

REPORT OF AREPO NATIONAL MEETINGS

Due to the precarious sanitary conditions following the COVID-19 outbreak, AREPO decided to organise its annual General Assembly online and in a new format.

A short version of the General Assembly, dedicated to the Statutory part, took place on the Interactio platform on September 28th 2020, assuring interpretation in all AREPO working languages. As concerns the Thematic part, in the weeks following the GA, AREPO held virtual Zoom meetings with groups of member Regions and producers' representatives from the same Member State with the aim to facilitate the participation of all members and simplify the discussion, avoiding linguistic difficulties.

The following national meetings have been held:

- 08/10/2020 - Meeting with Greek regions and producers' representatives;
- 12/10/2020 – Meeting with Italian regions and producers' representatives;
- 21/10/2020 – Meeting with Spanish regions and producers' representatives;
- 23/10/2020 – Meeting with French regions and producers' representatives;
- 26/10/2020 – Meeting with Portuguese regions and producers' representatives;
- 30/10/2020 – Meeting with German regions and producers' representatives.

Simultaneous interpretation has been provided for meetings with Greek, Portuguese and German members.

THEMATIC PART

This report intends to resume the main feedback and suggestions received in each national meeting. Therefore, it will focus on the outcome of the exchange between AREPO and its members on some of the items on the agenda.

With regards to the in-depth update on EU policies and the activities carried out by AREPO in the last semester, we invite you to consult the [activity report](#) and the [presentations](#) delivered during the virtual meetings.

Specific priorities of AREPO member regions

National meetings served as privileged channel of discussion with each member region, allowing for some of them to introduce specific priorities to be discussed and monitored later on. Furthermore, in every national meeting, members have appreciated the online format of the discussion, pointing out the interest in having other and more frequent meeting of this type.

AREPO member regions from Germany laid stress on National quality schemes. Particularly, as of their contribution in terms of sustainability, they should be better taken into account by EU policy-makers as viable options to achieve some of the main goals of the Farm to Fork strategy. As a result, AREPO is planning to organize a meeting centred on this topic with its German members. The main aim should be to better understand this subject and learn from existing good practices. The participation to this meeting should be extended to South-Tyrol as guest.

Members from Portugal (Açores and Alentejo) recalled the peculiarities of their products and territories, as well as the difficulties they encounter. In fact, quality products from these regions are mainly produced by small farmers, who need to be better supported by EU, in order to be able to better compete on the market. This is why quality policy is one of the main agricultural priority since

small producers can compete through quality on the market. Furthermore, small producers are more dedicated to put in place sustainability practices, articulating quality with it. Nevertheless, quality is seldom reflected in prices to consumers and there's a reduced knowledge concerning quality products. Additionally, the impact of quality schemes is limited by complex and time-consuming procedures for the registration of a products. This could even worsen when it comes to small productions put forward by a restrained number of producers who struggle to find the means to obtain a new qualification.

Evaluation of EU quality policy: update and presentation of AREPO position

The ongoing process of review of EU Quality schemes remain the priority of AREPO activity. Members have confirmed their approval for the work carried out so far and the results achieved, backing the position presented to EU Institutions.

Farm to fork strategy and EC initiative on a mandatory front of pack nutrition labelling

The debate over Farm to Fork strategy involved deep reflections concerning **the notion of sustainability as well as some limits identified in the approach proposed by the EC.**

Some AREPO members have already been working on some studies on sustainability at regional level.

During the meeting with French members, the key findings of some of these studies (Occitanie and Hauts-de-France) fed into the discussion. Particularly, the region of Hauts-de-France in the last two years has been working on a study concerning a **methodology to communicate on sustainability**, focused on assessing the environmental, social and economic aspects of sustainability of products under quality schemes. Through the INAO they had to opportunity to present the research to the FAO. The region would like to combine this work with the FAO SAFA methodology in order to extend the sustainability assessment to the whole supply chain. In addition, in 2021 they would like to include a focus on the positive nutritional impact of GIs on health, going beyond the information provided by Nutriscore. Once the study concluded, they are available to share the findings with other regions.

