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BACKGROUND PAPER

PANEL: SUSTAINABILITY AND GIs

1. OBJECTIVES

This panel will examine the **sustainability of products** designated by geographical indications (GIs) in light of three aspects: economic, environmental and social. In particular, in respect of the social and environmental dimensions, the panel will look how the GI schemes have the potential to **enhance sustainability** of agri-food production systems and rural economic activity.

Products designated by GIs owe their characteristics or reputation to the natural environment in which they are produced and to the *savoir faire* of the producers. By their nature, therefore, GIs are **intrinsically linked to the natural environment** in the place of production and as well as **to social factors**.

GI production impacts and engages the local population through rural **employment**, valorising **skills** of local producers, using and preserving **traditional** methods, and **anchoring** product having recognised qualities to a given territory.

Currently, many GIs yield considerable economic, environmental and social benefits; many other GIs have **potential** dependant on the extent of **commitment of the GI producer group** to embrace social conditions, environmental concerns, climate adaptation and mitigation, and animal welfare standards.

A recent [open public consultation](#) on the evaluation of policy has shown that 72% of respondents agreed that GIs ‘contribute to the preservation and development of rural areas’ (i.e. their socio-economic sustainability, as well as cultural and gastronomic heritage). Slightly more than half of the respondents are of the opinion that they contribute to ‘protecting the natural resources or landscape’, while a lower percentage (38%) consider GIs also to contribute to ‘improving the welfare of farm animals’.

2. CHALLENGES

The [Farm-to-Fork Strategy](#) calls for a transition towards sustainable food systems and specifically identifies the need to **better integrate sustainability** into GI development and management.

GIs can be primary vehicles for delivering sustainable production and, in many cases, contributing to the green transition. Across the GI community, there is a growing awareness of the need for better **sustainability outcomes** from GI production, and **publicise** the intrinsic sustainability credentials of GIs where these are already delivered.

External pressures may affect local traditions and the way to produce GIs. Climate change (both mitigation and adaptation needs) and enhanced environmental requirements, for example, may require GI producer groups to look at ways to ensure sustainability and permanence of the GI in the territory, including their regulatory and management aspects.

Specific environmental outcomes and social standards – beyond the legal minimum – are not part-and-parcel of many GI specifications. Nor are there legislation requirements for such conditions. Producers may be concerned if additional requirements (and costs) are placed on GIs that are not applied to non-GI products.

In sum the panel is an opportunity to debate:

- **current state** of sustainable ‘performance’ of the GI schemes;
- identify ways to define the **target levels** of sustainable outcome
- **vehicles and tools** that can be used to achieve those outcomes, such as regulatory tools; private initiative; incentives and role of rural development policy; and the use of labelling.

3. QUESTIONS :

- (1) How could the sustainability aspects of GIs be reinforced?
- (2) Which tools and incentives will enable GI producers to best meet the environmental, climate and animal welfare challenges while ensuring their long-term benefits?
- (3) How could clear information on sustainability aspects of GIs be best conveyed to consumers?
- (4) How could the sustainability performance of GI production be verified?

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