Lambrusco's versatility, quality, and international appeal. In an era where GIs are called to support sustainable rural development and competitiveness, Mr Savorini explained that Lambrusco stands as an example of how strong collective branding, rooted in authenticity and vision, can transform a product's image and secure its place in global markets.

Alberto Ribeiro de Almeida, Legal Affairs Director at PDO Porto and Douro, emphasised that GIs are not only valuable economic tools but also carriers of cultural heritage. In the digital era, they enhance competitiveness, support sustainability, and benefit the entire supply chain.



He stressed that strong legal protection and enforcement are essential to preserve the reputation and distinctiveness of GIs, which rely on producer groups, product specifications, and certification bodies. However, such protection comes with significant costs - financial, legal, and administrative - which cannot be taken for granted and must be strategically managed.

This includes registration, international agreements, and action against misuse, imitation, and online exploitation. Mr Ribeiro de Almeida noted that the European Union Intellectual Property Office (EUIPO) often applies a restrictive interpretation of comparability, which can limit GI protection.

Nonetheless, he argued that GIs must be defended against any use that exploits or harms their reputation. Despite existing safeguards, GIs remain vulnerable to dilution, misappropriation, and unfair competition. Protecting their selling power is vital to preserving both the long-term investments of producers and the cultural identity they embody.

Alain Mathieu, President of the PDO Comté and producer of milk, explained that since 1992, Comté production and sales have doubled, thanks to European and French regulatory systems that stabilise the sector.

The Comté cheese association sets up three years production plans and conducts biannual reviews to adjust them as necessary.

This production planning in accordance with market expectations has benefited Comté for decades, preventing surpluses and allowing for a better management of the filiera. **Decisions are made democratically, requiring a two-third majority for approval.**

He underlined that **GI supply management tools are available** for all GI products since the latest reform of the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). **Mr Mathieu called for simplification of CAP rules on this tool, proposing that a blocking minority of one-third – rather than requiring two-thirds agreement – should suffice to approve binding supply regulations.**

This change could ease the administrative burden on producer groups and improve the governance of GI products.



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Maciej Majewski from PGI Jabłka Grójeckie, a Polish apple with a 500-year heritage linked to Queen Bona Sforza explained that despite its historical roots, the sector is relatively young and faces strong pressure from supermarkets seeking to bypass the PGI label by purchasing apples cheaply, undermining the product's value.

He highlighted efforts to improve product communication, including developing a distinctive logo. **He stressed the importance of agreements with many supermarkets guaranteeing fair prices for producers.** Mr Majewski also called for improving the EU promotion policies, which currently limit their ability to effectively market PGI Jabłka Grójeckie (no continuity between the campaigns they participated in) and requested stronger support to enhance promotional efforts.





Panel 4: Social challenges – GIs and the rural fabric

This panel, moderated by **Carmen Martinez**, Secretary General of the PDO Valencia, addressed the social challenges faced by GI producers, highlighting how Geographical Indications serve not only as quality labels but as vital anchors for rural identity, cohesion, and generational renewal.

Through diverse examples— from Jura's Vin Jaune and Tokaj's wine culture to Sardinian lamb and Irish whiskey—

speakers underscored the importance of education, strong community governance, fair economic conditions, and cultural heritage in ensuring the long-term sustainability of GI systems across Europe.

Valérie Closset, President of the Société de Viticulture du Jura, underscored the vital role that GIs play in sustaining rural life, using Vin Jaune as an example. This unique wine, produced through a time-



intensive and traditional process, is deeply connected to the Jura region's identity, culture, and economy. Despite representing just 1.6% of the region's agricultural land, viticulture accounts for 20% of its agricultural value and supports over 1,000 direct jobs. Ms Closset emphasised that **Vin Jaune is not just a product but a collective heritage, shaped by terroir, climate, and human tradition.**

Events like La Percée du Vin Jaune bring together entire communities, mobilising hundreds of volunteers and attracting thousands of visitors, reinforcing intergenerational ties and local pride.

However, she also warned of mounting challenges: from climate variability and the long production cycle to economic pressures that demand quick returns, particularly difficult for young producers. Governance within small rural sectors is also fragile, relying heavily on personal volunteerism that is increasingly difficult to sustain.



Péter Molnar, President of PDO Tokaj, emphasised the deep connection between Tokaj wine and its territory, highlighting its cultural significance and historical roots. Since 1989, the region has been committed to sustainable practices to harness its rich and diverse terroirs. Mr Molnar stressed that the sustainability of Tokaj wine depends on strong collaboration among professionals, researchers, and educators.

Key challenges in social sustainability include the **need for educated professionals at all levels**, the vertical harmonization of sustainable education, and the imparting of **up-to-date practical knowledge with robust foundational and adaptational skills**. Research is crucial for addressing professional challenges and providing practical solutions.