In this respect, **in 2021 AREPO intends to organise some meetings devoted to the presentation of the FAO guide concerning GI ex-ante and ex-post evaluation**, once it will be published.

In the overarching framework of Farm to Fork strategy, members agreed on the orientation adopted by AREPO of insisting on a **holistic view on sustainability**. As a matter of facts, focusing only on carbon-efficiency could damage quality products, especially those coming from outermost regions and remote areas due to transport. On the contrary, AREPO approach should emphasize that GIs have a high impact on social sustainability, since most of them involve small and family enterprises, as well as their contribution to the protection of landscape.

Furthermore, with regards to the **inclusion of sustainability criteria for GIs**, the discussions revealed that members are more in favour of a **non-legislative and voluntary initiative**, especially to avoid red tapes, hence supporting the approach mentioned by the GI Unit of DG Agri.

The item on the agenda dedicated to the Farm to Fork strategy also included a presentation on the intention of the EC to introduce a **mandatory front-of-pack nutrition label**. This has been followed by an exchange of views and feedback from the participants with the specific goal of collecting inputs in order to build up AREPO position on this subject.

During the meeting with Greek members, AREPO President, **Ms Eirini Choudetsanaki**, called upon all members to cooperate in the elaboration of a common position with the intention to deliver this work in a very short time. For this reason, she proposed to intensify the frequency of meetings with AREPO regions, in order to get inputs and to better understand the impact of a mandatory front of pack nutrition labelling on GIs. Furthermore, since the Greek Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development is working on the topic of nutrition labelling, she promised to keep all AREPO members up to date concerning the results achieved.

Members backed the preliminary analysis delivered by AREPO services as well as the general orientation of the common position.

Particularly, the debate insisted on the **diet value of GI products**, on their traditional composition and characteristics, as well as on their **contribution to sustainability** (environmental, social and economic), hence on their positive impact on territories.

Since there is no room to propose a system different from the Nutriscore, members agreed on the need to find **alternative ways of communicating quality to consumers**, especially by **further involving producers in this**.

The discussion between AREPO and its members concerning the position on the mandatory front of pack nutrition label brought to the following:

- **AREPO should not support an exclusion of GI products from this system** because it would create a negative image of these products, fostering the view of GIs as unhealthy food.
- AREPO should instead envisage the **possibility of adding something more** to the over-simplified information provided by the Nutriscore. For instance, **we could propose to add a coloured background to signal that the product is an EU GI** and therefore has other relevant characteristics that come on top of nutritional ones.
- Nevertheless, depending on the product size, **adding another label on the front of pack could not be that easy**, since certain producers already struggle with the placement of the mandatory regulatory terms.
- AREPO should look at the **implementation of Nutriscore in countries where it has already been adopted** in order to determine whether it has affected GIs and eventually assess its impact;
- AREPO should monitor if **Nutriscore will be also mandatory for products destined to be exported in the framework of EU Trade Agreements**. In fact, members are worried that this could damage GIs on third countries markets, mainly because of the already proven lack of recognition from non-EU consumers. Likewise, AREPO should investigate **whether Nutriscore will be applied as well on imported products**, to avoid unfair competition of GIs from third countries.
- **AREPO should intensify its cooperation with FAO**, since it has already set up a debate on traditional and local diets, including the Mediterranean diet.
- AREPO should exchange its view on the topic with representatives from association of consumers, such as **BEUC (Bureau européen des unions de consommateurs)**.
- Members encouraged to further deepen the **collaboration among AREPO, its Regions and the EU Institutions**, especially to better understand how to engage producers and consortia in this process.
- **A meeting of the AREPO Board of producers will be organized**, with the aim of collecting their input to this process of internal consultation on the subject.

Update on CAP post 2020

As part of the discussion on the CAP post 2020, Italian regions suggested to start working together on **some proposals concerning rural development measures** to support GIs.

A similar activity, mostly focused on the implementation of measures to support certification and promotion costs (3.1 and 3.2), was organised with Italian regions for the current programming period. A draft of the measure for certification and promotion of quality products has been developed by the working group and has been shared with all AREPO regions, to facilitate the drafting of the measure at regional level. Moreover, AREPO has monitored the implementation of the measure within its member Regions.

As far as the Regulation on Strategic Plans is concerned, AREPO would like to organise **specific working groups** with all its members on the **“types of measures”** allowed under the **article 71 dedicated to “cooperation”**, possibly as of the beginning of 2021. In particular, the new regulation allows for various type of interventions besides those under current measures 3.1 and 3.2 (certification and promotion). As a consequence, **the main aim of this joint work should be of identifying which types of interventions could be included and propose a common draft of these interventions** that could be used by all member Regions as a basis for their work.

Since most of the work will depend on the national strategic plan proposals, meanwhile we could organize informal meetings in order to:

- Update the analysis concerning the implementation of measures 3.1 and 3.2 in AREPO member Regions, in order to assess differences (ex. eligibility rules, beneficiaries, etc.) and share these practices;
- Start considering which interventions can be carried out in addition to measures 3.1 and 3.2. For instance, in relation to the management costs of producer groups, especially for the smaller consortia, it could be interesting to identify a financing action that could allow for a coordinated management, thus encouraging the aggregation of consortia, creating a single entity capable of sharing various expenses.

Long-term vision for rural areas

Members supported the position presented by AREPO in response to the consultation on the Roadmap for a communication on the long-term vision for rural areas. They agreed on the importance of **greater empowerment of producer groups in training activities** towards young generations of producers and in taking care of the territory. However, consortia don't have access to measures of support for these training activities. As a result, considering the wide range of possible interventions foreseen by the new CAP, it has been suggested **to take into account the support to activities of transferring knowledge and specific training**.

EU Promotion Policy

Promotion policy has been one of AREPO priorities in 2020, especially given the public consultation launched by the EC. AREPO position on this topic has been further analysed with members, who reaffirmed their support and approval on the work carried out. Furthermore, Spanish member regions recalled the importance of an appropriate EU co-financing rate for promotion programmes. Particularly, they insisted on the importance of promotion for small producers, stressing that having access to a proper funding could encourage them in participating and taking full advantage of this EU instrument.

Update on AREPO studies

1. Study on GIs used as ingredients in processed products

The student internship period has ended in October 2020. After the intern will have finished working on her Master dissertation, we will elaborate the results delivered in a report to be diffused among AREPO members, following the translation in all AREPO working languages.

2. Study on problems and needs of small GIs

The student working on this topic has postponed the terms for submitting his dissertation. Meanwhile, he has realized an extensive database collecting information concerning the GIs from all AREPO member regions. AREPO Portuguese member regions showed their interest in the outcome of this study, since the majority of their productions are small GIs.

Conclusions

To conclude, here it is a list of next appointments and activities to be carried out in 2021, as resulted from meetings with AREPO members:

- Organise more frequent meetings, also through an online format, in order to facilitate the exchange of feedback and expertise within the network;
- Organise national meeting with AREPO member regions and producers at least once a year;
- Draft a common position of AREPO on the front-of-pack nutrition label;
- Organise a meeting of the AREPO Board of producers to discuss AREPO position on the front-of-pack nutrition label;
- Set-up specific working groups on the “types of measures” allowed under Article 71 of Regulation on CAP Strategic Plans dedicated to “cooperation”, in order to identify which types of interventions should be included and propose a common draft of these interventions;
- Organise a meeting with AREPO German members on National Quality Schemes;
- Disseminate the results delivered by the two studies carried out in the second part of 2020;
- Organise a meeting to present the results of the FAO guide concerning GI ex-ante and ex-post evaluation.