Knowledge exchange is enhanced through international collaborations in education and research, including partnerships with WOA, Oenoviti International, Vinifera Euromaster, and the Tokaj Wine Congress. This integrated approach underscores the essential role of social sustainability in the development and future of PDO Tokaj.

Nikolaos Birlirakis, President of the Beekeeping Cooperative of Rethymno “Thymos” involved in PDO Pefkothymaromelo Kritis (honey), described beekeeping in Crete as a cultural tradition stretching back over 7,000 years, deeply woven into the island’s rural identity and passed down through generations. Today, the island is home to about 2,000 beekeepers producing roughly 2,500 tons of honey annually, making Crete a leading honey producer both in Greece and worldwide.

This expertise is mostly transmitted within families, but is also supported by institutions like the Mediterranean University and the Ministry of Agriculture, which encourage training, innovation, and the sharing of best practices, e.g. in packaging and marketing.

However, producers face challenges such as low market prices and competition from imported honey, which threaten the PDO’s viability. They are calling for stronger institutional backing to enhance the domestic and international profile of

Pefkothymaromelo Kritis. Looking ahead, many beekeepers see tourism as a potential growth driver. Although agritourism is still limited, initiatives like “honey routes” are being developed to welcome visitors and showcase traditional methods. Interest is rising, but further investments in infrastructure and equipment are needed, along with regional support—especially in light of major projects like the new international airport planned for 2027.

Battista Cualbu, President of the PGI Agnello di Sardegna and producer, shared that the PGI guarantees high-quality lamb from Sardinian sheep raised on natural pastures, sustaining a pastoral tradition passed down for generations.

He stressed the need to protect rural economies from depopulation by supporting generational renewal. He called for EU funding for training programmes, technical education, and apprenticeships to attract and equip young farmers. Highlighting innovative partnerships, he showcased an integration project with Kyrgyz workers to address labour shortages.



He also urged investment in modern infrastructure, fair pricing, and stronger promotion of GI products on global markets. Furthermore, he underlined the PGI's contribution to experiential tourism and Sardinia's gastronomic identity, which draws visitors to discover local culture and cuisine.

Mr Cualbu concluded by urging the EU to defend its rural heritage through structural support for PGIs and sustainable pastoralism.

June O'Connell from the PGI Irish Whiskey shared that the PGI status ensures authenticity, preserving the strong geographic and cultural link to Ireland.

She highlighted the critical role of consumer and producer confidence in the GI system, underlining the need for **clear labelling and robust checks**.

She called on the EU to defend the integrity of PGIs – not just for companies, but for workers, communities, and tradition-bearers who invest in quality without shortcuts. She warned that without firm protection, trust and brand equity risk being eroded.

Ms O'Connell also stressed the importance of strengthening the connection between whiskey production and tourism, through education, guided routes, and cultural storytelling.







Panel 5: Environmental challenges – promoting biodiversity and natural habitats

This panel, moderated by Nicola Dall'Olio, Policy Officer for Agriculture, Emilia-Romagna Region, explored concrete experiences demonstrating how GIs are evolving from individual farming practices into territorial models of certified sustainability.

Discussions highlighted the role of GIs as tools for environmental governance, resilience, and cohesion, emphasizing the dynamic relationship between sustainability, biodiversity, and international competitiveness.

María de la Paz Gil, Secretary General of PDO Tacoronte-Acentejo, highlighted the urgent environmental challenges facing viticulture in this unique Atlantic Island landscape.

Located in a region highly exposed to climate change, winegrowers are dealing with rising temperatures, irregular vine growth, and declining rainfall. In this context, the PDO serves as a key structure to support climate adaptation, balancing tradition with innovation. Rather than focusing solely on productivity, Tacoronte-Acentejo has embraced a sustainability-first approach.



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The PDO promotes practices that protect biodiversity and natural habitats, such as reducing chemical inputs, adjusting vineyard management to changing seasons, and supporting soil and ecosystem health.

These efforts have been possible thanks to strong collaboration with producers and public institutions like the Cabildo de Tenerife and the University of La Laguna. She argued that GIs must be recognised also as drivers of environmental resilience.

Ms de la Paz Gil called for stronger EU support and greater public awareness of the environmental value of GI products, so that these traditional systems can lead the transition toward a more climate-adapted and biodiversity-friendly agriculture.

Andrea Rossi, President of PDO Vino Nobile di Montepulciano, highlighted the **Consorzio's crucial role in promoting environmental sustainability**. Since the 1980s, the Consorzio has led initiatives such as integrated pest management and innovative land zoning, establishing a robust foundation for sustainable wine production.

Over the decades, **the Consorzio has spearheaded collective projects**, including converting vineyard waste into biomass for energy, which has benefited local schools and administrative buildings.

The 2015 Carbon Footprint project, recognized as a national model, showcased the impact of collective action in reducing CO2 emissions and was

awarded as a "Smart Community". With the Consorzio's support, members have widely adopted sustainable technologies, investing in photovoltaic systems, solar thermal energy, and wastewater recovery systems.

These efforts reached a milestone with the Equalitas territorial certification in May 2022, which has brought economic benefits and enhanced the competitiveness of their sustainable products. **Mr Rossi underscored that the Consorzio's unified approach has been key to achieving significant environmental and economic benefits, illustrating the power of collective action in driving sustainability.**



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Delphine Georgelet, producer of PDO cheeses Mothais sur Feuille and Chabichou du Poitou, spoke about how goat farming is closely linked to the local land and environment. For her PDO cheeses, at least 85% of the animal feed must come from the local area.

This supports traditional farming and protects the soil. But it is hard for farmers to find land, so she asked that PDO and PGI farmers get priority when land is sold. She said farms need to modernise, using tools like AI to find and manage pastures, and new methods like drying hay in barns to deal with climate change.

She also said that training in animal care and farming skills is essential. She asked the EU to help livestock farmers with local feed, better equipment, and support for energy independence.



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Ms Georgelet ended by saying that raw milk cheeses are healthy, good for nature, and an important part of local tradition and called for them to be protected.

A central theme raised during the panel was the profound link between GIs and landscape, particularly in the case of PDOs. Beyond environmental and sustainability considerations, GIs, and especially PDOs, are closely tied to the landscape as a cultural and human construct.

These landscapes reflect the interaction between people and their environment, shaped by centuries of agricultural practices, traditions, and identity.



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Bernadette Gruber presented the PDO Ennstaler Steirerkas, a traditional mold-ripened cheese made from skimmed alpine milk in Austria's Styria region.

She explained that Steirerkas reflects a centuries-old Alpine way of life, based on low-impact farming on permanent

grasslands without machinery, where biodiversity, tradition, and sustainability are closely intertwined. Such farming systems maintain ecological balance while generating economic and cultural value, especially for small-scale farmers who combine production with gentle tourism.

The rich biodiversity of alpine pastures, with cows grazing on hundreds of plant species, produces nutrient-rich milk high in omega-3s, vitamins, and antioxidants, contributing to both product quality and human health. Steirerkas is also recognised for its positive effects on the gut microbiome.

Ms. Gruber concluded by calling for stronger European support for mountain farming and GI products that preserve these landscapes.

Furthermore, Mr Dall'Olio, the moderator highlighted that GI-shaped landscapes represent a non-monetised value underpinning tourism appeal and social cohesion, and should be more explicitly recognised and studied. They are a synthesis of nature, culture, and identity, forming a diverse yet unified European landscape.

Adding to this, **Gabriele Trinker**, Director of the Sölktäler Nature Park, noted that one of the roles of the nature park is to support alpine farmers in preventing the overgrowth of alpine pastures, ensuring their continued existence and the preservation of the landscapes that sustain both biodiversity and local heritage.



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Concluding remarks

The Presidents of the three organizing associations – AREPO (the Association of European Regions for Products of Origin), EFOU (the European Federation of Origin Wines) and oriGIn EU (the European association of GI producer groups) concluded the Conference.

Charles Deparis (oriGIn EU) highlighted the richness of the event, underlining the wide diversity of GI products and producers present.

He stressed that while GIs offer significant economic, social, environmental, and cultural benefits, several challenges remain—such as uneven uptake across Member States, insufficient promotion and protection (both within and outside the EU), high compliance costs, and barriers for young or small-scale producers.

President Deparis called for better integration of GIs in broader EU policies and reaffirmed the sector's strategic role in biodiversity, rural cohesion, and tourism.

Alessandro Beduschi (AREPO) positioned the conference as a springboard for future action, notably through the launch of a Europe-wide survey to assess the implementation of the new GI Regulation and feed into the upcoming European GI Action Plan to be launched by the European Commission

President Beduschi emphasized the critical role of regions in supporting GIs, and invited all stakeholders to engage actively via the GI SMART Community Platform launched during the conference, to foster innovation and dialogue in the GI sector.

Riccardo Ricci Curbastro (EFOW) delivered a strong political message calling on EU institutions and national governments to scale up their support for GIs. He warned that the future of the GI system is not guaranteed and urged the EU to make GIs a central pillar of the post-2027 Common Agricultural Policy.

This includes dedicated funding, regulatory support, and stronger tools for promotion and protection. President Ricci Curbastro concluded with a **call for the swift publication of the long-awaited GI Action Plan and for 2026 to become the year of concrete progress.**



Geographical Indications Conference

*A Producers' Vision for the EU
Action Plan on
Geographical Indications &
Launch of the GI SMART
Community Platform*

